

---

## Public Scholarship and CSCW: Trials and Twitterations

**Sarah A. Gilbert**  
sagilber@umd.edu  
University of Maryland College Park

**Lindsay Blackwell**  
lblackw@fb.com  
Facebook

**Michaelanne Dye**  
mmt@umich.edu  
University of Michigan

**Kishonna L. Gray**  
kishonnagray@gmail.com  
University of Illinois at Chicago

**C. Estelle Smith**  
smit3694@umn.edu  
University of Minnesota

**Casey Fiesler**  
Casey.Fiesler@colorado.edu  
University of Colorado Boulder

**Michael Ann DeVito**  
devitom@u.northwestern.edu  
Northwestern University

**Shamika Goddard**  
shamika.goddard@colorado.edu  
University of Colorado Boulder

**David Nemer**  
nemer@virginia.edu  
University of Virginia

---

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for components of this work owned by others than ACM must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee. Request permissions from [permissions@acm.org](mailto:permissions@acm.org).

*CSCW '20 Companion, October 17–21, 2020, Virtual Event, USA*

© 2020 Association for Computing Machinery.

ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-8059-1/20/10...\$15.00

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3406865.3418589>

### ABSTRACT

From tweeting, to blogging, to engagement with the media, scholars in CSCW engage in a variety of forms of public scholarship. Public scholarship can result in positive outcomes, such as community engagement, accessible research, and self-promotion. Further, public scholarship can support ethical research as a way to (1) reconnect with participants after data collection; and (2) increase the societal benefit of the research. However, despite these benefits there are also challenges and risks associated with engaging in public scholarship, particularly for early career researchers and those who are marginalized. This workshop will bring together those who already engage or are interested in this practice to discuss how to integrate public scholarship in our work, identify best practices for this type of work in the context of CSCW, including the ethical implications of outreach, and develop strategies to effectively support those most affected by the potential risks.

### CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → *Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing; Social content sharing; Computer supported cooperative work*; • **Social and professional topics** → *Professional topics; Professional topics; Professional topics*.

### KEYWORDS

public scholarship, ethics, academic labour

### ACM Reference Format:

Sarah A. Gilbert, Casey Fiesler, Lindsay Blackwell, Michael Ann DeVito, Michaelanne Dye, Shamika Goddard, Kishonna L. Gray, David Nemer, and C. Estelle Smith. 2020. Public Scholarship and CSCW: Trials and Twitterations. In *Companion Publication of the 2020 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (CSCW '20 Companion)*, October 17–21, 2020, Virtual Event, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 10 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3406865.3418589>

### WORKSHOP THEME

Public scholarship includes a variety of activities through which those engaged in research create, disseminate, and discuss their work with the wider public. Popular forms include: (1) sharing research on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit; (2) discussing research in public where it can be seen by a broad audience, or with the public, by answering questions and responding to comments; (3) engaging with the media through interviews; (4) knowledge translation efforts such as blogging and writing articles and op-eds for popular press or news media venues; and (5) finding creative ways to share research results directly with researched communities. Engaging in public scholarship can have an array of benefits for researchers, many of which are career-oriented, such as having results seen, read, and cited. For example, tweeting published papers using academic

hashtags can increase citations [19], blogging can make findings more accessible and citeable to busy colleagues [10], and social media use generally assists with networking, information sharing, and keeping up-to-date with new information [26]. Further, public scholarship builds important research career skills, such as writing for and justifying research to a broad audience [10].

### **Public scholarship to support ethical research**

Beyond benefits for researchers, public scholarship can also benefit the public directly. Recent findings from Pew have shown that Americans trust practitioners more than researchers and that scientists lack accountability and transparency [12]. Public scholarship can provide the public with insights into the scientific process by demonstrating *how* research is conducted [14] and may help build trusting relationships between researchers and the public through added transparency [15].

Public scholarship also provides a way for research participants to be more involved in the research process. In fields such as medicine, disability rights movements and patient advocates have demanded participant inclusion in research (e.g., [3]). Public scholarship offers a way to build on existing participant-centered methodologies in social computing research, such as action research [16] and participatory design [18]. While these methods include participants in the initial phases of research, such as planning and data collection, public scholarship can include them in dissemination, further reducing power differentials between researchers, who often hold positions of privilege relative to their participants, by providing participants with additional insight and control over how they are represented. Further, disseminating results using formats and paradigms used by participants themselves can provide an "ethical space" for researchers and participants to meet and where dialogues can occur [8]. For example, researchers can communicate results directly back to participants using research memes and zines [5], Reddit posts [9, 13], YouTube research videos [28], and impact seminars [27]<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, public scholarship increases the overall benefits of research by opening up knowledge to more people. In fact, there have long been calls for public scholarship as part of the core mission of universities, particularly those that are publicly funded, as a way of facilitating knowledge discovery, learning, and civic action [23]. Publishing in open access venues, for example, drastically increases the odds that a piece of research will contribute to a Wikipedia article [29]; imagine the additional knowledge reach of research coverage in the popular press. On a more individual scale, a large percentage of Twitter users would want to read the resulting scholarship that came from using their tweets [11]. In big data research, which may use data from millions of "participants," an effective way of communicating results may be public scholarship with a broad reach.

<sup>1</sup>Small public gatherings facilitated by researchers and paid for with research funds to engage with relevant stakeholders, policy makers, and members of the media

### Challenges associated with public scholarship

Public scholarship benefits both researchers and communities; however, there are also associated challenges and risks. While public scholarship supports ethical research, if not done with care it can also risk harming communities. For example, public scholarship may not be appropriate when working with communities where publicity would violate expected privacy norms [7, 22, 25], where sharing results could cause distress to participants, or in cases where the amplification of certain topics could risk broader societal harm through publicizing and normalizing antisocial groups or behaviours [1, 24]. Engaging with the media also involves risks of miscommunication of the work [27, 31] due to researchers' inexperience or a lack of preparedness for media engagement, time constraints, difficulty producing high quality multimedia, and differing incentives and workflows between researchers and media workers [28].

Further, just as power differentials must be considered when scholars are in positions of power, uneven power differentials pose particular challenges for those who are, or wish to engage in, public scholarship, such as power differentials within the academy, and between researchers and the public. Within the academy, current hiring, tenure, and promotion models do not directly reward public scholarship. As a form of intellectual labour, engaging in public scholarship may be more difficult for early career researchers who would need to balance engaging in public scholarship with efforts that *are* formally recognized, and may need to justify their public scholarship efforts to superiors—an activity that is, in itself, an additional form of academic labour. Other common barriers to public scholarship include heavy workloads, hesitancy over being misunderstood, perception of a lack of requisite skills, and fear of distraction [26], which can discourage both early career and established academics from engaging in public scholarship.

Researching particular topics and groups may also place researchers at risk. For example, Massanari [21] discusses how the far right gaze takes advantage of the visibility of scholars to surveil and silence researchers through harassment and abuse. Social media scholars, who are expected to engage on the platforms they research, as well as those whose work addresses issues of social justice, are increasingly at risk of being targets of harassment. However, experiencing harassment and abuse in response to public scholarship is not limited to those who study particular topics (for example, scholars have written about these risks in geography [32] and journalism [2]). Harassment and abuse as a result of public scholarship is also disproportionately experienced by researchers who belong to marginalized or vulnerable populations [1, 20, 21, 30]. Experiencing harassment and abuse as a result of public scholarship can result in some researchers pulling away from engaging public scholarship [30].

There are also social, legal, and physical risks to scholars engaging in public scholarship. For example, Dye has had to be judicious in the way she frames her research in public scholarship and the amount

of visibility she receives because, in addition to potentially putting participants at risk, it may impact her ability to return to her fieldsite or have legal repercussions [6].

If people refrain from engaging in public scholarship because of their identity, because of their junior status, because the topics they study place them at greater risk, or for the greater good, then the individual and career benefits of public scholarship are not evenly distributed. Further, the obstacles of engaging with public scholarship also minimize and obscure the experiences and perspectives of these scholars as well as the experiences of the communities that they are working with and learning from, perspectives that are critical for challenging dominant narratives and oppressive power structures.

### **WORKSHOP GOALS**

The goals of this workshop are twofold: first, it will help participants learn how to do public scholarship well (and why they should do it) by identifying and discussing successful engagements in public scholarship and examples where public scholarship may be less successful and why. For example, some public scholarship may not reach the intended audience, as shown by [4], which found that academics with few followers do not actually access the public through Twitter as their followers are majority other academics. Second, it will help participants overcome barriers and risks of engaging in public scholarship by discussing how we can support early career researchers, those are abused and harassed for their public work, and those who would like to engage in public scholarship but refrain from doing so out of fear of these risks.

In addition to these short term goals, we also intend for the workshop to support the development of two long term goals. The first is to use insights from the workshop to build on existing resources on public scholarship for scholars, such as Smith et al's [27] strategies for effective dissemination, Fiesler's [10] advice on effective blogging, and Marwick et al's [20] resources for coping with harassment and managing security risks through the publication of a widely accessible white paper. The second is to use connections made through the workshop to engage in community building, which can provide a powerful tool for knowledge sharing and support [17, 21].

### **WORKSHOP LOGISTICS**

This will be a one-day workshop conducted primarily via online platforms such as Zoom, Slack, and Padlet.

#### **Participant Recruitment**

We aim to have a maximum of 30 participants in order to ensure ample facilitator coverage and opportunities to participate, crucial concerns in an online format. As this workshop appeals broadly to many of the disciplines and domains represented at CSCW, we will advertise our workshop broadly via related social media channels (institutional social media presences, CSCW Meta, Researchers of

the Sociotechnical, Twitter via the #cscw2020 hashtag, etc), listserv postings, and communication through the organizers' personal networks. In selecting attendees, we ensure a mix of experience levels with public scholarship, and pay special attention to the inclusion of participants from under represented communities who face heightened risk when engaging in public scholarship. We will also aim to recruit industry, policy, and media partners with relevant experience, who may be able to provide important non-academic insights.

Applications to the workshop will be accepted via a simple online form with short-answer questions. We will ask participants to briefly describe their prior experiences (both positive and negative) with public scholarship, tell us about a time public scholarship could have been a benefit to their work, and identify key audiences they would like to reach and related challenges.

### Activities

To support the workshop's goals in an online format, we will engage in pre-workshop activities as well as varied activities during the synchronous workshop day.

*Pre-Workshop Activities.* In the two weeks before the workshop day, we will engage all participants via Padlet and Slack. Padlet will be used for idea generation in order to decide on key discussion topics for our later discussion groups. We will also create a Slack which will host formal introductions and preliminary discussions on the topics selected via the Padlet.

*Day-Of Activities.* As full details on how workshops will be structured in terms of time have not yet been released, our day-of plan is based on a standard CSCW workshop day. However, we are prepared to adjust as needed, and have attempted to make our schedule as modular as possible. Building on the discussion on the Padlet and the Slack, we will engage the group in the following set of activities:

- **(9:00 - 9:30) Introduction and Grounding:** Brief refresher introductions of the organizers, all participants, and the goals of the workshop
- **(9:30 - 10:15) Keynote and Moderated Discussion: Dr. Kishonna L. Gray.** Chat will be moderated by an organizer acting as stack holder.
- **(10:15-10:45) Coffee break/Optional Structured Social Time 1:** We will engage in an equivalent structured social activity which uses the group structure from the previous activity to create new connections between participants.
- **(10:45- 12:00) Small Group Discussion on Successes and Failures in Public Scholarship:** Based on the prior asynchronous discussion, we will break the workshop into five discussion groups, each of which will have a specifically appointed moderator and a specifically appointed stack holder in order to enable broad participation. Groups will work to find commonalities

and guidance in past experience, and group moderators will report out to the whole workshop afterwards.

- **(12:00- 1:00) Lunch Break/Structured Social Time 2:** In place of a workshop lunch, we will hold an optional mid-day social activity, recognizing that many participants will likely need an offscreen break at this point.
- **(1:00 - 2:30) Small Group Discussion on Risks and Mitigation:** Using a similar structure to the first small group discussions, groups will share, compare, and synthesize their experiences and concerns about the risks of public scholarship. Moderators and stack holders will take special care to center the voices of marginalized and otherwise at-risk participants during this discussion.
- **(2:30-2:45) Coffee break/Optional Structured Social Time 3**
- **(2:45 - 3:30) From the Experts Panel:** A pre-selected group of organizers and participants with extensive public scholarship experience will talk about best practices and potential pitfalls, taking participant questions via chat to maximize participation.
- **(3:30 - 4:00) Coffee break/Optional Structured Social Time 4**
- **(4:00 - 4:30) Next Steps:** Participants break up into small groups organized based on both synchronous and asynchronous discussions, with the aim of appointing project leaders and action items for any new group initiatives, and otherwise enabling new projects and collaborations.

#### AUTHORS

**Sarah A. Gilbert** is a postdoctoral research scholar at the University of Maryland College Park on the PERVADE: Pervasive Data Ethics project where she studies ethical practices for engaging in social media research. She also studies policies and practices that make online communities healthier. She is an active Redditor, who engages in public scholarship on the platform by creating Reddit-specific summarizations of her research and participating in discussions related to social computing and platform governance.

**Casey Fiesler** is an Assistant Professor of Information Science at University of Colorado Boulder, where much of her work involves research ethics for social computing; she is also on the research ethics committee for SIGCHI. She served for two cycles as Communications Chair for CSCW where she started the Medium publication, she has written a number of op-eds for *Slate*, and her research has been covered in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *WIRED*, and *Teen Vogue*.

**Lindsay Blackwell** is a Researcher on Facebook's Community Integrity team, where she researches ways to detect, prevent, and sanction online harassment and hate speech. She is also a PhD candidate at the University of Michigan School of Information, where her dissertation applies theories of criminal and social justice to online moderation practices. Lindsay's prior career in social media marketing

has informed her commitment to public scholarship, particularly by engaging on Twitter with other scholars, industry practitioners, and members of the press and broader public.

**Michael Ann DeVito** is a PhD Candidate in Media, Technology and Society at Northwestern University, where her work addresses everyday human/AI collaboration on social media. Her work also includes methods development around participatory, community critique for Queer design and intra-community values conflict resolution, including the creation of research 'zines. She formerly worked as a journalist in the Washington, DC market and taught multimedia science reporting at George Washington University.

**Michaelanne Dye** is a Presidential Postdoctoral Scholar in the School of Information at the University of Michigan. Her work draws on the fields of Anthropology, CSCW, and ICTD to study how people collaboratively design, access, and participate with internet technologies in constrained contexts. She works with marginalized communities to explore the grassroots, socialtechnical processes and systems that emerge when navigating political, social, and economic duress. Her work has been featured on *CNN*, *The Atlantic*, *New Scientist*, and *Vice*, among others.

**Shamika Goddard** Shamika is a person who is passionate about people and technology! She was born and raised in San Antonio, TX, and is the oldest of four children. After graduating from Stanford University with a degree in African and African-American studies, she served a year with AmeriCorps in New York City. She went on to study technology and ethics by developing technowomanism at Union Theological Seminary in the city of New York for her Master of Divinity. There, she also created and developed the concept of a Tech Chaplain. She currently attends CU Boulder as a doctoral student in their Information Science department and is studying technology, ethics, and social justice issues. You can watch her discuss technology, ethics and science fiction along with Jess Smith on their YouTube channel SciFi iRL.

**Kishonna L. Gray** is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication and Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Illinois - Chicago, and a faculty associate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. Dr. Gray is an interdisciplinary, intersectional, digital media scholar and digital herstorian whose areas of research include identity, performance and online environments, embodied deviance, cultural production, video games, and Black Cyberfeminism. Dr. Gray's most recent book, "Intersectional Tech: Black Users in Digital Gaming" (LSU Press, 2020), explores the visual, textual, and/or oral engagement of the Black body in transmediated spaces, focusing on the critical deconstruction of the exploited, hypervisible, labor of any associated Black performances (online and 'IRL').

**David Nemer** is an Assistant Professor of Media Studies at the University of Virginia. His research and teaching interests cover the intersection of Science and Technology Studies (STS), ICT for Development (ICT4D), and Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). Nemer is an ethnographer whose fieldwork include the Slums of Vitória, Brazil; Havana, Cuba; Guadalajara, Mexico; and Eastern Kentucky, Appalachia.

Nemer is the author of “Favela Digital: The other side of technology”(Editora GSA, 2013). He holds a Ph.D. in Computing, Culture, and Society from Indiana University and has written for *The Guardian*, *El País*, *The Huffington Post*, *Salon*, and *The Intercept*.

**C. Estelle Smith** is a Computer Science PhD Candidate at GroupLens Research at the University of Minnesota. Her work has touched on a variety of topics in Human-Computer Interaction including Online Health Communities, Human-Centered Machine Learning, and Science Communications/Online Misinformation. Estelle has conducted studies with HCI Researchers to understand their experiences engaging with the media, highlight design opportunities for sociotechnical systems involved in research dissemination, and distill strategies for effective engagement with media organizations.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## REFERENCES

- [1] Kimberley R Allison. 2020. Navigating Negativity in Research: Methodological and Ethical Considerations in the Study of Antisocial, Subversive and Toxic Online Communities and Behaviours. (2020).
- [2] Amy Binns. 2017. Fair game? Journalists’ experiences of online abuse. *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies* 6, 2 (2017), 183–206.
- [3] James I Charlton. 2000. *Nothing about us without us: Disability oppression and empowerment*. Univ of California Press.
- [4] Isabelle M. Cote and Emily S. Darling. 2018. Scientists on Twitter: Preaching to the choir or singing from the rooftops? *FACETS* (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2018-0002>
- [5] Michael A DeVito, Ashley Marie Walker, and Jeremy Birnholtz. 2018. ‘Too Gay for Facebook’ Presenting LGBTQ+ Identity Throughout the Personal Social Media Ecosystem. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 2, CSCW (2018), 1–23.
- [6] Michaelanne Dye. 2019. *Vamos a Resolver: Collaboratively Configuring the Internet in Havana*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Georgia Institute of Technology.
- [7] Brianna Dym and Casey Fiesler. 2020. Ethical and privacy considerations for research using online fandom data. *Transformative Works and Cultures* 33 (2020).
- [8] Willie Ermine. 2007. The ethical space of engagement. *Indigenous LJ* 6 (2007), 193.
- [9] Jordan Eschler and Amanda Menking. 2018. “No Prejudice Here”: Examining Social Identity Work in Starter Pack Memes. *Social Media+ Society* 4, 2 (2018), 2056305118768811.
- [10] Casey Fiesler. [n.d.]. Why (and how) academics should blog their papers. <https://medium.com/@cfiesler/why-and-how-academics-should-blog-their-papers-e6869559b8ea>
- [11] Casey Fiesler and Nicholas Proferes. 2018. “Participant” perceptions of Twitter research ethics. *Social Media+ Society* 4, 1 (2018), 2056305118763366.
- [12] Cary Funk, Meg Hefferon, Brian Kennedy, and Courtney Johnson. 2019. Trust and mistrust in Americans’ views of scientific experts. *Pew Research Center* (2019).
- [13] Sarah Ann Gilbert. 2018. *Motivations for participating in online initiatives: exploring motivations across initiative types*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of British Columbia.
- [14] Sarah A Gilbert. 2020. “I run the world’s largest historical outreach project and it’s on a cesspool of a website.” Moderating a Public Scholarship Site on Reddit: A Case Study of r/AskHistorians. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 4, CSCW1 (2020), 1–27.

- [15] Sarah A Gilbert, Jessica Vitak, and Katie Shilton. Under Review. Trends in Trust: Measuring Americans' Expectations for Trustworthy Research Use of Social Media Data. (Under Review).
- [16] Gillian R Hayes. 2011. The relationship of action research to human-computer interaction. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)* 18, 3 (2011), 1–20.
- [17] Jaigris Hodson, Chandell Gosse, George Veletsianos, and Shandell Houlden. 2018. I get by with a little help from my friends: The ecological model and support for women scholars experiencing online harassment. *First Monday* (2018).
- [18] Sarah Kuhn and Michael J Muller. 1993. Participatory design. *Commun. ACM* 36, 6 (1993), 24–29.
- [19] Jessica GY Luc, Michael A Archer, Rakesh C Arora, Edward M Bender, Arie Blitz, David T Cooke, Tamara Ni Hlci, Biniam Kidane, Maral Ouzounian, Thomas K Varghese Jr, et al. 2020. Does Tweeting Improve Citations? One-Year Results from the TSSMN Prospective Randomized Trial. *The Annals of Thoracic Surgery* (2020).
- [20] Alice E Marwick, Lindsay Blackwell, and Katherine Lo. 2016. Best practices for conducting risky research and protecting yourself from online harassment (Data & Society Guide). *New York: Data and Society Institute* (2016).
- [21] Adrienne L Massanari. 2018. Rethinking research ethics, power, and the risk of visibility in the era of the “alt-right” gaze. *Social Media+ Society* 4, 2 (2018), 2056305118768302.
- [22] Helen Nissenbaum. 2004. Privacy as contextual integrity. *Wash. L. Rev.* 79 (2004), 119.
- [23] Scott J Peters, Nicholas R Jordan, Theodore R Alter, and Jeffrey C Bridger. 2003. The Craft of Public Scholarship in Land-Grant Education. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 8, 1 (2003), 75–86.
- [24] Whitney Phillips and Ryan M Milner. 2018. *The ambivalent internet: Mischief, oddity, and antagonism online*. John Wiley & Sons.
- [25] Kathleen H Pine, Margaret M Hinrichs, Jieshu Wang, Dana Lewis, and Erik Johnston. 2020. For impactful community engagement: check your role. *Commun. ACM* 63, 7 (2020), 26–28.
- [26] Lenandlar Singh. 2020. Cultural Affordances of Twitter in Higher Education Professional Development: A Literature Review. *Asian Journal of Distance Education* 15, 1 (2020), 127–143.
- [27] C. Estelle Smith, Eduardo Nevarez, and Haiyi Zhu. 2020. Disseminating Research News in HCI: Perceived Hazards, How-To's, and Opportunities for Innovation. In *Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. 1–13.
- [28] C. Estelle Smith, Xinyi Wang, Raghav Pavan Karumur, and Haiyi Zhu. 2018. [Un] breaking News: Design Opportunities for Enhancing Collaboration in Scientific Media Production. In *Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. 1–13.
- [29] Misha Teplitskiy, Grace Lu, and Eamon Duede. 2017. Amplifying the impact of open access: Wikipedia and the diffusion of science. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 68, 9 (2017), 2116–2127.
- [30] George Veletsianos, Shandell Houlden, Jaigris Hodson, and Chandell Gosse. 2018. Women scholars' experiences with online harassment and abuse: Self-protection, resistance, acceptance, and self-blame. *New Media & Society* 20, 12 (2018), 4689–4708.
- [31] John Vines, Anja Thieme, Rob Comber, Mark Blythe, Peter C Wright, and Patrick Olivier. 2013. HCI in the press: online public reactions to mass media portrayals of HCI research. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. 1873–1882.
- [32] Nancy Worth. 2020. Public Geographies and the Gendered Experience of Saying “Yes” to the Media. *The Professional Geographer* (2020), 1–9.