

## ISSUE NO. 8

## Introduction: Gender, Globalization and the Digital

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In the nearly two years since this special issue, “Gender, Globalization, and the Digital,” was first proposed, the state of gender in digital spaces around the world has only grown more dismal. On social media, as the Gamergate controversy that began in 2014 has shown, those who advocate for feminist approaches to technology often become targets of a technoculture that enables harassment, doxing, and threats of violence (Massanari 2015). In online publications, over the past two years, efforts of intersectional feminists to push back against oppression have been increasingly vilified and conscribed as “toxic” (Risam 2015b). Echoes of these issues appear within the academy as well. During the Digital Humanities 2015 conference in Sydney, Australia, digital humanities scholars took to Twitter to ask #wherearethewomen in response to an all-male plenary panel that opened the conference (Verhoeven 2015). As these examples suggest, the impulse behind this issue – emerging debates around gender and the global scope of the digital humanities – remains urgent. “Gender, Globalization, and the Digital” responds to the pressing need to expand the purview of digital humanities scholarship to explore gender through intersectional lenses that include sexuality, race, class, and national context. The articles in this issue together offer a broad vision for the forms of analysis that digital humanities makes possible.

While the definition of digital humanities has been subject to great debate as the field has grown, “Gender, Globalization, and the Digital” typifies expansive, “big tent” definitions. Kathleen Fitzpatrick offers a capacious definition for the practices that comprise digital humanities:

*For me it has to do with the work that gets done at the crossroads of digital media and traditional humanistic study. And that happens in two different ways. On the one hand, it's bringing the tools and techniques of digital media to bear on traditional humanistic questions. But it's also bringing humanistic modes of inquiry to bear on digital media. It's a sort of moving back and forth across those lines, thinking about what computing is, how it functions in our culture, and then using those computing technologies to think about the more traditional aspects of culture. (Fitzpatrick 2015)*

Her broad definition encompasses not only the field of humanities computing with which digital humanities is often associated but also rhetoric and composition, new

media studies, and science and technology studies, among others. As Tara McPherson has noted, humanities computing and media studies share parallel trajectories:

*Through the decades this humanities computing work has been quietly building momentum; the scholarly fields of media studies, visual studies, and digital studies have exploded, producing valuable insights into the epistemological, phenomenological, ethical, and cultural dimensions of the visually intense and media-rich worlds we inhabit. (McPherson 2009, 119-120)*

She proposes that a variant of digital humanities produces the “multimodal humanist,” a scholar who “brings together databases, scholarly tools, networked writing, and peer-to-peer commentary while also leveraging the potential of visual and aural media that so dominate contemporary life” (McPherson 2009, 120). “Gender, Globalization, and the Digital” exemplifies the potential of this mode of digital humanities scholarship, both in its content as well as its form. The decision to publish the issue with *Ada* was based primarily on its commitment to community peer review practices, open access, and new models of feminist scholarship.

Accordingly, this issue is situated in emerging conversations about feminist praxis in the digital humanities. Its expansive approach to digital humanities reflects Bethany Nowviskie’s appeal for attention to both capacity and care in the humanities. She defines “capacious humanities” as “one that understands its history and possible futures broadly, and that has *organized itself* to work effectively, simultaneously, and in deep empathy and interconnection with other fields and disciplines, across multiple, varied scales” (Nowviskie 2015, original emphasis). Nowviskie suggests that the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from the social to the environmental, are best served by such an approach. She grounds a capacious humanities in a feminist ethics of care and argues, “Care ethics...seeks to illuminate the relationships of small things to each other within great systems” (Nowviskie 2015). For Nowviskie, these are connections that include data, large and small, objects, and the “the networks of interrelation that create it and in which it participates” (Nowviskie 2015). Motivated by the goal of illuminating such connections, this issue approaches the relationship between gender, globalization and the digital, shedding light on the range of investigations possible at their intersections.

Within digital humanities scholarship, feminist approaches have been identified as an important growth area. Jacqueline Wernimont and Katherine D. Harris have noted a strange disconnect between digital humanities and feminist engagement:

*Several of the major DH [digital humanities] projects that are now at the forefront of the field had feminist imperatives at the outset (for example: Women Writers Project, the Orlando Project, and the Dickinson Archive), but it does not seem to us that there has been a sustained inquiry into the evolving relationships between feminist theory and DH work. (Wernimont 2015)*

The “Feminisms in Digital Humanities” special issue of *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, edited by Wernimont, provides an opening salvo for a conversation about why feminism is significant to digital humanities, and this issue continues this conversation, extending the call for intersectional approaches specifically.

McPherson makes perhaps the best case for why intersectional feminist approaches to digital humanities are critical to the academy at this juncture. She argues:

*We [universities] need new practices and new modes of collaboration; we need to be literate in emerging scientific and technological methodologies but also in theories of race, globalization, and gender... We need to privilege systemic modes of thinking that can understand relation and honor complexity, even while valuing precision and specificity. (McPherson 2012, 154)*

As Moya Bailey suggests, intersectionality challenges the “add and stir” approach to diversity – simply adding more “diverse” voices (Bailey 2011). She notes, “This identity based mixing does little to address the structural parameters that are set up when a homogenous group has been at the center and doesn’t automatically engender understanding across forms of difference” (Bailey 2011). I have argued that intersectional feminism offers an important lens for digital humanities because it resists binary thinking and complicates analysis while foregrounding difference (Risam 2015a). Intersectionality, as a mode of relation, challenges the dichotomies that have characterized debates within the digital humanities, whether tensions between making and theorizing or binary approaches to identity (male and female, black and white, the West and the rest). I have offered a model for interpreting digital humanities through the lens of intersectionality, focusing on surface-level dimensions of projects – tagging schemes, critical apparatuses, and data coding – while making the case that further deep analysis is needed (Risam 2015a).

The scope of methods engaged within this issue reflects the possibilities for such analysis as they blend digital tools, objects, and methods with humanistic approaches rooted in a variety of fields. Liz Lane’s “Feminist Rhetoric in the Digital Sphere: Digital Interventions and the Subversion of Gendered Cultural Scripts” offers a feminist

reading of classical rhetoric, identifying patriarchal codes that shape public speech in digital contexts. Bringing together rhetoric and new media, she explores feminist rhetorical subversions enacted online. She argues that Twitter hashtags and feminist grassroots organizing provide alternative modes of feminist rhetoric in online discourse and digital writing. In “Digi-Blogging Gender Violence: Intersecting Ethnicity, Race, Migration, and Globalization in South Asian Community Blogs Against IPV,” Ishani Mukherjee blends new media, digital writing, and intersectional feminist analysis to examine intimate partner violence (IPV) in the South Asian diaspora in the United States. Mukherjee makes the case that IPV must be understood in a diasporic cultural context and positions blogging as an intervention in ethnic minority community silence around it. As such, her article exemplifies the activist impulse of intersectional feminist approaches to the digital humanities by exposing the gendered, ethnic, and racial power dynamics that shape how voices are unheard and unrepresented in the digital milieu.

Addressing this question of voice, essays by Kristin Allukian and Mauro Carassai and Christine Masters demonstrate the centrality of intersectional approaches to digital literary studies. In “Rule-guided Expression: Gender Dissent across Mediated Literary Works,” Allukian and Carassai consider rule-based cultural and thematic battles engaged by Anglophone women writers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Drawing on Alexander Galloway’s model of digitality and John Cayley’s work on media affordances, they identify new patterns of expression enacted by women in relation to the question of labor. Moreover, they argue that these patterns offer promising ground for further examination of gender-based forms of literary expression. Christine Masters’ essay “Women’s Ways of Structuring Data” addresses the visibility of women’s roles in the creation of infrastructures, whether cultural, political, social, economic, or technological. She examines feminist databasing through a case study of the *Orlando Project*, developed by Susan Brown, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements. *Orlando*, which celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015, is a watershed project for feminist recovery in digital humanities in general and in digital literary studies in particular. Through deep analysis of database structures behind *Orlando*, Masters makes the case that feminist data structuring based in reflection, articulation, and collaboration could address not only gendered but also global and racial marginalization in data structure.

Taking up feminist inquiry through affect and media, Crystal Abidin and Nishant Shah’s essays consider the role of connections forged and foreclosed by social media. Abidin’s article, “Communicative ♥ Intimacies: Influencers and Perceived Interconnectedness,”

reflects on ethnographic research data on social media influencers in Singapore. She argues that these influencers cultivate a sense of communicative intimacy between themselves and their audiences – a perception of interconnectedness. The attraction between follower and influencer, Abidin argues, lies in the construction of intimacy in digital and physical spaces. Nishant Shah's essay, "Thrice Invisible in its Visibility: Queerness and User Generated 'Kand' Videos" takes up affect in social media through the lens of queer visibility. Shah begins by situating forms of queer male Indian visibility enabled by the internet. He argues, however, for the need to examine how user generated queer videos both digitally and structurally produce invisibility. These videos, Shah suggests, deprive the queer body of affect and operate through a logic of containment that circumscribes the political potential for queer bodies in India.

Rodrigo Kazuo and Zachary Viet Pine's photo essay, "CultureNotFoundException," concludes the issue on a fitting note, visualizing the interpretive processes that motivate the digital humanities: the mixing of computational and digital media with humanities methods. Through this work, they render legible the forms of analysis that intersectional feminist approaches make possible. Kazuo and Pine describe their training in computer science, noting its failure to account for embodied user experience or the racial, gendered, classed, national, or sexual politics behind software. Their photo essay writes back to this absence, demanding a new vision of technology that makes visible the intersecting systems of oppression and dimensions of human experience behind it. Indeed, this essay, in its blend of visual and alphabetic modes, ends the issue on a note of optimism, demonstrating that McPherson's vision of digital humanities as multimodal humanism is, in fact, realizable and facilitates an intersectional approach to digital humanities.

Through the broad range of methods and tactics engaged in these articles, this special issue exemplifies the possibilities for a digital humanities that drills down into the material dimensions of the digital while embracing the interpretive affordances of intersectionality. The issue further answers calls from scholars who address digital gender through intersectional approaches to theorize the digital not as a passive space but one that actively constructs gender, race, class, sexuality, and other axes of identity (Arvidsson and Foka 2015). In doing so, "Gender, Globalization, and the Digital," the first special issue to outline the contours of intersectional feminism within digital humanities, intends not to define but to initiate a dialogue about the range of analyses such an approach makes possible.

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## ONE THOUGHT ON “INTRODUCTION: GENDER, GLOBALIZATION AND THE DIGITAL”

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