



Centre for Global  
Indigenous Futures

# Digital Intimacies Conference

1st and 2nd December 2022



**MACQUARIE**  
University



# Day 1 Thursday 1st December

9–10AM	<b>Welcome to Dharug Ngurra – Smoking Ceremony; Welcome to the conference</b>
10–10.50AM	<b>Keynote: Madi Day (they/them)</b>
10.50–11AM	<b>Audience discussion</b>
11–11.20AM	<b>MORNING TEA</b>
<b>THEME 1: DIGITAL GEOGRAPHIES &amp; LOCALITIES</b>	
11.20–11.40AM	<b>Dr Jessica McLean (she/her), Dr Clare Southerton (she/her) and Professor Deborah Lupton (she/her)</b> Young People and TikTok use in Australia: Digital Geographies of Care in Popular Culture
11.40–12PM	<b>Dr Naomi Smith (she/her)</b> Affording visceral digital pleasures: locating the body in digital intimacies
12–12.20PM	<b>Dr Amelia Johns (she/her) and Dr Paul Byron (he/him)</b> Queering and decolonising youth digital citizenship and safety in the Asia Pacific
12.20–12.30PM	<b>Audience discussion</b>
12.30–1PM	<b>LUNCH</b>
<b>THEME 2: SEXTech</b>	
1–1.20PM	<b>Associate Professor Corrinne T. Sullivan (she/her)</b> Workin’ it online: Indigenous sex workers navigating the digital environment
1.20–1.40PM	<b>Professor Alan McKee (he/him)</b> Criteria to identify online pornography that can support healthy sexual development: results of a Delphi panel
1.40–2PM	<b>Professor Kath Albury (she/her)</b> Design, justice, collective data intimacies and the business of sextech
2–2.10PM	<b>Audience discussion</b>

### THEME 3: GLOBAL RELATIVES

- 2.10– 2.30PM** **Associate Professor Crystal Abidin (she/her) & Dr Jin Lee (she/her)**  
International family & couple Influencers on South Korean YouTube: Intercultural learning, Spectacularized domesticity, and Cosmopolitan villages
- 2.30– 2.50PM** **Dr Sijun Shen (she/her)**  
A perfect intimate relation?: Watching one-self eating
- 2.50–3.10PM** **Natasha Zeng (she/her)**  
“I don’t think there is an endpoint, I think it’s meant to be a lifelong thing”: How Asian Australian diaspora negotiate race and identity online
- 3.10– 3.20PM** **Audience discussion**

### THEME 4: DIGITAL CARE

- 3.20– 3.40PM** **Jia Guo (she/her)**  
Affective Dissonance and Affective Solidarity: Understanding ‘Sisterhood’ in Chinese Feminist Digital Activism During COVID-19 and Beyond
- 3.40–4PM** **temi lasade-anderson (she/her)**  
Black Women’s Digital Intimacy: A Care-full Politic
- 4–4.10PM** **Audience discussion**

### 4.10–4.30PM DAY 1 WRAP UP

### 5.30– 7.30PM CONFERENCE DINNER (OPTIONAL)\*

\*Note: If you would like to attend dinner, please select the dinner add-on via registration page.

#### Location

Lachlan’s Restaurant, MGSM Executive Hotel  
99 Talavera Rd, Macquarie Park NSW 2113  
Food served 6:00pm

# Day 2 Friday 2nd December

9–10AM	<b>Catch up</b>
10–10.50AM	<b>Keynote: Dr Andrew Farrell (they/them)</b>
10.50–11AM	<b>Audience discussion</b>
11–11.20AM	<b>MORNING TEA</b>
<b>THEME 5: CARCERAL TECHNOLOGIES</b>	
11.20–11.40AM	<b>Dhakshayini Sooriyakumaran (she/they)</b> Resisting carceral automated decision-making technologies in Australia and India: What can policymakers learn from these movements?
11.40–12PM	<b>Maria-Gemma Brown (she/her)</b> Vibecores: the vibes of intimate digital publics nostalgic for the future
12–12.20PM	<b>Suneel Jethani (he/him)</b> The creeping scope of digital alcohol sensors
12.20–12.30PM	<b>Audience discussion</b>
12.30–1PM	<b>LUNCH</b>
<b>THEME 6: INTIMACY ONLINE</b>	
1–1.20PM	<b>Assistant Professor Lik Sam Chan ‘Sam’ (he/him)</b> Hyperpersonal failures: A framework for understanding challenges forming relationships in online dating
1.20–1.40PM	<b>Dr Jessica Pidoux</b> A comparative study of algorithmic-user classification practices in online dating: A human-machine learning process
1.40–2PM	<b>Souksavanh T. Keovorabouth (they/them or all pronouns)</b> “It’s Just a ‘Preference’”: Understanding Systems of Power in Online Dating from a Two-Spirit Perspective.
2–2.10PM	<b>Audience discussion</b>

## THEME 7: ONLINE HARM

- 2.10– 2.30PM** **Dr Kimberley Allison (they/she) & Dr Veronica Sheanoda (she/her)**  
Serial killers, bigots and nosy stalkers: Information seeking in the context of intimate platforms
- 
- 2.30– 2.50PM** **Dr Asher Flynn (she/her)**  
Technology-Facilitated Abuse Victimisation: Prevalence, Forms and Impacts
- 
- 2.50–3.10PM** **Saadia Ahmed (she/her)**  
Gendered harassment of Pakistani women public figures on social media
- 
- 3.10– 3.20PM** **Audience discussion**

## THEME 8: VIRTUAL & AUGMENTED REALITY

- 3.20– 3.40PM** **Dr Nathan Rambukkana (he/him)**  
‘Virtual Reality is Real!’: From Dreams of VR, AR and Remediation to Platform Realities
- 
- 3.40–4PM** **Dr Rhett Loban**  
Culturally-Centred Game Design
- 
- 4–4.20PM** **Dr Megan Catherine Rose (she/her) & Dr Sharon H. Elkind (she/they)**  
Becoming tiny androids: Emerging as robotic avatars in telepresence-facilitated relationships
- 
- 4.20–4.30PM** **Audience discussion**
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- 4.30–5PM** **DAY 2 WRAP UP**

Detailed information about each discussion can be found overleaf.

## KEYNOTE: MADI DAY (THEY/THEM)

DAY 1 | 10-10.50AM

Madi Day specialises in research on the relationship between settler colonialism, heterosexuality, and gender. They are a Chief Investigator on a national project ‘exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs that respond to domestic and family violence and sexual violence’ funded by the Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) ending in 2023. They are also a Chief Investigator on a Meta (Facebook) grant focused on ‘The impact of racist and violent content and threats towards Indigenous women and LGBTQI+ people on social media: a comparative analysis of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA’ ending in 2023. Recently, Madi co-authored a chapter with Bronwyn Carlson in the Palgrave Handbook of Gendered Violence and Technology entitled ‘Love, Hate and Sovereign Bodies: The Exigencies of Aboriginal Online Dating’ (2021).

## DR JESSICA MCLEAN (SHE/HER), DR CLARE SOUTHERTON (SHE/HER) AND PROFESSOR DEBORAH LUPTON (SHE/HER)

### Young People and TikTok use in Australia: Digital Geographies of Care in Popular Culture

DAY 1 | 11.20-11.40AM

The short-form video-sharing app TikTok is the fastest growing social media platform globally, particularly among young people. This article offers an analysis of how young people are engaging with TikTok, with a focus on caring and relational practices as they co-create this digital space. Adopting the perspective that digital popular cultures are creatively diverse, geographically distributed, and co-produced, we draw on interviews with young Australians to analyse the practices and performances captured and circulated in and from TikTok. Recent research on the destructive aspects of TikTok has shown how hate and harm have been spread in the app’s content. However, our findings demonstrate that there are also positive aspects of young people’s TikTok use which are important to surface. As we show, the embodied entanglements of digital and non-digital expression that are generated by young Australian TikTok users include sharing, liking or commenting on dance, song and recitation. Users replicate and remake these expressions in and across non-digital and digital spaces. TikTok therefore offers diverse opportunities for users to configure their identities and nurture their relationships. However, young people also recognise its limitations and have clear ideas for improving their TikTok experience.

Jess McLean is a Lecturer in the Department of Geography and Planning at Macquarie University and completed her PhD at the University of Sydney in the School of Geosciences. She has a book called 'Changing Digital Geographies: Technologies, environments and people' coming out in December with Palgrave Macmillan.

## **DR NAOMI SMITH (SHE/HER)**

### **Affording visceral digital pleasures: locating the body in digital intimacies**

**DAY 1 | 11.40–12PM**

Bodies are assembled in intimate, personal ways with and through digital technologies. Digital intimacies have received significant attention in recent years (Smith and Snider 2018), however the body has yet to be systematically incorporated. Studying digital pleasures prompts us to re-centre bodies in intimate human-technology encounters. To this end, we unpack emerging socio-technical trends in which content creators have capitalized on the entanglement of technology and the body to create products and services that stimulate pleasure by design.

In order to understand and conceptualise these emergent cultural practices, we explore two sites of digital pleasure, digital drugs (Barratt et al. 2022) and ASMR. Both of these sites involve content creators and the delivery of audio and visual content via social media and apps. When consumed, this digital content is intended to create altered states (digital drugs) and visceral frissons of pleasure (ASMR) in the body.

While widely consumed, engagement with digital pleasures has a hint of the fringe or subversive. It also unsettles moralised discourses about engagement with the screen as deficient, lacking and simultaneously as something to be overcome, rationalised and 'hacked' (Docherty 2021). Understanding the screen/body assemblage as a site of embodied pleasure, refocuses attention on *how* digital media afford. It also moves the debate outside of neo-liberalized understandings of wellness and productivity that often shape narratives about the benefits and harms of digital pleasures. Doing so instead attunes us to the unique, potent and embodied affectivities mediated through technologies and distinct digital cultures.

Dr Naomi Smith is a digital sociologist at Federation University Australia (Gippsland). Primarily, her digital work has focused on the intersection of the internet and bodies (including anti-vaccination), how online communities influence the way we make sense of our bodies, and how we manage them.

**Additional authors:** Dr Alexia Maddox & Dr Jenny L. Davis

## DR AMELIA JOHNS (SHE/HER) AND DR PAUL BYRON (HE/HIM)

### Queering and decolonising youth digital citizenship and safety in the Asia Pacific

DAY 1 | 12-12.20PM

This paper reports on findings from a UNESCO-funded study of online digital citizenship and safety resources for LGBTIQ+ young people in the Asia Pacific. Alongside a desk review of resources, we engaged 23 stakeholders from 10 countries via interviews and focus groups. Stakeholders were asked about the availability of resources that were accessible and relevant to LGBTIQ+ young people's culturally and locally specific needs, and what kinds of new resources would be most valuable. The findings canvas young people's experiences of online threats and harm, particularly relating to data security and privacy; bullying and hate speech; and misinformation targeting LGBTIQ+ communities. COVID-19 presented new challenges for regional peer-led advocacy and exacerbated existing mental health struggles for many LGBTIQ+ young people. Participants identified significant gaps in digital citizenship and online safety resources that were accessible and addressed their needs. Gaps related to LGBTIQ+ specific content not featuring in generic resources, or LGBTIQ+ content being flagged or blocked in countries with less permissive laws related to diverse sexualities and genders. Many felt that there was an issue of access and representation, where resources were only available only in English, or in formats difficult to access on mobile phones, or in areas with poor network connection and download speeds. Other participants noted problems with representations of homogenised and mainstream LGBTIQ+ identities and experiences that overlooked local cultural context. We present these findings and provide insight into the types of youth-led 'queer' and context-specific resources that LGBTIQ+ young people and stakeholders wish to see.

Amelia Johns is a Senior Lecturer in Digital and Social Media. Her work spans the fields of digital citizenship studies, digital inequality, youth digital activism, digital literacy and safety across networked and closed social media and messaging platforms. She is the recipient of an ARC Discovery project: 'Fostering Global Digital Citizenship: Diasporic Youth in a Connected World' (DP190100635) and was awarded a Facebook Content Policy Award in 2019 to examine the spread of misinformation and hate speech across platforms. She has published widely, including in *International Journal of Communication*, *Social Media + Society*, *First Monday* and she has a co-authored monograph on WhatsApp contracted with Polity.



## ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CORRINNE T. SULLIVAN (SHE/HER)

**Workin' it online: Indigenous sex workers navigating the digital environment**

**DAY 1 | 1-1.20PM**

The role of online and digital technologies in the working lives of people have grown exponentially, changing people's workspaces and environments, including for those that buy and sell sexual services. Historically sex work has been associated with street and brothel workspaces, however the advent of the internet and associated digital technologies has seen a significant shift in the way sex work is advertised and traded. Digital technologies have given rise to the creation of newer forms of sexual services (such as webcamming), with the internet more broadly enabling advertising platforms online, and the creation of online sexual media spaces that cater to differing sexual and/or gender appetites. Paralleling the growth in these technologies has been the scholarly literature detailing various dimensions of these technologies particularly in relation to those that buy and/or sell sexual services. Despite this continued interest little attention has been given to the experiences of Indigenous sex workers in online and digital environments. Research examining the lives and experiences of Indigenous sex workers is minimal and often relies on tired stereotypes that portray Indigenous sex workers as helpless, exploited victims involved in street-based work, seldom seen are studies that frame Indigenous sex workers as empowered people engaged in myriad workspaces and environments. This paper will present a snapshot of findings from an exploratory study with Indigenous sex workers in the country currently known as Australia. Drawing from semi-structured interviews with Indigenous sex workers this paper will explore the way in which online spaces and digital technologies are utilised and consumed for their work.

Corrinne is an Aboriginal scholar from the Wiradjuri Nation in Central-West New South Wales. Her research interests are multi-disciplinary and focus broadly on experiences and effects of body and identity in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Corrinne's knowledges stem from the disciplines of Indigenous Studies and Human Geography, and she utilises both to understand the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are affected by their experiences of space and place. Corrinne's Honour's thesis entitled, 'Moral Linen: Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences of dress in Parramatta Girls Home' was awarded the University Medal in Human Geography (2012). Her doctoral research explored the lived experiences of Aboriginal sex workers, Corrinne's thesis 'Indigenous Australian experiences of sex work: Stories of Agency, Autonomy and Self-Determination' was awarded the Vice-Chancellor's Commendation for Academic Excellence (2020).

## PROFESSOR ALAN MCKEE (HE/HIM)

### Criteria to identify online pornography that can support healthy sexual development: results of a Delphi panel

DAY 1 | 1.20–1.40PM

This project brought together a Delphi Panel of experts from a range of relevant areas including the production and research of pornography, adolescent and sexual health, and asked them to identify the best online pornography to support young people's healthy sexual development, as well as the criteria that should be used to make those determinations. Experts were recruited from a range of professional backgrounds who were all stakeholders in the Panel's question: six experts in each of five areas: sex educators, pornography researchers, online pornography producers, adolescent development experts and sexual health experts. Panelists were asked to nominate examples of pornography that could support healthy sexual development; and to specify the criteria used to make these decisions. In a second round Panelists were asked the extent to which they agreed with a synthesised list of each other's suggestions; and five proposed online pornographic sites. There was agreement across six criteria:

- 1 Includes a variety of sexual practices and pleasures
- 2 Includes a variety of body types, abilities, genders, races and/or ethnicities
- 3 Shows negotiation of consent on screen
- 4 The material is known to be ethically produced
- 5 Focuses on pleasure for all participants
- 6 Shows safe sex.

Four relevant pornographic sites were ranked from most to least agreement as follows:

- 1 Sex School
- 2 Make Love Not Porn
- 3 PinkLabel.TV
- 4 Lust Cinema

Professor Alan McKee is an expert on entertainment and healthy sexual development. His new book (with Paul Byron, Katerina Litsou and Roger Ingham) - called *What Do We Know About the Effects of Pornography After Fifty Years of Academic Research?* – emerges from an Australian Research Council Discovery grant entitled 'Pornography's effects on audiences: explaining contradictory research data'. He also worked on an ARC Linkage grant with True (previously

Family Planning Queensland) to investigate the use of vulgar comedy to reach young men with information about healthy sexual development. He was co-editor of the *Girlfriend Guide to Life* and co-author of *Objectification: on the difference between sex and sexism* (2020). He has published on healthy sexual development, and entertainment education for healthy sexuality in journals including the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, the *International Journal of Sexual Health*, the *Journal of Sex Research* and *Sex Education*.

**Additional scholars:** Professor Angela Dawson & Associate Professor Melissa Kang

## **PROFESSOR KATH ALBURY (SHE/HER)**

**Design, justice, collective data intimacies and the business of sextech**

**DAY 1 | 1.40–2PM**

This paper explores insights drawn from a 2021 research workshop with would-be sextech entrepreneurs, and two-day online ‘public interest sextech’ hackathon which took place in February 2022. The hackathon opened with presentations from technologists and activists representing marginalized communities disproportionately impacted by the collection, regulation, aggregation and commercialisation of sexual and/or intimate data – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with HIV, people with disabilities, trans people and sex workers. Hackathon participants (which included sexuality educators, design professionals and technologists) were then invited to respond by creating speculative designs for new forms of sextech informed by design justice approaches (Costanza-Chock 2020).

Invited panellists focused on facilitating collective approaches and/or political outcomes via sextech – such as responses to policing, cultural protocols, counter-surveillance and building partnerships. In contrast, many participants (and some hackathon mentors) prioritised support for individual (and often medicalised) experiences of sexual health, sexual pleasure and wellbeing, which they argued was best achieved via commercialisation and global scalability. Consequently, this paper reflects on the contradictions, tensions and rifts we observed between the market demands of tech startup cultures (as expressed by entrepreneurial hackathon participants); and the more collective and communally-focused approaches to everyday data intimacies (Burgess et al 2022) expressed by activists and stakeholders from marginalised communities.

Professor Kath Albury is an ARC Future Fellow and an Associate Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making + Society, Swinburne University of Technology.

**Additional authors:** Dr Zahra Stardust & Dr Jenny Kennedy

## ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CRYSTAL ABIDIN (SHE/HER) & DR JIN LEE (SHE/HER)

### International family & couple Influencers on South Korean YouTube: Intercultural learning, Spectacularized domesticity, and Cosmopolitan villages

DAY 1 | 2.10– 2.30PM

Drawing on a multi-year digital ethnography and personal interviews with Korean and oegugin YouTubers in the ‘international family’ and ‘international couple’ genres, this paper studies the relational ties and strategic performances exhibited by intercultural Influencers. Set against the backdrop of YouTube attention economies, the allure of cosmopolitan aspiration, and the social capital of K-culture, these Influencers curate, promote, and monetize idea(l)s around intercultural coupling and homemaking. We map out their discursive and visual strategies in performing these relational selves - between cultures, to South Korea, within the family unit - and offer the concept of ‘spectacularized domesticity’: the strategic practice of curating, commodifying, and self-exoticizing the otherwise mundane routines of personal relationships and household spaces into objects of curiosity and interest for culturally-situated audiences. We position our research at the intersection of Influencer studies, diaspora studies, and global studies to focus on the case study of digital ethnic enclaves among these YouTuber Influencers that serve as ‘cosmopolitan villages’. These villages function as casual sites for value exchange at three levels: (1) culturally, intercultural communications occur among the influencers and audiences, enhancing cultural knowledges and generating entertainment values; (2) economically, transactions occur among influencers, business entities, and audiences by garnering attention and transforming it to monetary forms and popularity; (3) socially, community building occurs among the village members, often around the members’ national and diasporic identities.

Dr Crystal Abidin is a digital anthropologist and ethnographer of vernacular internet cultures. She researches influencer cultures, online visibility, and social media pop cultures especially in the Asia Pacific region, and has published over 60 articles and chapters on various aspects of internet celebrity and vernacular internet cultures. Her books include *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online* (2018), *Microcelebrity Around the Globe: Approaches to Cultures of Internet Fame* (co-editor Brown, 2018), *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures* (co-authors Leaver & Highfield, 2020), *Mediated Interfaces: The Body on Social Media* (co-editors Warfield & Cambre, 2020), and *tumblr: Curation, Creativity and Community* (co-authors Tiidenberg & Hendry, forthcoming). Crystal is Associate Professor, Principal Research Fellow, & ARC DECRA Fellow in Internet Studies, Programme Lead of Social Media Pop Cultures at the Centre for Culture and Technology (CCAT) at Curtin University. She is also Affiliate Researcher with the Media Management

and Transformation Centre at Jönköping University. She was listed on *Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia and Pacific Standard 30 Top Thinkers Under 30*, and recently received the *International Communication Association Popular Communication Early Career Scholar Prize* and *ABC TOP 5 Humanities Fellowship*.

Dr Jin Lee's research explores the question of 'How do marginalized people struggle to make their own lives on digital media?' She is particularly interested in digital intimacies of non-white women and LGBTQ+ people and media practices of gender in popular culture. Her work appears in peer-reviewed journals including *Social Media + Society*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *Media, Gender, and Culture*, and *Broadcasting & Communication*. Prior to her academic career, she worked as a researcher at the Korea Information Society Development Institute.

## DR SIJUN SHEN (SHE/HER)

### A perfect intimate relation?: Watching one-self eating

DAY 1 | 2.30– 2.50PM

This presentation focuses on mukbang culture and demonstrates how this online performance of (over)eating reflects media technologies' perfection and destruction of our relationships with the self and others. Mukbang, which literally means broadcast eating, is an online pop-culture that embodies our most intimate relationship with a (primordial) other – the mother – by performing the act of feeding and being fed. The mediation of digital technology appears to have perfected this intimate relation but destructs our relationship with the self and others. The perfection of such a relationship lies in mukbang's display of images where the livestreamer is the one who is both being fed and doing the feeding and enjoying. This is an imaginary relationship that contemporary media techno-companies have promised its users – the enjoyment of watching one-self consuming. Mukbang culture embodies the imaginary idyllic state where our relationship with others, which is often messy and imperfect, is replaced by a relationship with a special other, the image of one-self on screen, perfected as it is always enjoying. This imaginary relationship is nonetheless destructive to our relationships with the self and others as mukbang not only commercialises the fantasy of perfected intimate relations but disordered eating. Mukbang is filled with performances of binge eating that has exacerbated fans' (unhealthy) relationship with food and their bodies, not to mention having done real damage to livestreamers' bodies. As an e-commerce strategy, the streamer-follower relationship is profit-oriented and often involves lies, manipulations and selling/purchasing unsafe products.

Dr. Sijun Shen specialises in online pop-culture of technology-mediated intimacy, such as mukbang and ASMR. Her work draws on netnographic research and (psychoanalytic) feminist theories to understand contemporary technology-mediated social relations and internet media's psycho-sexual implications.

## NATASHA ZENG (SHE/HER)

**“I don’t think there is an endpoint, I think it’s meant to be a lifelong thing”: How Asian Australian diaspora negotiate race and identity online**

**DAY 1 | 2.50–3.10PM**

Early on in my data collection for my PhD project I found race was often understood and practised in online spaces, such as the Facebook group Subtle Asian Traits (SAT), through surprisingly implicit ways. Often, race would be touched on through an almost formulaic and structured story. In my analysis of SAT (which forms the first part of my thesis), I found many stories centred upon a storytelling structure that centred around suffering but would often then be alleviated by some form of overcoming. Articulating and unpacking the central role storytelling occupies within these spaces, particularly what these life narratives tell us and how they are brought into the social then is crucial.

In this conference presentation, I intend to share my findings from my current phase of data collection: semi-structured interviews with everyday social media users who identify as Asian.

These interviews will allow my research to engage “in situ” (Gray 2009) with the practices and understandings of race and will elucidate the ways participants are “invited to engage *textually* in such spaces, understanding the self and others as texts that are open to be read” (Kanai 2020). Importantly, I hope to share and discuss the kinds of attachments and investments, drawing on the affective work of Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed, that participants make in the processes and practices of negotiating race and identity through digital culture. Does a practice of storytelling and the centering of self, as Berlant (1998) and Fernandes (2017) suggest, deflect, and defuse the confrontational politics of racism?

Natasha Zeng is in her second year of her PhD at Monash University, where she is researching how social media culture has shaped understandings and practices of contemporary antiracist activism. She is interested in the ways everyday social media users participate politically online through digital practices and knowledge cultures informed by self-branding and therapeutic doctrines.

## JIA GUO (SHE/HER)

### Affective Dissonance and Affective Solidarity: Understanding ‘Sisterhood’ in Chinese Feminist Digital Activism During COVID-19 and Beyond

DAY 1 | 3.20– 3.40PM

This research focuses on a social media campaign *#Sisters Combating the Pandemic Free from Worries* (*#姐妹抗疫安心行动#*) launched by a Chinese feminist activist Yu Liang (@梁钰Stacy) and her team on Weibo—a Chinese social media platform equivalent of Twitter—aimed on the COVID-19 outbreak in China. Although the campaign was conducted both online and offline, social media played a crucial role in attracting attention and mobilising participants.

Noticeably, the discourse of sisterhood — symbolising a kind of feminine intimacy — is widely used by the organisers and the supporters in the online community. Drawing the theoretical frameworks—*affective dissonance* and (digital) intimate publics, I attempt to examine that how the discourse of sisterhood in the campaign plays out to generate a kind of feminine affective solidarity. *Affective-discursive approach* is employed as the methodology.

After introducing feminist digital activism in China and the campaign, I argue that a gendered digital intimate public is formed based on the affective dissonance circulated online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Then, I focus on the discourse of sisterhood in social media posts from the organisers and attached comments during February 2020 to June 2020. Using the *affective-discursive approach*, I unpack how affective solidarity is generated in this intimate public in relation to empathy for female health workers and anger on the gender status quo in China. Finally, I will discuss the importance and limitation of affective dissonance in digital feminist activism in the Chinese context.

Jia Guo is a PhD candidate from The Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, The University of Sydney. She is interested in feminist media and cultural studies, social media in China, popular cultures, and fandom. Her PhD thesis is titled *Contextualising Postfeminism in China: Metropolitan Young Women, Aesthetic Labour, and Social Media*.

## TEMI LASADE-ANDERSON (SHE/HER)

### Black Women's Digital Intimacy: A Care-full Politic

DAY 1 | 3.40-4PM

This paper aims to highlight how studying Black women's relationship with technology provides what Catherine Knight Steele calls "the most generative means of studying the possibilities and constraints of our ever-changing digital world" (2021a, p. 1). As a member of the online Black diaspora (Bruce, 2022; Sobande, 2020), I am intimately aware of Black women's joy, care-fullness, and community building (Bailey, 2015; Okoye, 2021; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022; Steele, 2021b). Extant research investigates how Black women resist negative dominant controlling images of Black womanhood (Bailey, 2021; Collins, 1991) and 'talk back' (hooks, 2015), using hashtags as a means of platformed Black feminism (Clark, 2014; Florini, 2019; Johnson, 2021; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022; Steele, 2021b). However, little attention has been paid to how Black women navigate social media's affordances for friendship-making purposes. Thus, in this paper presentation, I posit that Black women's digital intimacy is a care-full politic wherein Black women use and engage Twitter in ways that centre joy, safety, and ultimately care — for themselves and the 'imagined community' of other Black women online (Anderson, 2006). Drawing on my on-going PhD research, and specifically on pilot study ethnographic interviews with four Black women and queer femmes, I argue that for Black women, virtual communities *are not* imagined — they are vital lifelines of support and solidarity, which is what drives their relational praxis of care.

temi lasade-anderson is a tech policy advocacy & campaigns strategist, and a LAHP-funded PhD student in the department of Digital Humanities, at King's College London. alaàsë is temi's Black feminist internet lab, a consultancy where she has produced work for numerous civil society organisations including Glitch, Digital Action, and Whose Knowledge? Currently, she is an advisory board member at University College Dublin's Centre for Digital Policy. temi has a master's in Digital Media and Society from Cardiff University's, where she was awarded 'Best Dissertation' (2022). In her PhD research, she uses Black feminist thought to centre and examine Black women's digital intimacies. Altogether, temi's work seeks to re-imagine and create equitable and joyful technological futures.



## KEYNOTE: DR ANDREW FARRELL (THEY/THEM)

DAY 2 | 10-10.50AM

Dr Andrew Farrell is a lecturer in the Department of Indigenous Studies, Macquarie University. Andrew is a Wodi Wodi descendant from Jerrinja Aboriginal community on the South Coast of NSW. Their research is multidisciplinary with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer) gender and sexualities on social media. They are instrumental in the development and delivery of Australia's first multidisciplinary Indigenous gender and sexuality curriculum in *ABST2035: Indigenous Queer Studies* at Macquarie University. Andrew is an ongoing board member of the grassroots Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ community organisation Black Rainbow. Their current works is a submitted thesis by publication in the Indigenous Studies Department at Macquarie University in 2022.

## DHAKSHAYINI SOORIYAKUMARAN (SHE/THEY)

### Resisting carceral automated decision-making technologies in Australia and India: What can policymakers learn from these movements?

DAY 2 | 11.20–11.40AM

My name is a spell

It can't be held

In the mouths of oppressors

Reminiscent of territories

Of bodies, invaded

The database collects my name

But cannot understand it

Yet the database decides

Where I will go in this life

The seeds of liberatory digital systems that allow us to remember who we are and bring us back to ourselves exist within movements resisting carceral technologies and the long histories of data extraction from colonised and marginalised populations. Data extraction and surveillance were central to the classification of people into colonial racial hierarchies and the control of newly acquired territories (Zureik 2013). These systems of surveillance persist in the present with automated-decision making (ADM) being increasingly used in contexts where our communities are over-represented: in law enforcement and criminal punishment, for migration, asylum and border policing, biometric identification, access to social welfare and much more. In the name of efficiency and optimisation, ADM is used to determine who is a 'risk'; to sort individuals and groups by their perceived levels of dangerousness, at greater scale and speed than historically possible. Fighting against this is not straightforward. Particularly in the face of corporate capture of regulatory regimes, narratives that construct our communities as a threat, the capture of civil society by elite philanthropic agendas, the limitations of Western human rights and risk frameworks, and the abstract of algorithmic violence into complex bureaucratic processes. And yet resistance continues. What exists at the heart of movements resisting carceral ADM in India and Australia? What can we learn from their ways of being, knowing and doing?

Dhakshayini is a Tamil person whose ancestral homelands are in the north and east of Illankai (Sri Lanka). They are a recovering civil engineer, a PhD candidate at the ANU School of Regulation and Global Governance and a member of the Expert Group on Race, Tech and Borders (facilitated by the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism).

## MARIA-GEMMA BROWN (SHE/HER)

### Vibecores: the vibes of intimate digital publics nostalgic for the future

DAY 2 | 11.40AM-12PM

Vibes saturate the internet -- from the revival vibes of TikTok accounts, to the uncanny feeling that our social media feeds tap into a vibe, to the impressionistic vibe of photo-dumps. In this paper, we examine a series of '-cores' hashtags on Instagram that proliferate around the creative effort to channel the vibe of life lived in capitalist ruins, in the aftermath of twentieth-century and millennial optimism about our techno-futures. These include #liminalcore, #cybercore, #nostalgiacore, #dreamcore, #y2kcore, #abandonedcore. This is one part of a larger project where we use machine vision and critical cultural studies approaches to explore the interplay between everyday image-making practices and the algorithmic architecture of Instagram.

We focus, in particular, on 'vibe pages' -- accounts that appear to be dedicated to animating the affective flow of the '-cores' hashtags. We argue that vibe accounts illustrate an important feature of digital intimacies. Vibe pages channel an inner, inscrutable feeling that cannot be easily apprehended or translated. They appear to exist as both an effort to conjure an intimate feeling, and to craft an intimate public by inviting other users to channel the vibe by sharing or mimicking their content. Vibe-based intimacies are creative and reflective efforts to channel and re-animate lost realities and futures. While at the same time, they appear to be calibrated for non-narrative algorithmic media cultures that are tuned to extend the flow of affect and attention. We reflect on the political potential of vibe-based digital intimacies' nostalgia for the future unfolding amid the commercial imperatives of digital media platforms.

Maria-Gemma Brown is a Research Assistant in the School of Communication and Arts at The University of Queensland. She is currently completing an honours year in cultural and communication studies at UQ.

**Additional authors:** Associate Professor Nicholas Carah, Professor Jean Burgess, Professor Daniel Angus & Jane Tan

## SUNEEL JETHANI (HE/HIM)

### The creeping scope of digital alcohol sensors

DAY 2 | 12-12.20PM

This paper traces and examines the surreptitious diffusion of embodied bio-surveillant technology from carceral and clinical settings into everyday life. I argue that the popularisation of sensor enabled technologies worn on the body has led to the emergence of a generative discourse that reframes harmful aspects of digital surveillance as eudaemonic practice. Using the example of alcohol monitoring technology, I discuss how the notion of digital tracking transfers between carceral and everyday settings in ways that downplays its controlling a/effects on human subjectivity. Through the example of alcohol tracking, I argue that if the interdiscursivity of generative materials that guide the design of digitally surveillant sociotechnical systems across these three settings is foregrounded then potentials for resistance come to light. Further, I suggest that as digital alcohol tracking technologies and practices are assimilated into everyday life, their carceral intensities become portable and normalised across contexts bringing with them complex dialectical notions of identity, control, and freedom. The paper concludes with a discussion of the ways that analyses of embodied digital intimacy predicated on Foucauldian accounts of power can be problematized and extended.

Suneel Jethani (he/him) is a Lecturer in Digital and Social Media at the University of Technology Sydney. His research focuses on embodied technology, datafication, and its relation to ethics, governance, and design. Suneel has published in peer reviewed journals including International Communication Gazette, M/C Journal, Communication, Politics & Culture, Cultural Studies, and Continuum. He is the author of two recently published books, *The Politics and Possibilities of SelfTracking* (Emerald, 2021) and *Openness in Practice* (Palgrave, 2021).

## ASSISTANT PROFESSOR LIK SAM CHAN ‘SAM’ (HE/HIM)

### Hyperpersonal failures: A framework for understanding challenges forming relationships in online dating

DAY 2 | 1-1.20PM

Although research has shown various negative aspects of using online dating (Corriero & Tong, 2016; Dalessandro, 2018), we lack a holistic conceptual framework to understand the challenges in developing long-term relationships via online dating. This research explores the way in which online daters perceive challenges, obstacles, and mishaps they have faced in seeking love online. The qualitative data were collected from 33 lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) online daters living in Taiwan. Most insights identified from the data also shed light on the behaviours of non-queer online daters and those living in other regions. Based on a thematic analysis of the interview data, I propose *hyperpersonal failures* as a heuristic concept for understanding such a phenomenon. Specifically, I identify *failures* in each of the four components of the hyperpersonal communication model (Walther, 1996), namely: *failed self-presentation* regarding the sender (i.e., online daters cannot present a favourable image to others), *failed respectful communication* regarding the channel (i.e., online daters send out harassing or rude messages), *failed interpretation* regarding the receiver (i.e., online daters cannot make sense of others’ relational goals and communicative patterns), and *failed feedback* regarding the feedback (i.e., online daters do not provide immediate responses or engage in ghosting). I describe how the concept can be applied to understand the implications of different features of online dating and offer some suggestions for online dating operators to create a platform for successful relationships.

Lik Sam Chan is an assistant professor in journalism and communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research examines the interplay between digital platforms, gender/sexuality, and culture.

## DR JESSICA PIDOUX

### A comparative study of algorithmic-user classification practices in online dating: A human-machine learning process

DAY 2 | 1.20-1.40PM

Dating-app GUI structures for data collection contain categories that enable classifying users algorithmically and classifying users between each other to define their sexuality and find a date. Indeed, app providers define categories that mediate the users' bodies and interactions to present themselves, these categories ultimately serve app algorithms for recommending profiles. Categories establish a main reciprocated mediation between algorithms and users that is explored in this article to shed new light on the way Big Data shapes human-algorithmic interactions in digital intimacies. However, online dating research pays little attention on classification processes from the perspective of the user, although classification is key to algorithm function for codifying sexuality. Using a qualitative analysis of 40 participant situated interviews, I examine the way dating-app users make sense of predefined categorical structures and their underlying classification processes, within 26 platforms. The results show that actors learn to integrate algorithmic logic into their common knowledge, as well as to challenge the algorithmic logic, and thus produce new social conventions to classify their emotional states, physical attractiveness and sexual preferences with technology.

Jessica Pidoux is a sociologist and holds a PhD in Digital Humanities from the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne. Her research focuses on the design and usage of matching algorithmic systems in online dating. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher in citizen science at CEE, Sciences Po Paris <https://www.sciencespo.fr/centre-etudeseuropeennes/en/researcher/jessica-pidoux.html>, and director of the Swiss non-profit association PersonalData.IO where she builds with civil society participative methods for data governance. She is also leader of the collective Dating Privacy [https://wiki.personaldata.io/wiki/Project:Dating\\_Privacy#Dating\\_Privacy-\\_Jessica\\_Pidoux\\_in\\_Media](https://wiki.personaldata.io/wiki/Project:Dating_Privacy#Dating_Privacy-_Jessica_Pidoux_in_Media)

## **SOUKSAVANH T. KEOVORABOUTH (THEY/THEM OR ALL PRONOUNS)**

**“It’s Just a ‘Preference’”: Understanding Systems of Power in Online Dating from a Two-Spirit Perspective.**

**DAY 2 | 1.40-2PM**

As someone scrolling through dating apps, I have been ignored, blocked, stood up, and ghosted because I am not masc, fit, tall, and most importantly, white. Moving to a new country, I thought things would have been a bit different than the U.S., which I realized that there is a specific system of power that dictates beauty, not only in the U.S. but around the world. I argue that our perceptions of beauty are truly based on systems of power and our proximity to that power. That our understanding of “preference” relies on this very notion of systemic power. To ground my argument, I draw on feminist, Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit scholar activists who have added critiques to these systems of power that are embedded in settler/colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism. I use la paperson’s “Settler-Native-Slave” triad and Andrea Smith’s “Three Pillars of White Supremacy” as two foundations of understanding settler/colonial power structure that can be seen in the U.S. but also around the world and its relation to beauty. In this presentation I position my own personal experiences as a Queer Indigenous Two-Spirit person from the United States with my scholarship as I provide opportunities and new ways of thinking around beauty to allow other Queer/Trans and Black, Indigenous, People of Color to begin to thrive, ultimately finding value in our own beauty.

Souksavanh T. Keovorabouth, Diné (they, them, theirs) is a Ph.D. candidate at Oregon State University in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program with a minor in Queer Studies with a certificate in Geographic Information Systems and a Ph.D. candidate at Macquarie University in Indigenous Studies. They received a dual bachelors and masters at the University of Arizona in Sustainable Built Environments and American Indian Studies. Their concentrated area of research is on Indigenous urban experience, Two-Spirit wellbeing, Relocation Act of 1950, Native and Queer urbanization, BIPOC Masculinities, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit in urban areas.

## DR KIMBERLEY ALLISON (THEY/SHE) & DR VERONICA SHEANODA (SHE/HER)

### Serial killers, bigots and nosy stalkers: Information seeking in the context of intimate platforms

DAY 2 | 2.10–2.30PM

Modern dating and data are intimately connected: personal data traces including photos, physical descriptors, sexual preferences, drug practices, and more are commonly laid bare for others to judge and interact with. Despite the abundance of information provided, intimate platform users may consider this insufficient; to navigate the inherent complexity of online dating, intimate (dating and hook-up) platform users often turn to cross-platform information-seeking. The literature to-date overwhelmingly frames such searches in terms of uncertainty reduction, particularly around safety and compatibility; however, the narrow foci of these studies invisibilises other motivations, and the potential interactions between these.

This study aimed to explore the complexity of motivations and strategies for seeking information about those encountered on dating and hook-up platforms; how these processes and outcomes influence ongoing interactions between users; and how this varied between users and contexts. To address these aims, we engaged with intimate platform users through a combination of a diary studies, surveys, and semi-structured interviews.

The overarching finding from this study is that information-seeking on intimate platforms is a complex process, entangled in an array of different motivations, conditions, and consequences. Concepts of safety in the dating context were expanded to consider physical, online and emotional threats, while acknowledging that individuals may compromise on safety in pursuing connections with others. We discuss information seeking as both a way of managing *and* a contributor to emotional vulnerabilities in dating, and how users negotiate this paradox by drawing on social networks and engaging in iterative reflective practices.

Kimberley Allison works as a Senior Research Officer at Western Sydney University and Canteen Australia, where they are involved in psycho-oncology and LGBTQI health research (which *occasionally* intersects). They continue to dabble in social computing research at Macquarie University, even though these projects are uncomfortably reflexive. Kimberley thinks the most important research outputs are the friendships we make along the way, and like. Not even in an ironic way.

Veronica Sheanoda is a Project Manager at Beyond Blue and Researcher at Macquarie University. She recently completed a PhD in Psychology at Macquarie University, exploring the understandings and experiences of cyberbullying amongst



sexuality, gender and culturally diverse young people. She is a former avid dating app user, and now spends her free time researching her old comrades.

**Additional authors:** Calvin Liang, Neilly Herrera Tan and Associate Professor Sean Munson

## DR ASHER FLYNN (SHE/HER)

### Technology-Facilitated Abuse Victimisation: Prevalence, Forms and Impacts

DAY 2 | 2.30–2.50PM

Technology-facilitated abuse is a growing social, legal, health and economic problem. This paper explores the prevalence, forms and impacts of technology-facilitated abuse in the Australia community. It presents findings on the first known study to establish a reliable national prevalence estimate for lifetime technology-facilitated abuse victimisation, using a general population sample ( $n=4,562$ ) and 30 qualitative interviews with adult victim-survivors ( $n=20$ ) and perpetrators ( $n=10$ ). The study found four main subtypes of technology-facilitated abuse experienced and perpetrated: harassment, monitoring and controlling behaviours, emotional abuse and threats, and sexual and image-based abuse. Key findings include an overall high lifetime prevalence of victimisation (one in two Australians), with strong intersectional dimensions: three in four LGB+ Australians; three in four young adults (18 to 34 years); two in three Indigenous and First Nations peoples; and three in five Australians with a disability, reported any lifetime victimisation. Victimisation was associated with higher levels of psychological distress, consistent with moderately severe mental ill-health, again with gendered and intersectional dimensions. The range of harms experienced by victim-survivors were lasting, complex and wide-ranging, including ongoing health and wellbeing harms, a loss of control, feelings of fear and paranoia, and a sense of constant hypervigilance. In this paper, we argue that research, policy and practice seeking to respond to or prevent technology-facilitated abuse behaviours must be attentive to intersecting identities including and beyond gender, and efforts to address technology-facilitated abuse need to be integrated into our response and prevention strategies across multiple forms of violence, abuse and inequality.

Asher Flynn is an Associate Professor of Criminology in the School of Social Sciences at Monash University and Vice President of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology. She is a leading international researcher in policy and prevention concerning gendered and sexual violence, and AI and technology-facilitated abuse. Asher has published seven books and approximately 60 chapters, articles and reports in these fields.

**Additional authors:** Sophie Hindes & Associate Professor Anastasia Powell

**Gendered harassment of Pakistani women public figures on social media**

**DAY 2 | 2.50–3.10PM**

This research explores the gendered harassment of Pakistani women public figures on social media through an analysis of their lived experiences. I use the term gendered harassment because gender cannot be isolated from the online harassment faced by women. This study aims to map the social, political, and structural factors that contribute to gendered harassment of Pakistani women. The issue stems from the misogyny inherent in the social scripts. Therefore, ignoring gendered harassment can strengthen gender inequalities in society. Also, gendered harassment needs to be acknowledged as a human rights issue by the platforms, legislators, institutions, and society. To understand the gendered harassment of Pakistani women public figures online, we must map the ways in which Pakistan's post-colonial political landscape has shaped gender relations. Pakistan is an Islamic state where women are considered the torchbearers of family and societal honour. Women public figures show a transgression from the traditional gender roles prescribed for Pakistani women. Now they are also accessible through social media subjecting them to harassment online. Gendered harassment of Pakistani women public figures on social media can be better understood through the examples of some high-profile gendered harassment cases over the past few years. These cases illustrate why my research is particularly important in the current environment. In addition, these public figures represent society at large hence investigating their lived experiences on social media can potentially help us understand the issues faced by less visible women in Pakistan. Despite extensive research available on gendered harassment, the unavailability of literature in the Pakistani context further adds to the need for this research.

Saadia Ahmed is a digital journalist and theatre practitioner; originally from Pakistan and now based in Perth Western Australia. She is pursuing her Ph.D. in Media, Creative Arts, and Social Inquiry from Curtin University Perth.

## DR NATHAN RAMBUKKANA (HE/HIM)

### ‘Virtual Reality is Real!’: From Dreams of VR, AR and Remediation to Platform Realities

DAY 2 | 3.20–3.40PM

This paper explores of the intimate possibilities of MAR (Mixed and Augmented Reality) digital spaces, and in particular those enabled by the Facebook/Meta-owned Oculus Quest 2 VR platform. From the 90s vision of just-around-the-corner Virtual Reality (including the show *VR.5* (1995) from which the paper borrows its title) to the announcement of the coming Metaverse, MAR technologies have a significant public sphere presence, one that (until very recently) arguably outweighed their actual societal impact. But with several of the “big five” platform ecosystems betting hard on the imminent centrality of these technologies (Microsoft, Meta and Apple) it is worth revisiting their prospective role in relational futures. I use autoethnography alongside participant observation and a modified walkthrough method to step through my own encounters with VR (Virtual Reality) and AR (Augmented Reality), in particular via the Oculus/Meta Quest 2 and its associated apps and software. Critically, I highlight how the discourse of “newness” about MAR digital spaces of intimacy has been questioned by those long-familiar with MMOs such as *Second Life* and even text-based social spaces like MUDs. I mobilize the *topos* of “intimate digital touch” and how it is figured or experienced—in early “space”-making digital platforms, in sci-fi and speculative visions, and in realities of MAR—to discuss the role of haptics and other digital transductions of senses that are part of these discourses/experiences, such as proprioception and the recent advent of olfactory (digital smell) and gustatory (digital taste) technologies and what these might mean for intimacy.

Dr. Nathan Rambukkana is an Assistant Professor in Communication Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, in Waterloo Canada. His work centres the study of discourse, politics, and identities, and his research addresses topics such as the “alt-right;” hashtag publics; digital, haptic, and robotic intimacies; intimate privilege; and non/monogamy in the public sphere. He is the author of *Fraught Intimacies: Non/Monogamy in the Public Sphere* (UBC Press, 2015) and the editor of *Hashtag Publics: The Power and Politics of Discursive Networks* (Peter Lang, 2015) and *Intersectional Automations: Robots, AI, Algorithms, and Equity* (Lexington Book, 2021). He is working on a new monograph titled *Digital Intimacies: How Platforms Remake Close Connections that Matter*.

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In Torres Strait culture, there is spirit called the Dogai who is a shapeshifter. She infiltrates islander society and appears human, but she is not authentic and has never lived in islander society. She is often soon discovered through her mistakes and give aways. Similarly, there are some games that exhibit this trait of the Dogai (Dogaism), where they outwardly appear to be a representation of culture, but internally, they do not represent the culture in any deep or meaningful way. This problem occurs because the designers often have no real experience with the culture. In many cases, cultures depicted in games are the designers' limited understandings or even prejudices of these cultures which are presented as a kind of gamified reality that can further perpetuate societal stereotypes and prejudices.

Through a reflection of the Torres Strait Virtual Reality game project, I explore the issues associated with designing and embedding cultures into games and look at how culture might thoughtfully be embedded into video games. In essence, I argue greater involvement and experience with those from the culture will yield more authentic and deeper cultural depictions in-game, and promote a more culturally-centred game design approach. More than just providing a greater chance at producing a culturally-sound game, I believe this approach is important for creating games that promote and advocate for authentic cultural and community perspectives.

Dr Rhett Loban is a Lecturer at Macquarie University. His research interests include culture, game-based learning and virtual reality. Rhett received his PhD in 2020 from the University of New South Wales in Sydney. His PhD thesis examined how players might learn about history through engaging with Grand Strategy video games, in particular through the practice of modding. In 2019, he was awarded the CSIRO Indigenous Professional Career Achievement Award for his work on Torres Strait Virtual Reality and vision for different ways of learning.

## **DR MEGAN CATHERINE ROSE (SHE/HER) & DR SHARON H. ELKIND (SHE/THEY)**

### **Becoming tiny androids: Emerging as robotic avatars in telepresence-facilitated relationships**

**DAY 2 | 4-4.20PM**

Isolation during COVID-19 provides both new opportunities to explore online-driven technologies, complicating what it means to be ‘present’. Telepresence provides a means to facilitate connectedness and intimacies. This technology uses internet-based communication networks to connect individuals using a camera and video display via the internet. Recent innovations expand telepresence to include affordable robotics, re-integrating the digital with the physical as a remotely controlled avatar in the “real” world. In this paper, we explore our use of tiny personal robots, such as the Ebo-SE by Enabot, as means to connect and move through space together, across international borders, with attention to human-robot entanglement in more-than-human worlds that shape embodiment and intimacies.

Through a six-month ethnography in 2022 informed by Haraway (1985) and Bennet’s (2009) work, we formed a research assemblage (Fox & Alldred 2017) with robots and our material worlds. As an Australian woman with trauma who struggles to connect with people outside of online spaces and an American woman limited by a degenerative disease and unable to travel, this approach explores how our bodies, as ever-emerging affective assemblages of matter, are interconnected through communication media. The re-introduction of physical avatars into the digitally-facilitated relationships transform our interactions and connectedness. We investigated how the robot can increase agential capacities through its entanglement with humans by giving the user a means to move, occupy physical space and emote. This complicates understandings of practice, performance, and animation (Silvio 2010).

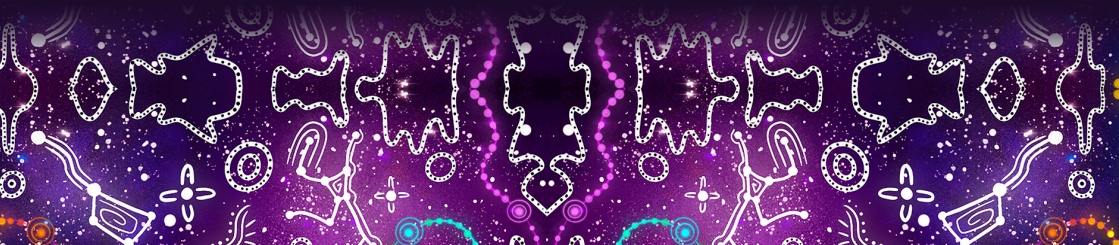
Upon entering the robotic body, we become more-than-human, form new entanglements with other matter, co-experience our respective geographical locations with new perspectives, explore this entanglement’s potential for intimacies, and complicating our understanding of surveillance.

Megan Rose is a Sociologist and Arts-based researcher at the Vitalities Lab UNSW Sydney and an affiliated researcher at the Australian Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making Society. Megan's robotic research investigates the social impact and implications of social robotics in the home, study, and work settings, including telepresence technologies and artificial companions such as AIBO and PARO. **Contact:** [megan.rose@unsw.edu.au](mailto:megan.rose@unsw.edu.au)

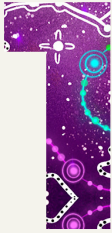
Sharon Elkind is an independent, interdisciplinary, social scientist and researcher. Her work in robotics seeks new means of accessibility and connectedness in academia and beyond. She also specializes in modern representations of mythology in popular culture and science-fiction, as well as international cosplay communities. **Contact:** [sharonelkind@proton.me](mailto:sharonelkind@proton.me)



**The Centre for Global Indigenous Futures explores the complexities of Indigenous life, ingenuity and identity in order to imagine futures in which Indigenous people are thriving. We consider Indigenous love, joy, intimacy, sexuality, identity, care, relationality, representation and digital life and how these might emerge and evolve in the future. Global Indigenous research conducted through this Centre opens up possibilities and opportunities for Indigenous futures.**



# THEMES



## **FUTURE WORLDS**

Exploring what futures for Indigenous people might look like, and how institutions, structures and systems can be transformed towards a just future.

- What a sustainable future might look like for Indigenous people
- What future work, housing, home, social life, sovereignty and justice might look like for Indigenous people
- The future of global Indigenous networks



## **INTIMACIES, RELATIONALITIES AND LOCATING OURSELVES**

Exploring the complexity of Indigenous life and identity and uses this to understand future possibilities for Indigenous peoples.

- Who and what is 'Indigenous' and how might this change in the future?
- Relations of care, reciprocity, obligation and responsibility
- Indigenous queer identities and cultures



## **DIGITAL FUTURES**

Exploring the many and varied ways in which Indigenous people use technology and how it is entangled in their lives.

- How technology can bring about Indigenous futures
- The opportunities in digital life, including for global community, connections, redistributed power
- The challenges of digital life, including surveillance, hate speech, violence



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