Call for Papers

First Monday

Deadline for Submission: 1st of August 2014

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Special Issue on “Digital Gender: Theory, Methodology and Practice”.

In the 1990s, Internet scholars often hailed “Cyberspace” as an arena where women and men could escape the socially imposed shackles of their biological gender. Through the Internet, digital technologies were seen to facilitate bodily transcendence (Benedikt 1991, McCaffrey 1991, Biocca 1992, Plant 1996a), catalyze new ways of engaging in gender politics (Schuler 1996, Wittig and Schmitz 1996, Castells 1997, Tsagarousianou et al. 1998), and provide a medium whereby individuals could reconstruct their identity free from the social, bodily stereotypes that reinforce normative views of gender (Plant 1996b, Stone 1995, Turkle 1995). In this way, scholars noted clear opportunities within digital technologies for both liberation and emancipation, not only through gender-play (Rommes and Van Oost 2001) and notions of cyborgs and technological drag (Graham 2001, Jimroglou 2001), but also in its potential to democratize the active production of an ever more digitalized world (Green and Adam 2001). Claims were even made that the networked organization of the Web inherently supported feminist and democratic work (Plant 1995, Scott et al. 2001, Carstensen 2009).
While this “Utopian” view of the Web rapidly gained prominence within both scholarly and popular press, not everyone shared this view (Scott et al. 2001, Roberts and Parks 2001). Seeking to explain the relative absence of women online, “Dystopian” critics pointed to how the Web was constituted dominantly as a “white male playground” (see Scott et al. 2001), with pornography as an extreme example of online sexism, and the capacity of digital technology to fuel sexualized violence (Inayatullah and Milojevic 1999) and online harassment (Ferganchick-Neufang 1998). Scholars in this stream soon showed that men often monopolized discussions online, even when they were directly related to women and their gendered experiences (Kramarae and Taylor 1993, Herring 1996). Similarly, scholars also showed that the Internet was associated with a “masculinized netiquette” (Sutton 1996), through which “deviant” women and men were both victimized and harassed: Indeed, several scholars have pointed to how such “flaming” dramatically reduce women’s and men’s ability to take place and participate online, highlighting the potential of digital technologies to enforce gendered behaviors and norms (Scott et al. 2001, Reagle 2013). Far from the utopian view of the Internet held by others, claims were even made that women were in dire need of segregated sanctuaries online (Camp 1996).

Though presented as ideal types, where the Utopians recognized the potential of the Internet and digital technology to emancipate women and men, the Dystopians instead pointed at the active exclusion of women, noting barriers for equal online participation due to hegemonic masculine scripts (Carstensen 2009, Sassen 2002, Scott et al. 2001). Through these entangled narratives rightly gained prominence, they are now, however, challenged by the ubiquity and accessibility of Internet technology in quotidian settings – particularly following the mobile and social revolution, spearheaded by companies such as Google, Facebook and Apple (Foka and Arvidsson 2014). Even as the online gender divide is rapidly eroding, allowing previously
marginalized groups to participate in the digital mainstream (Dean and Laidler 2013), the Internet itself remains firmly rooted in society at large (Foka and Arvidsson 2014), lending support to earlier claims that the potential of the Internet is squandered due to continued misuse and misappropriation of digital technology (see Scott et al. 2001). Internet technologies, such as social networks and online blogs, for example, hold clear opportunity to challenge normative societal views, but commonly also help to maintain the status quo (Carstensen 2009, Filipovic 2007, Foka and Arvidsson 2014, Harp and Tremayne 2006, Rightler-McDaniels and Hendrickson 2014). Similarly, even anonymous online communication has been shown to embody gendered, sexual, racial and class-based inequalities of the society at large (Shapiro 2010).

To understand this troubling outcome, and shed light on how the digital intermingles with the social in the production of gender, there is a need to revisit the claims of the 1990’s and to challenge traditional notions of “Digital Gender” (Foka and Arvidsson 2014, Shapiro 2010). In particular, we note the need to critically re-examine the conceptualization of the Internet as a separate – virtual – realm and direct attention to the increasingly complex ways that digital technologies permeate social practices, thus altering or reinforcing the very fabric of society (cf. Barad 2007, Leonardi et al. 2012, Sassen 2002, Wajcman 2004). While it is well known that Internet technologies afford overt spaces where normative views of gender can be challenged, there is a need to uncover how the situated online practices facilitated within these spaces both shapes and is shaped by societal processes and contexts (Foka and Arvidsson 2014, Shapiro 2010, Wyer et al. 2013).

This Special Issue seeks to move beyond the notion of Digital Gender as “gender online”, and instead direct attention towards how the digital intermingles with the social in the making and
unmaking of social categories and associated forms of oppression. On the one hand, we invite empirical research that focuses on how particular Internet technologies help maintain as well as challenge normative views of gender. On the other hand, we invite empirical research that uncovers how particular material properties of digital technology affect the (un)making of such views (cf. Leonardi 2010, Yoo 2012). To facilitate such a turn, we also call for theoretical and methodological contributions that can aid scholars in their investigation of the complexities of Digital Gender. Overall, we also stress the need for scholars of gender to move beyond binary oppositions and to be appreciative of intersectionality in their analyses of digital gender construction (cf. Daniels 2009).

**Key Questions and Themes**

We encourage theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions that approach Digital Gender as the digitally mediated production of gender. Guiding research questions may be driven by theory, methodology or empirical data, but should emphasize either whether, when, how, or why Internet technologies mediate the production of gender and acknowledge that online social practices both shape and is shaped by larger societal processes and contexts. The following topics illustrate potential areas of interest, but offer only a starting point, as we invite creativity in topic, lens and method:

- Reviews of existing literature that uncovers key assumptions and contradictions in order to chart out a new agenda for Digital Gender research.
- Methodological work that either utilize the Internet in novel ways to promote our understanding of gender or otherwise facilitate studies thereof.
- Case studies of online activism that highlight the potential of the Internet to alter the fabric of society and thereby challenge normative societal views of gender.
• Theoretical frameworks and concepts that further our understanding of how Internet technologies shape and are shaped by the complex processes whereby gender is produced.
• Empirical research that uncovers how particular Internet technologies becomes implicated in the making and unmaking of gender.
• Research that uncovers how online gender representations, narratives and performances matter beyond the virtual and show links between online and offline phenomena of relevance for gender research.
• Analyses of novel tools and concepts that make use of Internet technologies to promote gender equality.
• Empirical studies that uncover how Internet technologies maintain or challenge societal orders and mediate the production social categories and associated forms of oppression.

Submissions

The deadline for submission to this special issue is the 1st of August 2014. Please note, that the deadline is firm. While we acknowledge that theoretical papers may require additional space, submissions are typically expected to be 5000-6000 words. Regardless of type, all papers should follow the journal guidelines for publication in First Monday: (http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/about/submissions#authorGuidelines). Papers should be submitted through the online submission system at First Monday: (http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions).

Tentative timeline for publication

Submission deadline: 1st of August 2014 (definite)
Reviews back: 1st of October 2014
Deadline for revised version: 15th of November 2014
Notification of acceptance: 1st of December 2014

Publication date: 5th of January 2015

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References


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