Feminist Cyberspaces

Feminist Cyberspaces: Pedagogies in Transition

Edited by

Sharon Collingwood, Alvina E. Quintana
and Caroline J. Smith

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Feminist Cyberspaces:
Pedagogies in Transition,
Edited by Sharon Collingwood, Alvina E. Quintana and Caroline J. Smith

This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-3633-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3633-3

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

INTRODUCTION

WHY TECHNOLOGY?

SHARON COLLINGWOOD

In the summer of 2008, I attended my first conference on education and technology. Technology is not my area of specialization; I was attending because I had recently been charged with developing an online introductory women's studies course for my department. Although I had expected to feel out of place at a tech event, I was pleasantly surprised. The atmosphere at the conference was relaxed and friendly, the audiences were reasonably gender-balanced, and the presentations covered an interesting variety of subjects and technologies.

One of the many different presentations I attended was on using games in teaching. I went with an open mind, thinking that a few games scattered through the term work might well make an online course more lively. The presenter demonstrated the first game enthusiastically, propelling a little armed figure through a series of challenges; he jumped over chasms, slid under cars, dodged dangerous-looking buzz saws, and ended by combining mastery of the gameplay with assimilation of course material.

Unimpressed but still hopeful, I waited for the second game to be demonstrated. In this example, a little clown figure jumped through hoops, slid down a tightrope, and collected falling money. He, too, was successful in integrating gameplay and learning.

By the time the third example was presented and another little animated figure began his desperate dash for knowledge, the pattern was becoming clear. I had just decided to politely daydream away the remaining ten minutes of the session when an educational technology specialist in the audience stood up to berate the presenter fiercely for his unimaginative approach to instructional gaming and his total neglect of the play patterns of female gamers.

The presenter beamed benevolently at her. He answered that he did indeed have games that were designed with women in mind, and he proceeded to show us one of them. We then watched as a small but

adorable baby jumped over kitchen tables, slid through windows, and saved falling puppies from disaster. The presenter, happily oblivious to the reactions of the women in the room, explained the importance of emotional connection for true immersive learning.

The session did not end well. The heated discussion that ensued was the beginning of my education on gender and gaming; I learned that linearity, risk, violence, competition, and control are understood to be essential for games designed for males, while many believe that collaboration, communication, and aesthetics are important in designing games for women (Gee and Hayes, 2010, 1-16). I found arguments that males approach the computer as a challenge to be mastered, while females see it as a tool to extend one's own power, and that while males pit themselves against the computer, females attempt to use it communicatively and cooperatively (Turkle 1997, 88). Further research revealed a growing but still relatively undeveloped discussion of the essentialist notions at the heart of the gender and technology question (Graner-Ray 2004). Gender in gaming is still a highly controversial topic, and given the low number of female game designers, it seems destined to remain so for some time to come.

Although games are only one aspect the gender and technology problem, this session proved to be very useful to me, as it alerted me to the assumptions I had brought to the conference. As a professor of women's studies, I have taught hundreds of students to look at social phenomena through the lens of gender. I think this is the most important thing I do; many students have told me that this training gives them a new understanding of their world. Yet, when presented with a demonstration of gender-biased instructional gaming, I did not question the lack of inclusivity in the construction of these exercises. Instead, I accepted that the presentation was an accurate portrayal of instructional gaming, and my response was that what was being presented was "not for me" and certainly not for my female students. Instead of looking for what could be of value for students of both genders in integrating games into my course, or asking if there were other ways to use the gaming software, I accepted that the linear, competitive, and high-pressure elements I saw were an integral part of all computer games. Even worse, I was not the one who stood to protest the obvious bias in constructing these games. Perhaps this was because I believed that computing is outside my area of expertise, or perhaps at some level I felt an unspoken, unacknowledged acceptance of this technology as "male territory." This led me to wonder what other territories I had been conceding.

Many of us who teach women's studies are tentative in our acceptance of technology, as are many of our female students. However, computing and information technology is rapidly becoming essential in both the private and the public spheres; our ability to integrate it into new ways of teaching is important, not just for the efficient communication of course content, but also for the development of skills and literacies that will assure a satisfactory level of comfort and agency in the new digital culture.

Although women and men have shown roughly equal interest in using the computer, studies demonstrate that women feel less confident in computer use and are far less likely to pursue a career in computer sciences (Hill 2010, Tam 2006). A recent publication by the American Association of University Women demonstrated that although young women's interest in careers in science, engineering, and technology in general is growing, enrollment in computer science programs is undergoing an alarming decline, dropping from a high of 36 percent of computer science bachelor's degrees awarded in the mid 1980's to 20 percent of those awarded in 2006 (Hill 2010, 37). Many reasons have been given for the gender gap; a perceived lack of interest, the prevalence of cultural stereotypes, a hostile work culture, or even the superior abilities in spatial reasoning males acquire through video games. Whatever the cause, women are not fully participating in a highly-paid technology that is rapidly restructuring our society (Tapia 2004, Walton 2009).

The lack of interest in computer science as a profession may tell us something about women's participation in digital culture. It is not necessary to have a degree in computer sciences to be active online, but it is important to be confident and comfortable; recent studies suggest that underlying attitudes may need to be addressed in order to foster full participation by women. In 2005 a survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project established that women make up a slight majority of Internet users (Fallows 1995), and this ratio remained constant in a subsequent study in 2009 (Pew 2009). The voices being heard, however, are predominantly male. In 2007, *PC Magazine*'s list of the 50 most influential people on the web contained social activists, political commentators, social media moguls, and prominent web CEOs, but only five people on the list were women. In 2008 *Bloomberg Businessweek* listed the 25 most influential people on the web, four of whom were women (Casserly and Goudreau 2010). In 2010 *Internet Evolution*, a news and analysis macrosite, released their list of 100 influential people in business, technology, entertainment, news and commentary; there were only seven women. A new sphere of influence is rising in Internet culture,

and although there are many examples of talented and successful female and feminist participants, they are still in a minority (Sweeney 2010).

Our students need the tools to understand women's involvement social media. Women are the majority in social media applications like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, making up 60% of all users, but men predominate on Linked In, a business-oriented social network used primarily to post curricula vitae and to trade referrals (Rapleaf 2008). This may mean that while the collaborative and open nature of social media encourages female participation with friends and family, it is men who are more successful in goal-oriented transactional networking in a wider circle of influence.

Blogging is another area where women show strong participation; over 22 million women read or publish blogs, according to a recent report by BlogHer, the preeminent women's blog aggregation site (Wright 2009, 9) and women publish 49.1% of all blogs (Sysmos 2010). Yet, as seen above, this does not translate into female participation in the wider culture. The reason for this becomes apparent in an examination of the BlogHer site itself. The majority of the blogs focus on work, parenting, and lifestyles, with far less attention paid to news and commentary. This kind of community interaction may serve in the long run to establish a network that transcends race and class divisions to serve a larger political goal; as it stands today, however, women's self-expression on the web seems to be as vulnerable to gatekeeping as it was in the traditional media, which relegated "women's interests" to the Sunday section. This is not to say that the blogs themselves are not well written, insightful, and highly relevant, but it does suggest that although women's voices are being heard on the Internet, too often we are only talking to each other. This problem was made particularly clear in the summer of 2008, when the annual BlogHer Convention in San Francisco was held the same weekend as the conference for Netroots Nation, an association of young, male, and very political bloggers. Netroots was covered in the news section of *The New York Times*, but the BlogHer convention was relegated to the lifestyles section. The uproar that ensued on the feminist blogosphere demonstrated that the *Times* coverage had hit a nerve (Traister 2008).

Another difficulty for women bloggers is in the level of discourse on the web. Internet discussions can be very confrontational, and some participants argue that this creates a climate of hostility. Maureen Dowd, one of the few female op-ed writers for *The New York Times*, accepted her online position in 1996. Six months later she was ready to quit: "I was a bundle of frayed nerves. I felt as though I were in a 'Godfather' movie, shooting and getting shot at" (Dowd 2005). She was persuaded to remain,

but if an experienced journalist like Maureen Dowd can feel threatened in internet debate, how much more difficult will it be for our students? To fully participate in online commentary our students will need the rhetorical skills to successfully deal with "male" discourse and advocate for inclusionary practices.

Many women bloggers believe they are targeted for harassment more than men (Nakashima 2007). In 2007 Cathy Sierra, a nationally-known tech blogger, permanently closed her blog, citing vicious sexual harassment and threats to herself and to her family (Wagner 2007, Havenstein 2007). Other bloggers have been attacked in a similar fashion; in an interview with Gaby Wood, Jessica Valenti, founder of the feminist blog *Feministing*, describes her confrontation with misogynist attackers:

> There was one incident where I posted a video about online misogyny and saying that feminist bloggers blog under our own names all the time and say what we believe in, whereas when it comes to rapist and sexist and homophobic bloggers, they have massive anonymity to protect them. I said: if you really believe this, then have the guts to say who you are. They went nuts. They took the site down that night. I got 5,000 emails – you cunt, bitch, I'll kill you, I'll cut your breasts off…all kinds of sexually violent, scary things.

The problem of internet harassment is ongoing (Thorpe and Rogers 2011). Clearly, without our support, our students may not be able to deal with this behavior and could be silenced by it.

Blogging is more than a hobby. Some women are making a profit from their writing, others are gaining an influence in their respective professions, and still others are using blogging for charitable fundraising and social activism. The high proportion of women in social media in general is a very good sign and could have tremendous social repercussions if their voices become mainstream. The Internet itself is becoming a dominant source of information on political life; 55 percent of the American electorate took part in the 2008 presidential campaign or received news and information about it through the Internet (Smith 2009). The feminist classroom must prepare students for the rough-and-tumble nature of internet discourse.

Speaking out successfully requires good research skills and a competent handling of resources. In the past, a teacher's task was to assemble information, present it to students, and encourage them to engage with it. Due to the rapid changes in information technology, our task today is to help our students navigate a bewildering ocean of information. Library skills are of prime importance, but so is media literacy. Students

need to develop an ability for critical analysis in many areas, including social media, where they will be able to use their social networking skills to engage in collaborative knowledge building. However, they must also understand how web culture works. Not all areas of discourse are as open as our students believe them to be.

Wikipedia is a case in point. A powerful social phenomenon whose borders are linguistic rather than geopolitical, Wikipedia has great potential for global collaboration and social transformation. It is ubiquitous; most searches find a Wikipedia article at the head of the results, and this is partly because some search engines rank an article not just by the number of visits but also by the number of sites linking to it. As a prime disseminator of knowledge for the online community, it has a profound cultural influence. Due to its very nature, however, Wikipedia is sometimes unreliable; articles are constantly changing, and critics fault authors and editors for neglecting verification that is not freely available online (Garfinkel 2008).

Some academics refuse to accept work based on Wikipedia, and others recommend it only as a starting point. Whether or not Wikipedia is banned, however, students often use it. A recent analysis showed that 52% of students studied used Wikipedia in course-related research, whether or not their instructor advised against it (Head 2010). Many academics argue that Wikipedia is a valuable resource that teaches students to be critical of their sources, document their own arguments, participate in an open peer review process, and fine-tune their skills in argumentation (Maehre 2009). If these scholars are right, there is much to be learned from Wikipedia, providing that our students learn to keep a critical distance from it.

Other aspects of Wikipedia are more troubling. In 2009 a study by the Wikimedia Foundation revealed that women write only 12.6 percent of all contributions. Ed Chi, a computer scientist at the Palo Alto Research Center, has studied Wikipedia extensively and supports the findings of the Wikimedia study: “The average Wikipedian is a young man in a wealthy country who's probably a grad student – somebody who's smart, literate, engaged in the world of ideas, thinking, learning, writing all the time” (Manjoo 2009). Other scholars have revealed gender differences in Wikipedia usage (Sook and Kwon, 2010). This gender imbalance is particularly disturbing if we consider the success women are having in graduate schools of many countries, where women either outnumber men or are at least approaching parity. Other social disparities are also implied in Chi’s acceptance of the gender gap, and indicate that Wikipedia may well provide us with teachable moments but in more ways than its creators

intend. If we should not be encouraging our students to rely on Wikipedia, we should certainly be encouraging them to write it.

There are many positive aspects to our students' use of new media. Even on sites like Facebook, where interaction is primarily social, verification is second nature; posts are often reinforced with a link to a news story, a picture, or a video. With a maximum of 140 characters per message, Twitter is teaching them concision. Blogging promotes self-analysis and social awareness. Wikipedia highlights the necessity for trust in collaborative knowledge building and the importance of maintaining one's reputation in a scholarly community. Social activism is facilitated by these and other online programs, and as students learn to use the interface, involvement becomes progressively easier to initiate. Barriers between the private and the public, between amateur and professional, and between academic and activist are being bridged by new technology.

The initial feminist objective was to get women online; this has been accomplished. Now is the time to survey the field and learn to consolidate our efforts. Our discipline has always emphasized consensus-based decision making, and outreach to the community is essential to what we do. We now have the ability to forge stronger ties between our students and the communities of practice they study, while teaching them the skills they will need to succeed in the new digital culture.

This volume is about reaching across disciplines, going out of our comfort zones, and trying something new. Many of the contributions chronicle first attempts; some have not been completely successful. We are learning as we go along.

Our collection has been structured to reflect the multifaceted nature of education today; learning takes place on a personal level, through independent study and social media, it takes place at a local level in our classrooms and lecture halls, but it is also increasingly taking place on a global scale as new technologies foster international collaboration between individuals and organizations. In addition, there is a growing acceptance of learning in the collaborative 3D classrooms of virtual worlds. These educational spaces are not mutually exclusive, as the chapters in this volume make clear.

The contributors to this collection use a variety of technologies, suited to individual teaching styles and the demands of the subject material. Most are not experts, having "tinkered" enough to begin using these tools with students, and then developing pedagogical approaches as we deepened our understanding of the technology. However, we all share an understanding of the tremendous potential of the technologies we are using, and we hope

our contributions will encourage you to explore some of them for your own teaching.

Bibliography

"The 25 Most Influential People on the Internet." 2008. *Bloomberg Businessweeek*. Accessed June 25, 2010. http://images.businessweek.com/ss/08/09/0929_most_influential/index.htm?chan=technology_best+of+the+web.

Adam, Alison. 2002. "Exploring the Gender Question in Critical Information Systems." *Journal of Information Technology* 17, no. 2: 59-67.

Benkler, Yochai. 2006. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom.* Yale University Press, New Haven.

Carr, Diane. 2005. "Context, Gaming Pleasures and Gendered Preferences." *Simulation and Gaming* 36, no. 4: 464-482.

Casserly, Meghan and Jenna Goudreau. 2010. "Top 100 Websites For Women." *Forbes.com*, June 6. Accessed June 15, 2010. http://www.forbes.com/2010/06/23/100-best-womens-blogs-forbes-woman-time-websites.html.

Crocco, Margaret, Judith Cramer and Ellen Meier. 2008. "(Never) Mind the Gap!: Gender Equity in Social Studies Research on Technology in the Twenty-First Century." *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal* 2, no. 1: 19-36.

"Demographics of Internet Users." 2009. *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. Accessed June 25, 2010. http://pewinternet.org/ Static-Pages/Trend-Data/Whos-Online.aspx.

Dowd, Maureen. 2005. "Dish It Out, Ladies." *New York Times*, March 13. Accessed November 13, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/13/opinion/13dowd.html?_r=2&oref=slogin.

Fallows, Deborah. 2005. "How Women and Men Use the Internet." *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. Accessed June 22, 2010. http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2005/How-Women-and-Men-Use-the-Internet.aspx.

Garfinkel, Simon. 2008. "Wikipedia and the Meaning of Truth." *Technology Review* 111, no. 6: 84-86.

Gee, James and Elizabeth Hayes. *Women and Gaming: The Sims and 21st Century Learning.* New York: Palgrave.

Grainer-Ray, Sheri. 2004. *Gender Inclusive Game Design: Expanding the Market.* Hingham, Massachusetts: Charles Rivera Media.

Gray, Gaby. 2009. “The Interview: Jessica Valenti.” *The Guardian*, May 9. Accessed January 25, 2010. http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/may/10/jessica-valenti-feminist-blogger?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487.

Havenstein, Heather. 2007. “Death Threats Force Blogger to Sidelines.” *Computerworld.* Accessed June 23, 2010. http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9014647/Q_A_Death_Threats_Force_Blogger_to_Sidelines?intsrc=hm_list.

Head, Alison and Michael Eisenberg. 2010. “How Today’s College Students Use Wikipedia for Course-Related Research.” *First Monday* 15, no. 3 (March). Accessed June 20. http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/2830/2476.

Hill, Catherine, Christianne Corbett and Andresse St. Rose. 2010. “Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.” *American Association of University Women*. Accessed June 5. http://www.aauw.org/ learn/research/whysofew.cfm.

Holland, Alison. 2002. “How the Other Half Plays.” *The Age*. Accessed June 5, 2010. http://www.theage.com.au/articles/ 2002/05/25/1022243279705.html.

Lim, Sook and Nahyun Kwon. 2010. “Gender Differences in Information Behavior Concerning Wikipedia, an Unorthodox Information Source?” *Library and Information Science Research* 32, no. 3: 212-220.

Jesella, K. 2008. “Blogging’s Glass Ceiling.” *New York Times*, July 27. Accessed June 14, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/fashion/27blogher.html?_r=1.

Lenhart, Amanda, Kristin Purcell, Aaron Smith and Kathryn Zickuhr. 2010. “Social Media and Mobile Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults.” *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. Accessed June 15. http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Social-Media-and-Young-Adults.aspx.

Maehre, Jeff. 2009. “What It Means to Ban Wikipedia: An Exploration of the Pedagogical Principles at Stake.” *College Teacher* 57, no. 4: 229-236.

Manjoo, Farhad. 2009. “Is Wikipedia a Victim of Its Own Success?” *Time Magazine*, September 28. Accessed June 15, 2010. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1924492-2,00.html.

Mellström, Ulf. 2009. “The Intersection of Gender, Race and Cultural Boundaries, or Why Is Computer Science in Malaysia Dominated by Women?” *Social Studies of Science* 39, no. 6: 885-907.

Nakashima, Ellen. 2007. “Sexual Threats Stifle Some Bloggers.” *The Washington Post*, April 30. Accessed June 20, 2010. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/04/29/AR2007042901555.html.

“Rapleaf Study Reveals Gender and Age Data of Social Network Users.” 2008. *Rapleaf*. Accessed June 25, 2010. http://www.rapleaf.com/business/ press_release/age.

Smith, Aaron. 2009. “The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008.” *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. Accessed June 15, 2010. http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1192/internet-politics-campaign-2008.

Sussman, Matt. 2009. “Who Are the Bloggers? State of the Blogosphere, 2009.” *Technorati*. Accessed June 24, 2010. http://technorati.com/blogging/article/ day-1-who-are-the-bloggers1/.

Sweeney, Tim. 2010. “The Internet Evolution 100.” *Internet Evolution*. Accessed July 27, 2010. http://www.internetevolution.com/document.asp?doc_id=190304.

Sysmos, Inc. 2010. “Inside Blog Demographics.” *Sysmos Company Blog*. Accessed June 28, 2010. http://www.sysomos.com/reports/bloggers/.

Tapia, Andrea and Lynnette Kvasny. May 22-24, 2004. “Recruitment Is Not Enough: Retention of Women and Minorities in the IT Workplace.” Proceedings of the ACM SIGMIS CPR Conference, Tucson, Arizona. Accessed June 10, 2010. http://ist.psu.edu/faculty_pages/ lkvasny/publications.html.

Tam, Mo-Yin and Gilbert Bassett. 2006. “The Gender Gap in Information Technology” in *Removing Barriers: Women in Academic Science, Technology Engingeering and Mathematics*, edited by Jill Bystydzienski and Sharon R. Bird, 108-22. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Taylor, Marisa. 2009. “Women Outnumber Men on Social-Networking.” *Wall Street Journal Blogs*. Accessed June 15, 2010. http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2009/10/07/women-outnumber-men-on-social-networking-sites/.

Thorpe, Vanessa and Richard Rogers. 2011. “Women Bloggers Call for a Stop to ‘Hateful’ Trolling by Misogynist Men.” *The Guardian*, November 5. Accessed November 8, 2011. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/05/women-bloggers-hateful-trolling?newsfeed=true.

Traister, Rebecca. 2008. “A Blogosphere of Their Own.” *Salon.com*, July 30. Accessed June 20, 2010. http://www.salon.com/life/broadsheet/2008/07/30/blogher_convention.

Turkle, Sherry. 1997. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Wagner, Mitch. 2007. “Death Threats Force Designer to Cancel ETech Conference.” *InformationWeek.* Accessed June 20, 2010. http://www.informationweek.com/blog/main/archives/2007/03/death_threats_f.html.

Walton, Marsha. 2009. “IT Jobs Offer Growth, but Women Are Bailing Out.” *Women’s eNews*. Accessed June 24, 2010. http://www.womensenews.org/story/women-in-science/100623/it-jobs-offer-growth-women-are-bailing-out.

Wright, M. 2009. “Women and Social Media. BlogHer, iVillage and Compass Partners.” Accessed June 15, 2010. http://www.blogher.com/files/2009_Compass_BlogHer_Social_Media_Study_042709_FINAL.pdf.

WIDENING THE SCOPE OF THE TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM: TECHNOLOGY AND FEMINIST PEDAGOGY

CHAPTER ONE

FEMINIST WORLDING: MEDIA ECOLOGIES LEARNING

KATIE KING, JARAH MOESCH,
AND THE STUDENTS OF SHARE IT!, A WOMEN'S STUDIES SENIOR SEMINAR, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

In the middle of the room sat a large cardboard box overflowing with surge protectors and extension cords, thoughtfully brought by one student to share with the rest of us. Laptops everywhere, a large projection screen on the wall, people flowing in and out of this feminist cyberspace created by our students at the Theorizing the Web *conference. Ah ha! For the first time students got to feel out what the "People" part of the prototyping process really meant: actual people to talk to, actual people to offer comments and get excited, actual people to take the ideas on…Process, process, process. This is what worlding means: activating spaces, activist intentions, worlds everywhere.*[1] *More and more is networked among activisms, even in this particularly disciplinary place.*

Katie: This year the senior seminar needed both of us. Jarah Moesch, a professional technologist and multi-modal artist, and me, Katie King, a scholar of, among other things, feminist technoscience. Together we are prototyping a new sort of course, something the university wants to call "scholarship and practice." Well, neither term is that easy to separate. In fact, mixing them unexpectedly is what we wanted to do.[2]

Like our class, this essay is also a collaboration, one with Jarah, Katie, the students of *Share It!*, using a range of social media tools, all engaged together across time and media but also peopled face to face, spoken in real time, distributed among internets, but also located in real space.[3] It proceeds in sections; *gamestorming, social media learning, worn tools, storytelling and prototyping*, and it ends with *learning to be affected:*

feminist worlding. It is interspersed with the cards our students wrote out on the last day of class to share with you, our readers. – And so, we begin.

Figure 1. Share It! Senior seminar presentation at the University of Maryland

Gamestorming

Jarah: When Katie calls me a professional technologist, that points more to the "technology" part of what I do – web development, time-based media (video, audio, performance), using and manipulating softwares – but for me the technology never stands alone. Ideas, structures, and technologies are always entangled: complicit and intrinsic to each other, a complex web of theories, histories, practices and power. They only appear separate.

I want my students to know this, to experiment, to play in a complex, thoughtful, and curious process. To this end, students in my classes spend time creating their own theoretical practice, beginning with what I affectionately call *gamestorming* – a cross between game design strategies, performance, play and brainstorming. I am a big fan of construction paper, markers, and glue. Paper gives us more ability to play; it is easier to use, to

cross-off, add-on, crumple up, throw away, cut and paste, move around than the digital. It feels less permanent.

To get started this semester, we held an "activist-possibilities" card-sorting session (inspired by Mary Flanagan's *Grow A Game* cards).[4] The idea was to think through how ideas, values, and actions can come together in unexpected ways – to rely on each other for ideas, to cooperate, share, and trust within a system of feminist values and social media.

A last-day topic card:

> CARD SORTING VALUES, from the *UMD Now* group:[5]
> Tara Fischer, Charissa Powell, Angie Nedd
>
> Card sorting is a great tool to encourage critical thinking, because with each switch of a card, you can form new views on the same idea, or you can go off into a different direction and come up with something new. There are endless possibilities.

Students were asked to identify a social issue they were concerned with, perhaps had done work for, or were passionate about. They each wrote their "issue" on a blank notecard. They then broke up into smaller groups and were given two decks of cards. Deck #1 included goals-based words, and deck #2 was action-based. Each group worked as a brainstorming team for each of their "issue" cards. They placed an issue card down then selected a "goals" card. They then brainstormed based on this mash-up of issue and goal. Ideas could be realistic, far-fetched, even fantastical. Then, they added a card from the "actions" deck and continued to brainstorm based on these added possibilities.

This way of entering into media making considers every action, every system, every space, as structurally embedded with beliefs and values that manifest themselves in very material ways, from a public city park to the spaces of the Internet. The same applies to uncritically using technologies to share content, learning, and teaching. By divorcing theory from practice, the classroom from the world, content from technology, students lose a huge learning opportunity, especially when it comes to feminist approaches to the world.

To communicate ideas or to create meaningful action, a media-maker must consider not only the content, but the form of the media, because interactions, the actions taken with the technology, must also create the very system that is being navigated and explored. In other words, media making enters into and incorporates digital architectures.

Mary Flanagan (2009) describes this process in relation to play:

> *Critical Play* is built on the premise that, as with other media, games carry beliefs within their representation systems and mechanics. Artists using games as a *medium of expression*, then, manipulate elements common to games—representation systems and styles, rules of progress, codes of conduct, context of reception, winning and losing paradigms, ways of interacting in a game—for they are the material properties of games, much like marble and chisel or pen and ink bring with them their own intended possibilities, limitation, and conventions. (4)

What if students began to understand activism itself as a tool? Technology as methodology? What if intersectional feminisms were activated through creation and use of media?

If we think about students using activism as a "medium of expression" and then "manipulate" traditional activisms, such as community organizing, fundraising, lobbying, protesting, through the creation and jamming of multiple forms of media, we begin to get at a framework for gamestorming theoretical practices.

What if students began thinking, learning, teaching, and doing the technology itself in relation to the content? What if students explore, question, think about, and propose structural change based on the feminisms they have been learning about?

The purpose of gamestorming is to move beyond the norms inherent in activism and in social media and to begin thinking about other possibilities for social change. Some of the ideas generated could then be experimented with by morphing existing digital media, creating new methodologies for transmedia and transdisciplinary work.

A last day topic card:

> PROTOTYPING, from the *Idea2Action* group:
> Rachel Westbrook-Fritts, Carmen Atlee Loudon, Emily Hooper, Renee Leone
>
> This class has been an excellent opportunity for us, as students, to experiment with prototyping in many senses. Not only is this class a prototype itself, but our project has also served as a crucial prototype, serving as a launching pad for future work and possibilities. In exploring US UNCUT, and documenting how an idea can be put into action and turn into a full-scale grassroots movement, we can use this prototype to not only further the movement, but also to create our own.

Social Media Learning

Katie: I was off to Sweden one week toward the last part of the course, just after spring break and just before we were scheduled to offer a workshop at the UMD *Theorizing the Web* conference.[6] Invited to help brainstorm the possibilities involved in an online distance learning gender studies curriculum, I was excited to meet with Swedish feminist tech folks, game developers, science studies grad students, feminist theorists, and British eLearning specialists. What I offered there came out of and returned back into the *Share It!* course:

> Whatever might be hopeful, innovative, exciting about offering a BA and MA in Gender Studies as a distance learning project comes in a necessarily altering infrastructure for gender studies, a very mixed bag of the commercial, of restructuring, and of the social ecological. These are what social media use to network today.
>
> I see Social Media in 2011 as FIRST an exercise in learning itself. Social media have a lot to teach us and our students about what learning is and even in five years those lessons will be of use. SECOND, social media are right now the very transmedia platforms and interfaces for all kinds of learning, formal and informal. We need to use them as such and to validate the kinds of learning that they foster, even as we also teach students now and later about their implication in systems of power. THIRD: social media are actually elements in larger ecologies which themselves "learn."
>
> Using social media for learning and directing analysis to social media at the same time are ways of understanding more clearly the many systems within which they are embedded and the forms of agency involved. These are not simply either human or technological, but rather call into question simple nature culture divisions, or human instrumentalisms, or agencies understood as forms of control and prediction.
>
> Emergence and self-organization are forms of connection that we all need to encounter and understand more carefully. They characterize the global financial systems mediated among media, some of the natural ecologies of which media are now actually elements in dynamic interaction, neurological rewards and attentions entertainment and educational media elicit, as well as operate more and more obviously as mechanisms of global social change. Social media are agencies in these in a range of striking forms today with implications for politics, ethics, and living.
>
> Just about every element of distance learning quite properly puts into perspective and could be used to make visible the very conditions of contemporary learning, how what we know about it is changing, and how it is interactive among knowledge ecologies in discontinuous layers, accretions and assemblages. Not all distance education is online or computer mediated. Not all distance education is never face to face. Not all

> distance education is isolating or even individual. The value of distance education is paradoxically social, in that it rearranges who is where, with who else, and through what means.
>
> Social media learning puts all that right up front. And despite the ways we may conceptualize social media, its ecologies are continuous with our many worlds, not something exclusively technological or even wholly media-driven. That these ecologies will change over the next five years is given. That gender studies will change over the next five years ought to be as given, as clearly dynamic and contingent.
>
> Social media learning is thus a properly altering infrastructure for gender studies, whether for this very program or for any gender studies located anywhere today. One in which learning is the condition of both students and teachers in conditions emergent and self-organizing as global academic restructuring continues or is challenged or is altered. (*Social Media Learning: A Necessarily Altering Infrastructure for Gender Studies*)

Jarah: In my classrooms, students play, experiment, and reach out in areas they may not normally dabble in, to think, and when they want, to create. I encourage them to go beyond their comfort zone because although they may know how to use particular technologies, such as texting, social networking sites, or word processing, they also have areas of fear that prevent them from experimenting with what they think they know.

First, students come to the class with definitive attitudes about "technology" and the "Internet" – from fear around issues of privacy and safety, to believing that technology is objective and available to all, if only everyone can learn how to technically use it.

Second, although they may participate in social networking, most have never built web technologies or websites on their own. Part of this is due to the plug-n-play nature of our current web, internet, app culture, and part is due to the commodification of the Internet, all that purchasing, streaming, posting, and communicating across the walled gardens we use today.

Third, many students have never thought about how the technologies (hardware, such as the computer itself) and softwares (websites, forms, etc.) are created and deployed or what it means to participate with and through pre-determined systems of code and form. For many students, "it just works" – like turning on a faucet. Computers, phones, softwares are just accepted as is, not thought about socio-historically.

This really begins to get at my and Katie's hesitation to use the term "digital native." It is a far-too-simple term even to describe that particular age group which was born into a world filled with technology, and having

grown up with it, purportedly has an easier time comprehending it and using it.

We still have to encourage them and ourselves to think critically about and to de-naturalize all our experience, teaching students to create research questions of their own which then enable them to learn, explore, and share through their own critical thinking process. To get them there, we provide a workshop atmosphere, with small working groups, and an open framework to encourage thinking.

How do you create this framework? Shift students from consumer and "sharer" to (the mindset of) system creator. Get them thinking about how an application, software, or technology is made, its purpose, and how the underlying systems and infrastructures work. Start with the search engine.

But you cannot expect a student to re-think a search engine when they come to it thinking that it is simply an objective place to search for information. They first need to understand it as a producer of specialized information, based on particular data-sets, handled by both people and algorithms, resulting in a much-manipulated stream of information. To this end, *I had our students perform as a search engine.*

We began by thinking about our own individual digital footprints. What technologies do you own and use? What online services do you use regularly? Where are you on the Internet? What happens when you use a search engine to look for yourself? Are you surprised by the results? What do these results say about you as a person? Does it describe your identity(ies)? Are there items missing? How might the missing information change how people who do not know you understand you?

Some students had written for their high-school newspapers, and these were still available. Others interned, volunteered, or worked for non-profits, so their names were affiliated with particular organizations working on singular issues. A couple were mentioned in family member obituaries. Interestingly, many students were not readily accessible via search – either because they had "locked down" their information in Facebook or did not use social networking at all, or they had a very common name or shared a name with someone more famous than themselves, so they did not appear on the first few pages.

After learning what information was publicly available about their names, they broke up into groups, with one person playing the search engine, and the others, the searchers. The searchers entered the name of the person "playing" the search engine, along with keywords to gain potential information, and the "search engine" responded with the information that they knew was actually available online. This meant for example that one student who shares a name with a semi-popular porn star