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OF, BY, AND FOR THE INTERNET

New Media Studies and Public Scholarship

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A tweeted photo of infant sleepwear made me "internet famous" (Kane 2014). My sudden "micro-celebrity" (Marwick & boyd 2011) was enervating, and exciting, and empowering, and scary by turns. Such experiences vary widely, however, and how and why academic micro-celebrity distributes asymmetrical consequences is the subject of this chapter. I propose we must actively work to craft a new media studies of, by, and for the internet, one that seeks to *transform* rather than simply *disrupt* both scholarship and the broader social landscape. This transformation would aim to produce a new mode of what I describe as "public/scholarship," that is more democratic and expansive in its processes, and more equitable and supportive in its outcomes, for all participants. Such an outcome is by no means assured and is indeed already threatened.

It is a cliché of new media and digital humanities (DH) that digital technology is fundamentally *disruptive*—that is, that it breaks down prior social, economic, and political arrangements, and that such breakdowns have revolutionary effects. This rhetoric plays out in miniature in the academic setting. In hindsight, many of these claims seem overblown. It is hard to articulate the disruptive impact of PowerPoint, once much trumpeted: as it turns out, PowerPoint simply reproduces "the lecture" but with snazzier visual aids, and a whole lot of infrastructure spending. Similarly, there is not much revolution in new internet media used to simply further or refine status quo scholarly methods: paywalled journal articles on the web are just as inaccessible as print ones immured in academic libraries, for example.

Here, I consider viral academic speech as offering the opportunity to develop a new media studies of, by, and for the internet, or what I call "public/scholarship." Public/scholarship as a locution intends to name not a modified, adjectivized version of "scholarship" but a truly compound, see-saw form, both "public" and "scholarship" equally weighted. This mode of new media engagement can be transformative, changing both scholar and scholarship in profound and discomfiting ways.

To clarify and limit my scope for this essay, I offer this taxonomy of new media engagement, arranged from least disruptive to most transformative. I come at this from the "scholar"

end of the continuum, moving toward the "public." You might reverse this instead. The boundaries between categories are fuzzy rather than sharp; overlaps will vary case by case:

1. **Publicizing and sharing finished academic work**: This includes posting your own articles on Academia.edu, placing a work in an online repository, or publishing a presentation on Slideshare.

2. **Scholarly gleaning**: Gleaning activities aggregate and organize resources for anyone to use, through, for example, curated Twitter lists, hashtags, social bookmarking, Storify, and digest blogging.

3. **Seeding**: Seeding places material online to allow others to grow it into something bigger or better or different: sharing a syllabus on GitHub for reuse and elaborations by others, or creating open documents such as the #femdh list of female coders suitable for invitations to conference keynotes.

4. **Doing research in and through the public/internet**: Collective hashtags like #dayofdh exemplify this mode: the hashtag is dispersed to participants whose use of it serves a purpose in and of itself, but the collected tweets also later become a dataset upon which further scholarship is built. #FergusonSyllabus and #CharlestonSyllabus bring academic and popular sources together, as history unfolds in real time. Public/ scholarship begins to emerge as distinctions between a researching subject and a subject of research begin to break down.

5. **Affective labor and meta-discursive work**: From "Quit Lit" to the Adjunct Project at the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* to collective blogs like *Hook & Eye* and *Conditionally Accepted*, to hashtag projects like #ILookLikeAProfessor, various kinds of online scholarly writing work explicitly through new media to organize academic labor and academic communities, cutting across intersectional lines: class, institutional position, geographic location, race, and gender. The question of affect is foregrounded in these discussions about academic practices and values: the personal is political, and deliberately visible.

6. **Activist or direct intervention work**: For example, Canadian Women in the Literary Arts (CWILA) counts and counters the exclusion of female writers from formal review media. Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH) aims to shift the direction and composition of DH using lightweight organizing and publishing tools to work around substantial infrastructure constraints as well as the disciplinary ones that are weighted against a truly global digital humanities scholarly practice.

7. **Accidentally or on-purpose going full-out public viral**: Sometimes, a bit of academic speech escapes the orbit of scholarly conversation and blazes across the sky of broader public culture. Whether the experience burns everything in its path or lights a new way often correlates to historic categories of power or exclusion. I know, because it happened to me.

It Happened to Me

My friend Christine Robinson Logel, a social psychology professor at Renison University College, snapped a photo of two pairs of infant pyjamas, juxtaposed, and posted it to Facebook. I asked her permission to share the photo on Twitter. At 12:40 on that September Monday, rushing to get to class, I tweeted the photo with the caption "Please RT this sexist set of baby jammies from Target. Boys can be heroes; girls can date heroes. #target #sexism" (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Twitter screen capture. Tweet by Aimée Morrison (@digiwonk).

By the time my class was over, the post had already garnered more than 50 retweets, and some modified retweets from high-profile accounts were boosting the signal. Crucially, the post got re-hashtagged with further gender- and comics-related tags, which helped make the image a lot more discoverable. @EverydaySexism (220,000 followers) spliced Christine's photo to another photo, of two adult-sized t-shirts, one reading "Training to be Batman" and the other "Training to be Batman's wife," and tagged me in it (see Figure 5.2).

Twitter notifications were arriving several per minute. It took very little time for the mainstream media to notice. The first reporter, a columnist for an online news site, contacted me through Twitter, within hours (Csanady 2014). Christine and I were both recorded and interviewed for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) talk radio and news website coverage Monday evening (van Koeverden 2014).

Overnight Monday, my notifications clogged with more than 400 messages, overwhelmingly supportive. On Tuesday, I did a TV segment for the local network affiliate, two print interviews with Canadian wire services, and a radio interview with an all-talk station locally (Perkel 2014). Retweets and modified retweets moved into the hundreds. Media requests were coming through my cell phone, the university press office, my university email, my office phone, and Twitter. Twitter users, some in my preexisting network, but most not, were alerting me every time a different media or web outlet took up the story (e.g., Dusenbery 2014; Terror 2014). Others were adding images and anecdotes to a hashtag corpus of sexist clothing (see Storified collection of these at Morrison 2014).

By Tuesday evening, the wire service stories were being posted and printed nationally. Wednesday brought more, and more diverse, media: another live talk radio interview, national broadcast TV interview, and a college radio interview. My own university's press office contacted me, a little nervous. This is the point I later describe as "peak onesie." The tweet was covered in a *Jezebel* story that appeared Tuesday overnight; later the author incorporated my submitted remarks (Rose 2014). A national all-news cable network had me in studio for a 2-minute remote, live interview: it is the first semihostile interview I have ever done, as the host opens with "people on the internet are outraged" and asks me, skeptically, "what's wrong with these pjs?" The hate mail arrived on Tuesday and built through Wednesday.

Figure 5.2 Twitter screen capture. Tweet by EverydaySexism (EverydaySexism).

On Thursday, the story received coverage in Australia, from the superhero angle, and probably related to the #WearYourSuperheroes story that originated there, and the *Mail Online* repeatedly pinged Christine and me for photo permission, as did a National Broadcasting Company (NBC) affiliate in Atlanta (Moran 2014). The story appeared on the front page of Yahoo.com. Two more student journalists from local universities contacted me. Things began to slow by Friday, a steady dribble of mentions and retweets, tapering quickly off. But even now, every couple of days, nearly 3 years later, someone retweets the image, still.

Power and Privilege in Public/Scholarship

Tressie McMillan Cottom has identified the move toward public engagement through social media as supporting a culture of academic micro-celebrity and personal branding that, instead of disrupting the neoliberal university, can instead promote it on two fronts: bringing reputational currency and prestige to the university and promoting a purported democratization of knowledge without truly changing anything (McMillan Cottom 2015b). It is undeniable that my own viral media experience operates in the ways McMillan Cottom describes, leveraging public attention to bolster my own profile as a legitimate authority at the same time as accruing reputational and attentional currency to my institution. On the ground, it looks like this: sometimes, at parties in the community where I live, or even at conferences among academics, I am introduced as "you know, she had the tweet about the pajamas!" and people are impressed, because it was kind of a big deal in socially acceptable ways, at least in my own broad employment and cultural networks. There was arguably nothing either disruptive or transformative about my viral media experience.

My experience of the public/scholarship of #sexistjammies is enframed by the intersections between my institutional position, my research area, my embodiment, and my cultural capital, mostly working to my substantial advantage. My tenured professorship and affiliation with a research institution were crucial in granting me immediate credibility as a legitimate "expert" participant in public culture. I benefit as well from the financial and professional security that tenure offers. Further, my location in the Canadian university system is marked by a political

climate on and about campus issues that is generally far less polarized and antagonistic than that in the U.S. These are important advantages.

That I am a researcher of new media topics further gave me extra access to valuable social and material resources to manage this event. With around 2000 followers at the time my tweet was picked up, I was already above the 96th percentile for reach among Twitter users— the average Twitter user who logs in more than once a month has between 160 and 200 followers, depending on how this is calculated (Cir.ca 2015). I had a prior, established public persona and audience, rather than a personal or private one; self-presentation online is, after all, my core research area. Mikki Kendall has dissected how the experience of Twitter shifts based on a scale of followers: over 5,000 followers, she says, and things can get a little un-pleasant and combative; over 10,000 and it is not worth reading your mentions anymore (Daniels 2015). I do not have this problem. Yet. While the scale of engagement the tweet drew was unusual, I was neither blindsided by the attention nor thrust into a position of moving suddenly from total obscurity to inadvertent internet micro-celebrity (Marwick 2013). Frankly, I had already cultivated such micro-celebrity, primed for attention and trained in getting it: I am, it seems, a good neoliberal academic subject even when I am trying to dismantle retail patriarchy.

I was also advantaged by my status as an established media commentator. For several years already, I have been very frequently called upon as an expert source on new media- and gender-related topics in print and broadcast media. Indeed, because of my media contacts, my research profile, and my faculty position, I was able to turn myself from the object of media's attention to a subject directing and framing it. I could and did reach out to jour-nalists directly. I wanted to talk about the sexism in the pajamas, per se, but also about the arc of the feminist viral media story, generally and structurally, and I did not see this in the spontaneous coverage. I pitched the story to a digital culture radio program that airs nationally; I was allowed to suggest an angle and focus that was reflected in the questions I was ultimately asked (Young 2015). Similarly, the local newspaper, having reprinted the wire story about the controversy, decided to follow up with a story, which appeared in the feature section, on my research more broadly (Aggerholm 2014). This type of access to sympathetic and substantial media treatment is a rare privilege.

Misunderstanding Virality Produces Harm

The backlash against my viral media did ultimately arrive, both because the tweet itself was explicitly feminist and, inevitably, because I am a woman and a feminist. The Cycle of Backlash moved through my Twitter mentions, my university email account, and the comments sections of blogs and online publications, and it proceeded as it generally does in what I began to refer to as my Misogynist Insult Escalation Chart. Your chart will prob ably have similar items on it, but perhaps in a different order, depending on your member-ship in intersecting categories of exclusion or privilege: many scholars, were they inclined to wade through their Twitter mentions, would be well able to craft racist, ableist, or classist insult escalation charts of their own. My own experience goes like this:

1. This does not matter / I do not care / no one cares.
2. Get a sense of humor.
3. It is just Twitter / Facebook / Tumblr / The Internet, not the real world.
4. Make me a sandwich / get in the kitchen / ugly / lesbian / bitch.
5. You are wrong / this is not my experience / this is not real.

6.   You have no standing / are not an expert / do not know anything.
7.   I am going to get you fired / you are finished in this town.
8.   I will rape you / kill you / harm your family.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this chart recalls Joanna Russ's brilliant *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983), with its eleven-point plan to minimize, distract, confuse, and confound public speech by women, a problem that seems even more urgent now than in 1983. Many contemporary feminist journalists, for example, recount living in a perpetual state of fear arising from an onslaught of online rape and death threats, and many are unwilling or unable to accept those terms of employment for long (see, for example, Penny 2011; Cox 2014; Hess 2014; Dingman 2016). As Lindy West wryly puts it, "Being insulted and threatened online is part of my job" (Goldberg 2015)—and such job conditions increasingly obtain for female academics with a public presence as well. Indeed, *Model View Culture* founder Shanley Kane details how her experience of becoming "internet famous" involved her visibility being weaponized against her: becoming a "public figure" according to others' logic meant not that she gained in perceived authority, but that she lost any assumed privacy rights (2014). Having a higher platform to reach a bigger audience that does not want to hear what you have to say is a mixed blessing, at best.

From my work as a theorist in social media, I had always understood these kinds of attacks to be inevitable and substantially structural rather than strictly personal—I was expecting them. I was not expecting, frankly, to have such an easy time of it. Structural patterns have personal instantiations of course, and experiences vary widely based on intersecting categories of identity, topic, and location, a lesson I needed reminding of. I was not seriously doxxed and did not receive any really threatening Twitter mentions or emails, probably because I was mainly (but not totally) immune from racist, homophobic, and ableist attacks online: many, many people called me a humorless bitch, but only one person wanted to have me deported, for example. This was invaluable to my capacity to maintain a sort of existential equanimity that so many others have been robbed of: it is easy enough for me to joke when I suffer insults one through five, but not six, seven, or eight. Still, "going viral" even in such positive terms and with such (relatively) trivial consequences was emotionally and physically exhausting, and this truly surprised me. The constant disruption of various notifications, media calls, emails, and more, of which I was never certain which would be hostile or supportive, is enervating and unnerving, despite my comparatively easy experience. I did nothing but manage this for an entire week: no writing, no grading, no class prep, and barely attending class. I still get random hate tweets, and they still bother me.

There are real risks to taking scholarship outside the ivory tower, risks that accrue unevenly based on identity and visibility. Internet shitstorms rain down disproportionately, and with disproportionate damage, upon the more precarious: women, people with disabilities, people of color, junior scholars, and the contingently employed. McMillan Cottom writes, "Were I white or male or of a higher class, it is possible that I could leverage the adage that all press is good press" (2015b). For too many, the physical, emotional, reputational costs of "going viral" are too high to bear. Recent informal experiments, such as #raceswap, demonstrate what many of us know in our own experiences to be true: minoritized populations have their ideas challenged far more aggressively, with racist and sexist ad hominem attacks, with more threats of personal violence, and more generally trollish behavior, than white men (Carbone 2014; Nesbitt Golden 2014; Vogt & Goldman 2014; DeMarco n.d.). This is deliberate and structural. Even as academics are urged to make ourselves more public, those who would derail public/scholarship engage in organized campaigns we can liken to hostile

"outing" of otherwise self-limiting and obscure internet writings by scholars, or a kind of muckraking among the AstroTurf, what the *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently described as the "Higher Ed's Internet Outrage Machine" (Schmidt 2015). While some viral academic media broadens reach and speech, other viral academic media is deliberately weaponized to suppress it. This depends largely on who is producing the speech, and about what. In the U.S., organized trolling expeditions by conservative campus organizations, some funded by national political advocacy groups, engage in missions of seek-and-destroy, looking for progressive material from precarious subjects and launching wars.

Recently, professors Saida Grundy, hired out of her doctorate directly to Boston University, and Zandria Robinson, leaving University of Memphis for Rhodes College, were both the subjects of weaponized viral media (Shahvisi 2015). Each was targeted by conservative national student organizations for public tweets addressing the intersections of race, gender, class, and power (Chasmar 2015; Hasson 2015; "University of Memphis Professor" 2015). The virality of this speech was forced upon each scholar: decontextualized tweets were surfaced, promoted, amplified, and reframed to generate maximum attention to these scholars for the purpose of having them fired or discredited and humiliated (Fadiran 2015; Jaschik 2015a, 2015c; Shavisi 2015). These incidents, and many others like them in ways that mark white supremacy as both threatened and threatening, demonstrate the skewed uses and consequences of viral academic media (see Crockett 2014; McMillan Cottom 2015a). Grundy and Robinson are black women, and both are junior faculty members, Grundy in African American Studies and Robinson in Sociology. Both were subject to organized conservative attacks their respective institutions were ill-equipped to respond to. Distressingly, neither received adequate support from their institutions. The University of Memphis merely noted that Robinson was no longer in their employ, leaving open the possibility that she had been fired rather than the actual case that she had already been recruited into a position at another school (Timpf 2015). President Robert A. Brown of Boston University, more seriously, actively denounced Grundy's tweets, characterizing them as "statements that reduce individuals to stereotypes on the basis of a broad category such as sex, race, or ethnicity" and engaging in what amounts to tone policing (Brown 2015). In both cases, the professors were targeted by conservative groups for addressing topics in critical race studies well accepted in that field, but which were violently opposed by more public audiences online; it is distressing that their institutions seemed to choose not to side with them as colleagues, but to capitulate instead to small groups of online agitators skilled at drawing and directing media attention.

Public/scholarship has never been easy, and in many ways it has become harder as internet publication and communication tools knock down the protective walls of the ivory tower. And we must remember that these walls have, in their better incarnations, sheltered vulnerable academics and created space, however imperfectly, for progressive thinking and substantial debate. (These imperfections are themselves structural and profound. The recent *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academi*a (Guttiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012), a collection of 30 personal narratives of systemic exclusion, powerfully articulates the means by which the ivory tower continues to enforce a normative academic identity that forcefully works against a more inclusive, diverse, and just academe.) The walled garden of the academy, that is, has at some times and in some ways enabled even as it restricted socially engaged scholarship. In general, the humanities academy is friendlier to marginalized and minoritized populations than the world at large can be; and in general, the world at large is more outwardly civilized than much of the internet. On the internet—the broadly construed "public" at issue here—suppressing women, people of color, people with disabilities, and otherwise marginalized subjects has become a blood sport engaged by normative subjects whose

status is threatened, by simple sadists, and by groups exploiting the nature of virality to organize targeted mobs. Shiny happy talk about the imperatives of public scholarship available to any scholar with an internet connection denies the force and power of these acts of suppression and the ways they disproportionately harm some scholars in some fields more than others.

"Of the People, by the People, for the People"

It is no surprise that scholars writing on social justice issues—gender, race, class, and politics—are at the forefront of both public/scholarship and the backlash against it. Grundy ultimately favors more rather than less speech, writing: "the events we now witness with regularity in our nation tell us that we can no longer circumvent the problems of difference with strategies of silence" (quoted in Jaschik 2015b). This is the essence of a truly transformative version of public/scholarship. As Sunera Thobani, a Canadian academic who herself became the victim of a 2001 internet mob, writes: "Challenging the truth claims of dominant elites has long been a major part of the struggles of oppressed peoples for self-determination" (2003: 400). Indeed, some of the most vibrant and urgent new media public/scholarship has been produced by marginalized subjects, by those who have become public/scholars because academic and popular systems of power and reward have excluded them, or whose work has been sought out and surfaced in order to terrorize and silence. McMillan Cottom is blunt: "Put simply, all press is good press for academic microcelebrities if their social locations conform to racist and sexist norms of who should be expert" (2015b). Otherwise, not so much. Suey Park and David J. Leonard caution against the tone policing that distinguishes high-status from low-status speech online, noting that "[a]n effort to gentrify digital spaces in the name of safety and dignified discourse is sweeping the Internet," erasing marginalized voices—much of this erasure is performed by white liberal feminists (2014; see also Ross 2014). Emerging new media modes of public/scholarship must challenge rather than simply replicate how authority, authenticity, and legitimacy in intellectual work is allocated. I'Nasah Crockett flags this as well, noting the pervasiveness of antiblack racism "not only institutionally, but also at the level of the everyday . . . So of course it makes itself apparent in the supposedly brave new world (so different from any world that came before!) of social media" (2014; see also Kaba and Smith 2014). Of course it does; the sarcastic parenthetical aside speaks precisely to the disembodied dreams of utopian communication that continue to be more observed in the breach than in the occurrence.

It is easier to craft compelling rhetoric about the transformative power of public/scholarship than actually implement it. Already, as we have seen, public/scholarship is being threatened on at least two fronts. First, within universities themselves, the transformative potential in public/scholarship risks being co-opted by neoliberal logics of personal branding, good press, and "knowledge mobilization" that instead reward the powerful and maintain the status quo; in this guise, "disruptive" new media technologies simply further entrench existing powers and privilege. Second, public/scholars addressing contemporary cultural questions face substantial personal risks from internet mobs for daring to bring socially relevant research out into the world beyond the ivory tower; a secondary risk arises when their own institutions, disciplinary associations, or colleagues disavow their public/scholarship using strategies from simple tone policing to releasing blanket institutional apologies for the scholars' perceived transgressions to outright dismissal (e.g., Illinois University in the case of Steven Salaita). Some public/scholars are mobilizing to support threatened scholars, and to work out the nitty gritty details of a more equitable, more inclusive scholarship. Eric Anthony Grollman, for example,

has produced a widely shared blog post detailing concrete actions that scholars, disciplinary associations, and institutions can take to support scholars under viral media attack (2015; see also McMillan Cottom 2015a for a similar take). Dorothy Kim and Eunsong Kim (2014) describe and decry a politics of academic citation that takes from but does not adequately credit or compensate the informal intellectual work of marginalized writers outside of academic systems of prestige and reward. Mia McKenzie's *Black Girl Dangerous* (2014) models transitions from blog posts to books—activist intersectional writing that moves between academic and nonacademic uses, contexts, and economies.

New media modes of public/scholarship, that is, offer us the opportunity and the imperative to transform ourselves as scholars, because our technologies and practices remain shot through with systemic biases and inequities that structure and constrain existing educational, social, political, and economic interactions and institutions. How could they not be? New media scholarship of, by, and for the internet inserts itself into, shapes, or is shaped by extant communities and emerging conversations—like #gamergate, which has terrorized scholars and game journalists alike (Cox 2014; Brown & Cuen 2015; Goodyear 2015). Whatever it is ostensibly about, it is also always already about who is entitled to speak, about what, and with what authority. It is not the abstract and utopian dreams for perfect communication envisioned in the early 1990s, suited to our more idealistic aims of seamless transmission of information. It is about whose speech is suppressed, by what means, and how this suppression can be countered; it is about whose voices are most easily amplified, by whom, and to what ultimate purpose. To neglect this work by pretending that computation "disrupts" asymmetric distributions of power and influence merely replicates these divisions we claim to wish to bridge.

Acknowledgments

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