Chris Chapman
Troubled Consciousness: Complicity in Colonization and Compulsory Cound-Mindedness

WEB DuBois' double consciousness describes Black people's parallel standpoint from which to evaluate the world, which uses knowledge of whiteness to navigate the ever present dangers of white supremacy. White people, and others positioned as normal and dominant in interlocking power relations, need no such parallel standpoint to survive those systems in which they are positioned 'on top' of social stratifications. But perhaps a politicized ethics would require the purposive development of a different kind of parallel consciousness.

The paper explores narratives from a white development worker's recognition of the racism that shaped her work in Africa and a racialized Muslim woman who implicates herself in the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples in what is now called Canada. These narratives demonstrate the crucial role that emotions play in the ethico-political work of implicating oneself in oppression, and also the ways that such emotions are self-surveilled and imagined to be barriers to ethicality and justice.

Intersecting DuBois with Judith Butler's performative 'trouble' as well as critiques of affective regulation from Mad studies and Sara Ahmed, I suggest that people positioned 'on top' of relations of domination (as white, male, nondisabled, non-Indigenous, from the Global North, cisgendered, etc.) might fruitfully cultivate a 'troubled consciousness.' This is a purposive consciousness of the ever present danger of enacting oppression and is not primarily rational. It rather embraces uncertainty, shame, and anxiety, which are normatively cordoned off as 'bad' and worthless emotions that are best avoided or 'worked through' psychologically. I suggest that this condoning off is a consequence of discourses of disablement and that Mad critiques of these discourses are useful for a more politically engaged ethical navigation.