Designing for the Perils of Public Voice in the Age of Social Media

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Our mission is to explore new ways to leverage social media, open data, and collective action technologies toward a smarter, better society.
NETWORKED PUBLICS AS THIRD PLACES

Networked Publics:
- Social media, community technologies, big social data, Wikipedia, learning networks

Third Places:
- Public places away from home and work
- Gathering places for conversation
- Essential for the emergence of communities and collective action
The mere act of participating in public discourse online is a form of civic engagement.

IMPORTANT OF HAVING A VOICE IN PUBLIC NETWORKS

Use of public networks and media sharing correlated with civic engagement, *not* use of personal networks.
NOT ALL VOICES EQUALLY REPRESENTED IN PUBLIC SPHERES ONLINE

Wikipedia editors are predominantly male

Distribution of Protected Accounts by Gender on Twitter

Source: www.beevolve.com
On May 24, 2014, Elliot Rodger went on a premeditated killing spree, killing 7 people including himself.
"You girls have never been attracted to me, I don’t know why you girls aren’t attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it. It’s an injustice...

On the day of retribution, I am going to enter the hottest sorority house of UCSB and I will slaughter every single spoiled, stuck-up blond slut I see inside there."

http://mashable.com/2014/05/26/yesallwomen-hashtag/
Within a couple of days, 1.2 million Tweets were posted by women sharing their stories of fear, harassment, and sexual assault under the hashtag #YesAllWomen

[Graph showing tweets per hour with a peak on 05/25 1pm and #YesAllWomen (estimated): 61500]
For many women, “#YesAllWomen” provided an empowering experience, giving voice to shared experiences that need to be addressed.
Yet, it was interspersed with many antifeminist and threatening posts.
Within days, the woman who created the original #YesAllWomen hashtag received so many threats she had to change her account to private.

She was silenced.
In one week of Tweets Anita received: 157 abusive tweets, 15 were death threats and 13 threatened rape. A further 31 were explicitly violent in nature.

http://www.vocativ.com/culture/society/anita-sarkeesian-threats/

Many are silenced.

Anita Sarkeesian cancels Utah State speech after mass-shooting threat

October 2014
A gay substitute teacher in Charlotte, N.C., has been fired from his job at a Catholic high school after posting on Facebook about his plans to marry his longtime partner.

Lonnie Billiard taught theater and English at Charlotte Catholic High School for more than a decade. After retiring in 2012, he has remained part of the community as a substitute teacher.

Those ties ended, however, after Billiard revealed his plans to marry Rich Donham, his partner of 12 years. On Dec. 30, Billiard said he received a call from the school’s assistant principal saying he was no longer welcome to be a substitute teacher.
She Tweeted Against the Mexican Cartels. They Tweeted Her Murder
How can we design third place technologies to help assure the benefits of having a public voice online are experienced without harm by all?
Addressing Online “Hostile Environments”

- A hostile work environment is a form of harassment.

- Online public networks may also be hostile environments, characterized by the cumulative effect of conduct in social media so severe and pervasive it interferes with a citizen’s ability to engage in public discourse.

- Social media systems seeking to foster a culture of civic discourse should enact a zero tolerance policy.
Tools for Segmented Identity

**PRIVACY**

http://www.flickr.com/photos/trekkyandy/168510246/

**BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT**

http://www.flickr.com/photos/billjacobs1/125510752/sizes/m/in/photostream/
Tools for Pseudonymity

- An identity separate from the “real” you, so that participation in public discourse online cannot lead to personal harm.

- Yet, a persistent identity that may develop its own reputation over time, to increase accountability.
- Social policy fostering a culture of respect
- Legal adaptation balancing free speech and principle of no harm
- Socio-technical system design to mitigate real threats to well-being