Book Review

Traffic jams on the information superhighway: The intersectional internet as a roadmap for progressive research

Noble, S.U., & Tynes, B.M. (2016). *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class and Culture Online.* Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Opening with Kimberlé Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality as described through the metaphor of literal traffic intersections, editors Safiya Umoja Noble and Brendesha M. Tynes present a well-rounded, deeply articulated collection of writings detailing the people, products, policies, and politics entwined in *The Intersectional Internet.* Though published in 2016 and dealing in some cases with ephemeral technology, this work is likely to gain neo-classical status for both the quality of its content and its potential to serve as a de facto manual for interrogating information and communication technologies and new media through a critical lens. The editors' call for a new theoretical frame of Intersectional Critical Race Technology Studies (ICRTS), an "epistemological approach to researching endangered and racialized identities in digital and information studies" (p. 4), is realized and demonstrated through each chapter that follows.

Part One of *The Intersectional Internet* considers human interactions with technology. These seven chapters take readers through a vast array of human experiences, portrayals, and socio-cultural realities of internet-based technologies, new media, and the communication they facilitate. Tynes et al. identify a significant research gap in Chapter One, writing "theories of race online have failed to capture the intersectional nature of race, gender, class, and other categories, and the context within which they are structured by Whiteness as a practice of power" (p. 25). This conversation is developed in Jessie Daniels' chapter, *The Trouble With White Feminism.* We see how difficult it is to study Whiteness, as historical scholarly approaches to race tend to afford Whiteness invisibility while sustaining the dominance of Whiteness in the methods of conducting and reporting research.

Each chapter in *The Intersectional Internet* can stand alone, however, the power of intersectionality as a lens for interpreting the impact and experiences of the internet and information and communication technologies (ICTs) is made apparent by their grouping in Part One. The subjects and contents of these chapters are as engaging as the tools it provides for a new generation of progressive researchers. Catherine Knight Steele's study of the ways Black women write and communicate through celebrity

gossip blogs, for example, challenges us to consider different ways of knowing and the myriad forms of information and dialogue that lie beyond the traditional narrative of what makes for valid intellectual content. Steele's analysis in Chapter Four is carried out over three levels of inquiry: personal/individual, communal/cultural, and institutional (p. 78). Corresponding with micro, mezzo, and macro levels of study in complementary social science fields, Steele's model of Black feminist epistemology has direct implications and lessons for media, communications, and library and information scholars, asking us to consider social ties and networks outside of mainstream media and to investigate the use of storytelling and counternarrative in the creation of meaning and information.

Jenny Ungbha Korn's *Cultural Constructions of Race and Gender* examines intersectionality in practice through a critical discourse analysis focused on Facebook groups. The introduction and first section of this chapter can serve as examples of best practice in setting the stage and context of publishable papers using progressive research. Notably, Korn includes white women as a category, providing a reference for researchers describing the importance of 'white' as a racial category. The remaining chapters in Part One are equally as valuable for modern researchers in the social justice and information spaces, demonstrating the uses of critical reading (Washington, Ch. 3); discourse analysis (Steele, Ch. 4); rhetorical analysis and interrogation of social imaginaries (Leonard, Ch. 7); and the application of marginality and intersectionality as lenses for analysis on micro, mezzo, and macro levels (Christian, Ch, 5) in person-centered research.

Focusing on the products and politics of the internet, the chapters of Part Two consider the ways ICTs are designed, built, and monetized to create and perpetuate the socio-cultural realities in previous chapters. In Chapter Eight, Sarah T. Roberts' empirical research with commercial content moderation (CCM) workers allows readers to shift perspective from the experiences of interacting with and through ICTs to the policies, structure, and labor that curate the content that users can access in the first place. By applying a critical lens to both the policies and activities of content moderation, Roberts exposes the nuances of information on the internet and opens the discussion of constructed meaning, the commodification of content and identities, and the power structures that challenge the intention and power of content created by users.

"[A]s this edited collection illustrates, at its best, media and critical studies is able to offer an analysis of *both* the politics of technology and the technology of politics", writes Robert Mejia (pp. 236–237). Mejia describes the need for critical and intersectional discourse regarding the health and ecological impacts of manufacturing, consumption, and disposal of electronic devices; an epidemiological topic that demonstrates the depth and breadth of research possibilities introduced in *The Intersectional Internet*. The marriage of critical legal studies, the political economy, and information systems in Melissa Villa-Nicholas's chapter demonstrates the evolution of core concepts in critical studies to address emerging needs in our growing information landscape. Reminiscent of Crenshaw's critical analyses of DeGraffenreid

v General Motors, Moore v Hughes Helicopter, and Payne v Travenol (1989)[1] which gives foundation and context to intersectionality, Villa-Nicholas moves us into the information technology and telecom industry and highlights the invisibility of Latinas in it. We are reminded of globalization and the need to challenge dominating Western narratives in Chapter Ten, when Ergin Bulut calls out internet and social media companies as not only technological actors but political ones, highlighting the complex social dynamics in Turkey and the cascading impacts of legal censorship of media and internet-hosted information based on religion, class, and gender.

The potential to enrich analysis through the application of an intersectional lens is central to the chapters in this work, and researchers can find both inspiration and direction in its pages. Molly Niesen (Ch. 9) describes how traditional research methods can be extended through this approach. Noting the limitations of structural analyses and intersectional lenses on their own, Niesen combines the two and a new form of analysis emerges: "structural intersectional analysis considers how structural inequality values some identities over others" (p. 163). In the book's final chapter, Tiera Chanté Tanksley gives progressive researchers a new framework to build upon: Black feminist media literacy. To counter the narrative of a post-racial society and an impartial internet, Tanksley merges Black feminism, critical race theory (CRT) in education, and intersectionality into a framework which is then applied in critique of both media depictions of Black girls and women and to the counter story told by memes created by Black girls and women talking back to the mainstream. Tanksley provides progressive researchers with the necessary information for applying the tenets of CRT in education to their own research while centering marginalized and intersecting identities in their analyses.

"Sexism and racism persist in shaping the design, use, and meaning of ICTs, and this must be prioritized as a set of key ethical concerns in those computing fields where design and implementation of these systems occurs," writes Sweeney (p. 225). And indeed, *The Intersectional Internet* offers an onramp to including critical race approaches in media, information, and technology scholarship. Noble and Tynes have provided what they laud in the book's introduction: writings which interrogate and counter narratives of neutrality on the internet, spotlighting the centrality of dominating white male identities in internet culture, and contributing a launch pad for deeper conversations. *The Intersectional Internet* is a must-read, with influence already seen in recent works including Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* and Benjamin's *Race After Technology.* The broad scope of topics covered in its chapters offer opportunities

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[1]Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at: http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

for talking about CRT empirically while identifying areas of possibility for new progressive research and scholarship.

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