'Symbolic Violence' and the Ethics of Representation: Reimagining (Digital) Public(s)

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Abstract

Drawing from an 18-month ethnography of the social network site, Xanga, this author examines how notions of the public inform communication practices and identity formations of Asian-American Internet users. The author connects participants' experiences of alienation from (offline) public sites as motivation for their digital writing activities that recreate and revise a different version of the public. This study argues for the importance of digital environments that afford public arenas for marginalized groups. How one is "seen" or recognized by the public has ethical implications; for Asian Americans, this too often means performing well-worn Asian stereotypes in order to be accepted by the public. Through Xanga, participants are able to explore and assert various **public** identities. This study has particular implications for educators considering the ethics of representation and race for digital contexts and for the design of digital courses.

Keywords

asian american; identity formation; public; ethics; representation

Reimagining (Digital) Public(s)

In 1996, Susan Wells asked "What do we want from public writing?" in her timely work interrogating theorists growing focus and concern with the role of writing in and for the public (Weisser, 2008; Mathieu, 2005). More than a decade later, this question remains a central inquiry for educators, particularly when we consider emerging technologies' role in mediating and producing public writing (Couture and Kent, 2004). In this new digital context, writing for the public has been celebrated (Rheingold, 2000), interrogated (Barton, 2005), and critically examined for its social and political possibilities (Ward,1997; Weisser 2008).

While such work has broadened academia's understanding of the public, what remains a major oversight in this body of scholarship is how the public, touted as a significant writing concept, gets taken up by everyday writers. That is, little work has explored how writers understand "the public" in digital writing practices, and this lack suggests that the field has been occupied with the public as an abstract concept divorced from the actual practice of writing. Specifically, scholarship has failed to examine how racial identities and writers function in the representation and construction of the public given digital technology's ubiquitous role in both the production of representations and, ostensibly, the public. Examinations of how digital environments invoke public imaginaries for writers, then, have ethical implications when educators ask students to engage in these environments because "the public" remains a contested site of representation (and power), functioning to exclude the very students educators may seek to include and empower in the "public" imaginaries of their online classrooms.

My interdisciplinary research on Asian-American writers on the social network site, Xanga, combines critical race, technology, and public theories in order to examine how public functions as a key motivation for Internet users. In my 18-month ethnographic study of the social network site, Xanga, I employed an observer-participant role for examining how Asian-American users produce their identities through language practices. Unexpected data led me to explore participants' engagement with online public(s) for reimagining and rewriting their fraught offline relationships with the public. In other words, participants recount alienating experiences from public sites (school, work, pop culture/media) due to their raced bodies; they have been told to "go back to the rice patties," asked if they ever eat scorpions "like they do on TV," but are, then, framed as "tech-savvy" by broader public discourses (participants: Nick, Angeline, and Chris). This bipolar, public discourse that signals to

Asian Americans their conditional belonging (such as in economic turns for technology booms) exacts a psychological and collective toll—they see themselves as valued for **only** one-dimensional identities: good at math and computers, docile, and culturally inept (Lowe, 1996; Ono and Pham, 2009).

For Asian Americans to become recognized in and by the public, then, typically requires the performance of the very stereotypes preventing them from being multi-dimensional. Drawing on Gross's (2001) term, "symbolic violence," I see this conditional belonging in the public sphere as a cultural process in which specific groups are made marginal, insignificant, and powerless through the cultural and public denial of the whole, complex person. Such symbolic violence has consequences for how Asian Americans conceive of their role in the broader public imaginary. In short, many participants in my study do not believe they belong in public arenas unless they perform Asian stereotypes, thus challenging how they imagine themselves as shaping civic discourses and contexts. However, my study also shows the significant potential for resistance-work in social network sites that afford users the opportunity not only to reimagine themselves as part of the public, but to rewrite online public(s) in the process, effectively rewriting themselves as public figures. By using Xanga as a platform, participants are able to create and engage with an Asian-American public, thus mitigating the white, dominant gaze that calls forth Asian stereotypes as the cost for being recognized.

Through multiple modes of data collection (online artifacts, surveys, and interviews), my triangulated research supports Fraser's (1996) subaltern public as a viable theory for digital environments, while pointing to the potential of social network sites as technologies and spaces where alternative groups can experiment and create public identities in "safer" contexts than the public, writ large. This is particularly important for students who have been historically alienated from such sites, both on and offline. Specifically, participants show that an online public is an essential imaginary for their identity formations because "being heard" and recognized by the public imaginary is something that these participants believe that they have denied.

Such finding calls upon educators to rethink new ways we can use digital environments for helping students ethically access and even create public(s); the production of digital environments has significant implications for shaping the public and, in turn, for students' work in representing self and others within such spaces. For example, positing the public as a representation unto itself allows writers to examine how this imaginary works to include and exclude others. Treating the public as a representation affords writers the opportunity to understand how the public emerges from cultural-historical contexts, and ultimately, how such contexts are informed by race as both a material experience and a process of representation. Given such findings, I believe that educators within the digital/new media fields are well-positioned to help students construct and shape more inclusive public spaces that can both empower themselves and others as ethical and civic endeavors.

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Captive Students and Corporate Surveillance:
Privacy Research and Implications for Educators

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Abstract

As educators teaching with online technologies, we need to consider what sites we require students to use in our classes. Corporate surveillance, tracking, and big data aggregation and reidentification are omnipresent and are issues that we need to be concerned about. Research shows that even as young adults share more personal information online than any other age group, they are concerned about their privacy online. In this presentation, the author reviews recent developments in corporate data mining techniques and privacy research—both secondary and primary that she has conducted—to provide recommendations for online learning.

Keywords

data mining; privacy; online learning

Imagine—you're a student signed up for an online course that you must complete in order to graduate. The instructor requires you to have a Google+ account and a Twitter account for course hangouts, feeds, and projects. You go to Twitter, click "accept" on the terms of service (that you don't read, because what's the point—you need to graduate), and, viola!, you are now part of Twitter's ever-expanding database.

As instructors, we value student engagement in public social media in our courses. But when we ask students to participate in these corporate-owned spaces, are we compromising our students' privacy, serving them up to marketers? Sure, we could avoid marketers altogether by teaching within bounded institutionally sanctioned learning management systems such as Sakai—fairly private there but that seems too limiting for pedagogy and for learning. Corporations create some of the more innovative communication technologies, and it's hard to imagine teaching online without, say, Google. And it's hard to imagine preparing today's global citizen without including participation in the online sites where so much public and intellectual work is being created, discussed, and disseminated.

We could conclude that privacy concerns just don't matter anymore—that students are living their lives online and don't really care that much about privacy. We could adopt the attitude of Zuckerberg (2010) who, when defending Facebook's ever-changing privacy policies, argued that "People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds but more openly with more people. That social norm is just something that's just evolved over time. We [at Facebook] view it as our role in the system to constantly be innovating and be updating what our system is to reflect what the current social norm is." But is the current social norm among students really toward more sharing of information with all?

Studies in the United States and in other countries indicate otherwise. Surveys by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that teenagers and young adults are concerned about privacy and are taking more steps to try to protect their privacy online (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Lenhart et al., 2010; Madden & Smith, 2010). A survey by the European Commission (2011) of citizens of all ages in all E.U. countries found that 62% of young people age 15-24 changed their privacy settings on social networking sites and that even though young people share more information online than older adults, they too expressed clear desires to control and access the use of their personal data by corporations. A study of college students at an American public university found that 51.3% of students were "very uncomfortable" or "uncomfortable" with the idea that advertisers were looking at their information online (Kazungu et al., 2011).

But if students might be "uncomfortable" is that really something we need to worry about as we design our online courses? What are the actual harms, if any, from sites (who give us free services

after all) that track where we go or things we like? The harms come in big data. As Liebowitz (2010), past Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission (the U.S. government agency that aims to provide consumer protections) explained, "[D]ata collected for one purpose can be combined with other data and then used for purposes not anticipated by the consumer. Further, unbeknownst to many consumers, companies such as data brokers collect and sell such aggregated data on a routine basis." What we ask students to do on one site may not be a problem, especially when sites such as Twitter emphasize that they don't reveal any "personally identifying information" but what is "personally-identifying" has changed as data aggregation, resorting, and reidentification gets easier and easier (Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Millar, 2009).

Data mining is an issue, but does it mean we go hide in those bounded, institutionally-controlled learning management spaces? I would argue vigorously no. We have an ethical obligation to teach students how to engage in online media and public media, even if those spaces are corporate-owned public spaces. And we have an ethical obligation to prepare students to be critical users of the Web. Tellingly, in the survey mentioned earlier of U.S. college students, only 41.3 percent thought advertisers were seeing their online information—that means the majority of students (all of whom had Facebook accounts) were not aware that their information was being mined (Kazungu et al., 2011). Clearly, students have much to learn. And so do we. As technologies change, as more and more courses and communications move online, we have an ethical obligation to prepare our students and ourselves for being critically aware, publically active, and privacy-aware (but not privacy-paranoid) Web users.

So what can we do? First, we need to educate ourselves and our students about the privacy policies and settings of sites we use in our online courses. This means actually taking the time to read through the privacy policies—an onerous task if there ever was one! But we need to slog through the legalese because some hot new site that pops up may have some egregious policy or some more established site may suddenly change its policies—the way LinkedIn had (for all of one day) its "social advertising" (Roslansky, 2011) policy that allowed the use of users' photos in advertising, not just advertising for LinkedIn, but third-party advertising too. If a site's policies are horrendous, we need to not use the site, finding, if possible, other alternatives.

We need to resist and to teach our students to resist the minimization of harm, what McDonald (2010) explained as the tendency to negate defuse harms, like the harms to privacy, in favor of immediate gains (using a site). We also need to not be blinded by deflection (Selber, 2004), how sites describe their services in ways that hide their other purposes (e.g., Facebook marketing itself as the place where "friends find friends").

Critical awareness doesn't just extend to knowing sites' policies, we also need to help students learn how to set privacy options. We cannot assume they know. And we need to be aware of the privacy policies and laws in the countries in which we teach. If a company's policies violate a national law on privacy (or may violate the law as laws continually change), do we, as instructors living in that country or teaching students who live in that country, really want to require students to use that site?

As we prepare course curricular, we need to layer in direct instruction in the analysis and evaluation of Web technologies and privacy. We need to help students interrogate their own and others' individual, community, and cultural expectations for privacy, helping them to recognize that privacy is, of course, a cultural construct and perceptions of privacy vary widely (Elm, 2009; Ess, 2002; Gal, 2002; Lange, 2007; McKee & Porter, 2009; Nakada & Tamura, 2005), thus shaping not only users of Web sites, but also the site developers as well.

When we teach online, we need to recognize that privacy matters, and we need to design our courses in ways that ensure students are able to engage with public Web media with a critical awareness of the risks of corporate surveillance.

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MOOCs, Interaction, and the Ethical Issue of Copyrights

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Abstract

This article explores an important ethical issue for online course design: faculty and student copyrights in MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) hosted by third parties outside the university. When faculty offer courses via a third-party MOOC, what copyrights do they retain for the original materials they create? What rights do they relinquish? And what copyright protections exist for students? This article critiques several MOOC licenses on the grounds that they elide the distinction between course and course content, thereby undercutting the university's value and potentially damaging the university's ethical relationship with students. Universities should avoid entering into MOOC licensing partnerships that treat the course as an object rather than as a social performance or that fail to provide adequate protection for faculty and student intellectual property. The value added of the college course is not merely the content. It is, more importantly, the social interaction between content, instructor, and students.

Keywords

This presentation explores an important ethical issue for online course design: faculty and student copyrights in MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). This issue should concern faculty developing online courses, whether MOOCs or OOCs (i.e., not "massive"). The course materials developed for MOOCs— syllabuses, course policies, video lectures, quizzes, class activities, PowerPoint slides, writing assignments, etc. — are certainly copyrighted. But who holds the copyright for those materials when they appear on a MOOC — and who "owns" the MOOC overall? What are the intellectual property implications for faculty who develop MOOCs? What copyrights do students retain for the original material they create and post on MOOCs?

We should certainly be excited about MOOCs and acknowledge their tremendous potential. At the same time we should be suspicious about an emerging development model for MOOCs: Many universities are outsourcing their MOOCs to third-party host/providers such as Coursera and Udacity — in much the same way that they are outsourcing quality assurance review for online courses to third parties like Quality Matters. The host/provider contributes the delivery platform, the interface design, and the promotion and marketing, in exchange for which the host makes claims on the intellectual property of the MOOC. It is the nature of these IP claims — and the definition of "course" that underlies the IP licensing — that bears watching, because these claims can fundamentally change the university's ethical relationship with its students.

Are MOOCs truly "open"? That depends on whose MOOC. By definition they are "open access" in the sense that the courses themselves are free (usually, so far) and open to all who can access them on the Internet. But not all MOOCs are "open" in the sense of "open source," and certainly not in regards to their approach to intellectual property.

The early MOOCs (which were not called that) typically operated under an open source ethic. For instance, MIT's OpenCourseWare project licenses its available course materials under a Creative Commons open access license that allows students to share, redistribute, and remix available course materials if they credit the source and use the same licensing for new materials they create. The Open Yale Courses project currently offers 42 online courses using this same Creative Commons license. We should notice that these open source courseware projects archive course materials but often label these materials as courses. That is a troubling elision, and one that plagues many discussions about online courses. Does "the course" = "the materials for the course"? Well, no, not entirely. A course consists of other elements, including and especially an unfolding performance in time, the instructor's

interactions with students, and the students' original content contributions. That reductive misrepresentation of "course," which is, unfortunately, fairly common, has significant consequences for the development of online courses in higher education.

"Course" — a simple term, everybody knows what it means, and so the complexity and diversity of its meaning are often overlooked. We should pay attention, though, to how "the online course" is being represented in public discussions and by for-profit third parties such as Coursera and Udacity but also by organizations like Sloan Consortium and, particularly, Quality Matters that are exerting considerable influence over how universities design online courses.

The MOOC providers getting all the press — edX, Udacity, and Coursera — are establishing restrictive copyright controls over courses and are constraining students' uses of course material. In regards to the students' own work — the work they originally produce and post to MOOCs — Udacity claims an exclusive license to "use, distribute, reproduce, modify," etc., that intellectual property, including the right to use students' material for commercial purposes or to sublicense these rights to other parties, a broad copyright claim that universities typically do not make on student work (Udacity, 2013).

Udacity's copyright policies are stringent in regards to protecting its own intellectual property, but broad in regards to claiming rights to students' intellectual property. This seems fairly typical for the major MOOC providers. Both edX and Coursera have substantially the same policies governing material posted for their online courses (edX, 2013; Coursera, 2013).

It is important to note that these licenses do not refer to "students" but rather refer to "the User." In fact most MOOC registrants are not, strictly speaking, college students; in respect to the MOOC provider they are "participants." Typically (with some exceptions), the registrants do not pay tuition and do not earn course credits. Most MOOCs are not even technically "college courses." What is unusual, though, is that universities — some fairly prestigious ones normally paranoically obsessive about protecting their brand —are embracing a vocabulary that blurs the institutional boundaries between the profit and the non-profit; between corporate and academic identities; between "course" and "course materials"; and between their own "courses" and these online-training-modules-that-are-courses-only-in-the-informal-sense.

These restrictive copyright policies should be troubling to universities and to faculty who sponsor MOOCs on third-party hosts. Before moving in this direction, universities should reflect on their "institutional ecology" (Benkler, 2003, p. 1272; see also Benkler, 2008) — that is, the kind of organizational infrastructure they are building when they outsource their courses to a third-party host, particularly those that elide that distinction between the course and the course materials. Now I have no doubt that some college courses do fit this model: that is, they are taught primarily as one-way delivery of content from instructor and/or textbook to student, conceived of as an empty vessel (or nearly so). In the MOOC world, this is called, pejoratively, an xMOOC. We can also see this as Freire's banking model of education, applied to online course design.

To imagine a course as equivalent to its content misses a vital point about the value added of higher education: Students can be content creators, too. The assumption of the cMOOC, or connectivist MOOC, is that students themselves create knowledge and promote learning through their interaction in courses. A cMOOC is designed to maximize student interaction, remixing, and social dialogue (Siemens, 2005; Ravenscroft, 2011). The assumption here is that learning happens not only in the one-way transfer of content from instructor to student/s, but most importantly in networked, crowd-sourced collaborative interaction and in students' active contributions to and remixing of course content. Indeed there is an even stronger claim at play here (one not unlike the assumptions of Socratic dialectic): the interaction between participants potentially creates new knowledge and course content. In this respect, students in a cMOOC could potentially be considered co-content creators — and ergo potential co-copyright holders — along with the instructor.

An online college course should not be equated with its content or treated as an object apart from its performance or its participants (Viadhyanathan, 2002). The value added of many, perhaps most, college courses lies precisely in the performance: the social exchange and interaction between content, instructor, and students. Courses are more than merely online textbooks, even if multimodal ones. Universities and faculty should be staunch advocates of a broader, connectivist view of "course" and avoid licensing arrangements that reductively equate courses with their content or that fail to uphold students' intellectual property rights.

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