Introduction: Marginality and Social Media

Katy E. Pearce, Amy Gonzales, and Brooke Foucault Welles

Abstract

This special issue brings together 13 manuscripts and two practitioner responses that speak to the intersection of marginality and social media in a variety of contexts. Readers of Social Media + Society certainly know what social media are, but marginality may be more elusive. We introduce this special issue by noting the historical moment for studying marginality, providing a working definition of that concept, and highlighting how this special issue sustains and extends that conversation within the context of social media.

What Is Marginality?

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Marginality is of substantial interest in the field of communication (Foss & Ray, 1996; Marwick & Boyd, 2018; Turner, 2019) and includes a current emphasis on issues related to minoritization, representation, equity, and inequality. As a focus of scholarship, as well as more general critique of bias and exclusion in the academy, marginality has a variety of definitions. In the call for papers for this special issue, we focused on Gatzweiler and Baumüller’s (2014) definition, where marginality can be understood as the experience of disadvantaged (typically involuntarily) people or groups who are excluded from the resources and opportunities they need to participate as full and equal members of society. This experience may be based on one’s demographic identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, sexual identity, and it could also be based on circumstances, such as chronic illness, physical ability, one’s profession, and the intersections therein. Marginality influences what people can achieve and limits their abilities to take advantage of the resources and opportunities afforded to non-marginalized peers. Furthermore, marginalized individuals and groups are often politically, economically, and/or socially vulnerable, as their susceptibility to harm is greater, often due to their exclusion from critical resources.

Why Does Marginality in Communication Matter?

There are a number of ways that social media scholarship has already engaged with marginality, including a robust body of work on unequal access, as well as work on the risks and opportunities of engaging in (semi) public communication online. It is this latter body of work that especially inspires this special issue. Expanding the scope of experiences that are examined, documented, and theorized in the literature is one principal contribution we make here. Furthermore, by focusing on the experiences of marginalized people and groups, the articles in this special issue contain important theoretical and practical insights for how best to amplify opportunity and mitigate risk on social media for marginalized people, and more generally. Precisely, because marginalized people often have fewer resources and greater needs, they are forced to be frequent (and often adept) navigators of the interstitial space between risk and opportunity on social media. Examining how marginalized people thrive in social media spaces can guide theory, methods, and ethical research.

Keywords

marginality, marginalization, margins, social media

1University of Washington, USA
2University of California Santa Barbara, USA
3Northeastern University, USA

Corresponding Author:
Katy E. Pearce, Department of Communication, University of Washington, Box 353740, Seattle, WA 98195-3740, USA.
Email: kepearce@uw.edu
practices as we strive to design better social media communication experiences, first for individuals living at the margins of society and then for social media users in total.

Issues of marginalization have, of course, been long considered and well theorized by many critical and humanist scholars as well as within communication as a discipline (Foss & Ray, 1996). But most empirically-oriented scholars working on social media are not in conversation with critical work. This is by design. Empirically-oriented scholars are trained to avoid making critical claims in the spirit of “objectivity.” Yet, empirically-oriented scholars are often well positioned to examine the antecedents and consequences of marginalization in social media communication. As Carragee and Frey (2016) argue, issues of social justice should not exclusively be the domain of critical research, as critical research does not often actively engage in determining causes and identifying levers of change as much as it does provide a necessary critique of current systems.

In contrast, the three co-editors for this special issue are all social scientists studying marginality and technology through a postpositivist lens. We believe that empirical work can be used to highlight the needs and concerns of individuals who experience marginalization. Of course, we acknowledge that our epistemological biases have their own limitations—sometimes, a crude distillation of relevant concepts or an imperfect appreciation of context—but we hope that by encouraging conversation between postpositivist and critical perspectives, we can build new forms of knowledge that broaden the reach and influence of research in this area. To that end, another principal goal of this special issue is to present empirical scholarship addressing marginality and social media that used novel methodological approaches with meaningful engagement with theory from an ethical perspective. Meaningful theoretical engagement includes (but is not limited to): emphasizing the links between marginalization theory and communication research; testing the validity of communication theory not typically applied to marginalized populations; proposing new theoretical constructs that are relevant to marginalization in digital communication; and/or recognizing the need for theoretically interdisciplinary approaches to marginalization in communication. We believe that rooting this scholarship within communication theory will better ensure the staying power of this research. However, we also believe that this scholarship is ripe for application. To highlight this potential, we have also included in this special issue conversations with various practitioners. These conversations reveal the exciting intersection of theory and practice, and also highlight the need for each world to inform the other to optimize the import of this scholarship.

Delimiting Our Aims

It is important to note that there are several things we did not aim to accomplish within this special issue. First and foremost, as discussed above, our goal was to assemble empirical pieces on social media and marginality. Although we welcomed and encouraged critical engagement, our focus on empirical work necessarily means critical scholarship mainly plays a supporting role in this collection. Similarly, there is already a robust literature on general issues of digital inequality, including inequalities in access, skill, and use (e.g., Caton & Chapman, 2016; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Jones et al., 2009; van Deursen & Helsper, 2018). Although we did not rule out the possibility of including papers that extend those themes (indeed, the manuscript by Epstein and Quinn [this issue] is an example), we refer readers to existing canon for more general theories and frameworks to understand digital inequality and social media. And, though we neither sought nor avoided reflections on marginality and social media within the field of communication itself, we did not receive any manuscripts on the topic and, therefore, it is not discussed here. However, we would be remiss not to acknowledge that this special issue was assembled during a time when discussions of racism and identity-based exclusion are particularly salient within the field of communication as well as in societies more broadly. We wholeheartedly support the work of scholars like Chakravartty et al. (2018), Gardner (2018), and Wasserman (2020), and encourage readers to engage with these important discussions, which we explore more fully in the section “Future Directions”.

Finally, it is essential to discuss the editors’ positionality in the context of this special issue. The three special issue co-editors have a tremendous amount of privilege: we are white, cisgender, able-bodied, US-born native English speakers, with graduate degrees from, as well as tenure-track positions at, prestigious research universities. This all shapes our biases and perceptions. Because we know privilege can encumber fair assessments, we took several steps to address our biases as we assembled this special issue. Among other things, at each stage of abstract and then manuscript solicitation, we solicited a higher number of editorial and peer reviews than might typically be expected. We did this to compile feedback for each piece from at least one reviewer with expertise in the theoretical framework(s) one with expertise in methods, and, importantly, at least one reviewer with contextual expertise that could evaluate engagement with marginality within the study. In addition, we conducted internal analyses at each stage of the special issue editing process to assess the balance of representation by gender, geography, race, and employment status (faculty, student, etc.) of the authors, the contexts studied, and methods employed. We held additional editorial feedback sessions with authors and provided pre-print copyediting in an effort to provide greater support to authors, particularly those less familiar with publishing in North American or European, English-language research journals. Finally, we also selected a publication outlet that would be open access, reducing access barriers to the resulting work. Although far from perfect solutions to eliminate bias and structural inequities, we hope that these initiatives have helped to shape a better and more inclusive special issue, and we thank the authors, reviewers, and student research assistants for making it possible.
Three Modes of Inquiry

A key aim in this special issue was to highlight cutting-edge research at the intersection of marginalization and social media to elevate the visibility of such work today, and highlight the need for continued work in the future. To best do that, we consider the current manuscript articles through three key modes of academic inquiry: method, theory, and ethics. In doing so, we can better articulate the unique contributions of these papers, while also contextualizing them within a broader academic perspective.

Methods

Best practices for conducting research with marginalized populations suggest that scholars should be engaging in reflexivity at every stage. This includes consistent involvement of community and relevant stakeholders, often utilizing participatory methods, with a goal of social change (Beaton et al., 2017; Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). Many of the studies in the special issue did this. For example, Lupien (this issue) used a community engaged participatory research approach with indigenous civil society organizations in the communities of fieldwork. From the beginning, the researcher had an advisory group of indigenous community leaders to articulate research goals prior to beginning fieldwork. Similarly, Carlson and Frazer’s (this issue) study was guided by principles specific to indigenous research ethics and analyzed using an indigenous research methodological framework, all with a goal to elevate indigenous perspectives. Lupien (this issue) and Carlson and Frazer’s (this issue) approaches speak to what Clark-Parsons and Lingel (this issue) articulate in their piece on “margins as methods,” in which they offer a set of guiding questions as they urge researchers of marginalization to enhance their reflexivity and continuously consider the consequences of their methodological choices for the participants themselves.

When authors take this approach, it is possible for social media research to respond to some of the historic omissions and harms rendered against marginalized communities, who are often under-represented and/or exposed to novel risk when they participate in research. Every article in this collection focuses on a population that is significantly under-represented in scholarly research more generally. Populations of study include people of color (Davis, this issue; Smith et al., this issue), refugees (Udwan et al., this issue), LGBTQ+ people (Birnholtz et al., this issue), people with disabilities (Trevisan, this issue), indigenous people (Carlson & Frazer, this issue; Lupien, this issue; Richez et al., this issue), and people from the Global South (Birnholtz et al., this issue; Soriano & Cabañes, this issue). Although social media have many limitations (centralized corporate control, limited reach to some parts of the world, and financial barriers to entry, to name just a few), the possibility to expand populations of study through techniques like observation, asynchronous participation, and flexible interview scheduling was embraced by most in this collection.

Simply put, research related to marginalized individuals and groups should aim to lift up, not further marginalize. Research findings should give back to the communities that are studied. As Trevisan told us about the workshops that he facilitates to disseminate research results, “You can’t just use these organizations. It needs to be a real partnership and they need to get something out of it.” This is similar to the experience of Birnholtz, who cold-called non-profits and activists in his focal research area and was fortunate to find a partner that was quite interested in research. This type of partnership is not possible for all organizations, but having members of the organization as full research team members made the work richer and enhance the validity of the project.

With all of this work involved in producing better engaged scholarship, authors should be given space to talk more about methods and engagement. Yet, there is seldom room within a journal article to discuss some of the challenges involved in such research. Blogging about methods is one way to promote discussions of methodological challenges, so we applaud Birnholtz for writing a blog on his research topic and encourage others to consider this, and other alternative approaches to bringing scholarship to the public sphere.

Authors’ Methodological Choices

In this special issue, it is notable that the majority of manuscripts employ qualitative methods, including interviews (Birnholtz et al., this issue; Carlson & Frazer, this issue; Lupien, this issue; Soriano & Cabañes, this issue; Udwan et al., this issue; focus groups [Trevisan, this issue], and discourse analysis [Davis, this issue]). Qualitative methods have long been the dominant method used in the study of marginalized groups (Barron, 1999), partially because of the nature of questions of marginality as well as the possibility of elevating voices of the marginalized. Some manuscripts in this special issue use multiple qualitative methods to help triangulate findings. For example, Coe and Griffin (this issue) employed content analysis and cultural analysis in their study of presidential tweets. As the authors themselves say, this pairing “fosters a more holistic assessment of how marginalized identity invocation manifests measurably and ideologically in Trump’s Twitter discourse” (p. 5). Following Mertens’ (2010) work on mixed methods and marginality, this is to be lauded, as mixed methods can better address persistent inequalities and support the voices of diverse research participants.

The quantitative studies in the special issue include two surveys (Epstein & Quinn, this issue; Velasquez & Montgomery, this issue) and one experiment (Smith et al., this issue). Quantitative methods may be less often used for studies of marginality, but as Fassinger and Morrow (2013) and Cokley and Awad (2013) argue, that does not lessen their utility. Quantitative studies can provide large, representative
samples of cultural communities, establish cause and effect relationships, and provide results that may be more persuasive to policymakers. As one example, Velasquez and Montgomery (this issue) employed an online survey of Latino adults from a panel service. The survey was available in English or Spanish, with half of the participants completing it in each language. This study was exceptional because it was representative of the Latino population of the United States and did get at questions that could arguably be explored quantitatively. By focusing on this population in particular and not comparing groups, the authors were able to go into great depth, despite the quantitative nature.

To summarize, engaged scholarship, including participatory methods, while not commonly employed in the field of communication (one might even say they are marginalized, see Broad et al., 2013, and Rodino-Colocino, 2011), are an appropriate methodological choice when working with marginalized individuals or communities and the greater care that such methods require should be better appreciated within the academy and within the field of communication. Making a difference through research is a valuable goal and should be rewarded (Dempsey et al., 2011).

**Theory**

One way to better ensure the staying power of research on marginalization and social media is through the use of theory. Theory can help tether new ideas to previous scholarship; unify previously disparate perspectives; and create a launching pad for future studies that can further develop understanding of how marginalization and attempts to combat it often play out in digital contexts. Most of the studies in the special issue take an inductive approach to theory, though a small number also use theory deductively. We address each in turn and also briefly consider the role of theory in fostering research that can be prescriptive for improving people’s lives.

**Inductive Approaches**

Though empirical, most of the studies included in the issue take an inductive approach to theorizing marginalization. This approach to building knowledge brings attention to phenomena often overlooked in both popular and academic circles in a manner that is thoughtful and rigorously grounded in previous scholarship. Sometimes, these traditions are united under topic areas and other times they point to specific theoretical constructs. As an example of the former, Epstein and Quinn (this issue) elaborate understanding of disparities in privacy literacy, and Richez et al. (this issue) explore social media effects on policy through a lens of political narratives. These ideas are not primarily theoretical per se, but are situated in long-standing conceptual traditions on privacy, narrative, and so on. In other cases, the authors use theoretical constructs to tie new findings to previous research.

For example, Lupien (this issue) contextualizes findings from community-based participatory research with Latin American indigenous activists in political opportunity theory. Carlson and Frazer (this issue) use Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) construct of connective action and Papacharissi’s (2016) affective publics as lenses for exploring how indigenous groups navigate online spaces. Linking new work on marginalization to existing theoretical constructs helps better ground these new insights and ensure their long-term impact.

In contrast to those that situated work in previous constructs, a few authors offered their own theoretical constructs for consideration. Shoemaker et al. (2004) recognize this step as essential in forming “the building blocks of theories” (p. 15). These new concepts can be operationalized and tested to develop predictive theories; they also signpost issues deserving of additional research, inviting future scholars into conversation, and theory development. In this issue, for example, Soriano and Cabañes’ (this issue) construct of entrepreneurial solidarities captures key digital worker concerns and their implications for the worker experience. Coe and Griffin’s (this issue) four-part marginalized identity invocation framework articulates the tactics and consequences of highlighting marginalized identities as political strategy. Each of these, and other concepts proposed within the special issue, signal new opportunities for building theory at the intersection of marginalization and social media.

**Deductive Approaches**

In contrast to studies that used inductive theoretical approaches, there were a small number of papers that used a deductive approach to theory building. These two papers either referenced theories that explicitly deal with difference (social identity theory, Velasquez & Montgomery, this issue) or describe the responses that people have when exposed to marginalization and injustice (anger activism model, Smith et al., this issue). In both cases, the authors test, and ultimately reinforce, existing theories. In the piece by Velasquez and Montgomery (this issue), the authors further validate recently developed measures of perceived permeability as a component of social identity theory. In contrast, Smith et al. (this issue) examine the ability of the anger activism model to predict the mechanisms of online mobilization in response to bearing witness to racial discrimination. Each of these papers uses theory to inform how racial and ethnic minorities are represented by and engage with social media. They illustrate how research on social media and marginalization can use deductive techniques to appreciate marginalized experiences.

**Theory and Application**

Finally, we note that many of the pieces published in this special issue reveal insights that can and should be brought
back to the communities that informed them. How, for example, can knowledge gained from the relationship (or lack thereof) between social media campaigns and policy change alter the course of future campaigns (see Richez et al., this issue)? How can knowledge of location-aware systems inform future design for individuals from marginalized communities (see Birnholtz et al., this issue)? Indeed, nearly all of the articles included in this special issue offer clear and specific insights for the populations under investigation. We applaud the authors for weaving together stories that can inform real-world experiences for people at the margins of society with insights that feed broader theoretical and conceptual narratives.

**Ethics**

Finally, working with marginalized people and groups communities also requires greater focus on ethical considerations. Ethics should be foregrounded in all scholarly research, and especially, online scholarly research where questions of best ethical practices are still actively being negotiated (though we would point readers to the frequently-updated guidelines developed by the Association of Internet Researchers for the latest thinking in this area (Franzke et al., 2020)). When it comes to marginalized people and communities, social media research arguably amplifies considerations of power, exploitation, and informed consent. As Clark-Parsons and Lingel (this issue) note in their essay in this collection, “digital media complicates already-imbalanced power relationships between the researcher and the researched” (p. 2).

Power differences between researchers and participants are significant within this area of research. Udwan et al. (this issue) brought this power differential to the forefront of their paper, noting the multiple power structures interwoven in the lives of the refugees and being forthcoming about centering the social justice orientation. Moreover, they explicitly discuss how cooperation with government agencies, such as universities and ethics review boards, is a point of tension for their participant population (Syrian refugees) whose lives are frequently and sometimes dramatically disrupted by government regulations and oversight. Addressing power differentials is all the more important when the researcher does not identify as a member of the community being studied. As noted above, Trevisan told us that for him, not being a member of the community he studies makes it essential for him to give back. Lupien (this issue) prepared reports for the organizations that were studied. These are good practices to be emulated elsewhere.

Managing risk is also an important ethical consideration for scholars working on marginality and social media. Social media research, even research conducted on “public” social media posts, creates novel risks for marginalized people that warrant some explanation here. Fiesler and Proferes (2018) discovered that people generally do not know that their social media posts can be used for research and do not want their posts used without consent. So, at minimum, simply viewing social media posts for research creates the possibility of a perceived or actual loss of privacy. Such losses are more acute for people from marginalized communities who may experience disproportionate harm from even well-intentioned observation. For example, in her analysis of the ethical challenges inherent in social media research in totalitarian regimes, Pearce (2020) describes how researchers may inadvertently expose participants to additional risk, beyond the risk already inherent in public declarations of resistance, by downloading and storing their posts. The very fact that foreign researchers are interested in their posts can put social media users at increased risk for additional state surveillance and harassment. Similarly, Jackson et al. (2020) acknowledge how the additional labor of organizing and labeling social media posts that enables research can also enable unwanted state surveillance, especially when ordinary people transcend their usual spheres of influence and attention (e.g., by tweeting during a protest). In this collection, a number of researchers note special precautions they took to de-identify and/or not collect personally identifiable information to protect participants from marginalized communities whose identities, orientations, and/or behavior are locally stigmatized and criminalized (e.g., Birnholtz et al., this issue; Udwan et al., this issue).

In a different vein, and less frequently discussed in the open, working with marginalized populations can also be particularly difficult for researchers. Sometimes, researchers themselves are members of the populations they study, putting them at risk of secondary trauma as they collect and analyze data and, possibly, primary trauma when they visit field sites where they too are in harm’s way. Furthermore, research with marginalized populations is often more challenging, with time spent arranging accommodations for participants with, for example, limited communication ability, for example, Trevisan (this issue), unpredictable schedules, for example, Soriano and Cabañes (this issue), or unreliable access to communication technology, for example, Udwan et al. (this issue). These forms of labor are infrequently acknowledged and certainly do not typically factor into conversations about academic publishing or research ethics. We invited authors to be explicit about the additional labor involved in working with marginalized people, and readers will note several articles contain discussions of positionality and the ethics of inclusion.

When we solicited submissions, we asked authors to reflect on ethics, especially using critical and feminist approaches to marginality and social media, for example, Brock (2018) and Linabary and Corple (2019). Some authors point out that their work presents few ethical quandaries beyond the typical quandaries inherent in research on human subjects. It is worth noting that not all people from marginalized groups bear disproportionate risk in all situations. Reviewing anonymous and “public” social media posts, participating in laboratory
experiments, and completing surveys on non-sensitive topics may rightly be navigated using standard ethical practices (Institutional Review Board reviews, reporting results in aggregate, de-identifying examples, etc.) While other projects are plainly more sensitive, requiring additional protections and accommodations for both participants and researchers. Many fall in a middle ground, working with people, and/or their social media artifacts in ways that are not only obviously risky, but also not well governed by traditional ethical considerations. In these cases, it may be possible to use the platform’s affordances as a guide, for instance, neither further concealing nor further revealing identity, as Davis (this issue) did in her piece on racial trolling. Perhaps the most useful contribution to the particular ethics of studies of social media and marginality is Clark-Parsons and Lingel’s (this issue) essay, which centers critical feminist ethics, and offers important questions to guide researchers through the ethical considerations throughout participant selection, data collection, analysis, and presentation. If editing this issue has shown us anything, it is that ethical challenges and their solutions are deeply contextual, constantly shifting, and amplified by both social media and marginality. Clark-Parsons and Lingel’s (this issue) essay is essential reading for anyone working on social media and marginalization.

**Limitations of the Special Issue**

A special issue about social media and marginalization lends itself to representation on a breadth of topics and perspectives. However, we also recognize that there is always room for greater representation. We were able to include a range of excellent papers about issues faced by ethnic and racial minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, indigenous communities, immigrants, and individuals with disability, among others. At the same time, we would have liked to include articles that grappled more directly with gender and Islamophobia, as two central political issues that certainly deserve academic attention.

We can also think of diversity from a more academic perspective. That is, what did we fail to accomplish in trying to present the scope of theoretical, methodological, and ethical issues related to studying marginalization and technology? Primarily, we would have liked to have a better balance of inductive and deductive scholarship. We received very few quantitative submissions that used postpositivistic theory to test propositions that inform experiences of marginalization that were submitted for review. As three scholars who typically work from that epistemological perspective, we believe that there is a need for additional research that tests theories using the scientific method, which is often (though not exclusively) using quantitative methods. This is not to say that we do not value the incredible qualitative research that is included in this special issue and elsewhere on the topic of technology and marginalization. Rather, we think that having a greater breadth of methods and theories focused on these issues would further help to strengthen the impact of the work. We also believe that quantitative scholars can and should consider the ethical implications of their methods and theories (e.g., see Sprague, 2016) leveraging their strengths and owning their limitations.

**Future Directions**

Undoubtedly, the biggest challenge for scholarship related to marginality is the lack of diversity and inclusiveness within the academy. It is undeniable that white patriarchy and North American and Western European views dominate the tenure system, editorial boards, publication of manuscripts, distinguished scholar awards, and citation practices (Chakravarty et al., 2018). In the context of this special issue, although things are changing, non-marginalized individuals and groups continue to dominate scholarship as authors, participants, and audience, pushing such work literally to the margins. Moreover, authors sometimes feel that they have to reframe their arguments to fit into mainstream forms of knowledge production, or all of the papers on marginalized identities are pushed to a single conference panel, rather than distributed across panels on relevant topical domains. Reviewers and editors, in the spirit of inclusivity, could take steps to be more welcoming of such scholarship, following Ang et al. (2019). Here, we assembled a collection on marginality, but we hope this sort of work is better integrated into all issues (not just special issues) of journals moving forward.

Solutions to these and other issues will require the work of many. We would like to highlight some existing efforts. We appreciate Mayer et al. (2017) call for embedding race and gender-focused scholarship in all aspects of scholarship and teaching. Similarly, Alper et al. (2015) highlight ways that communication and social media research can and should be more inclusive of people with disabilities. We also recognize Ang et al. (2019), Gardner (2018), and Wasserman’s (2020) push for greater internationalization in the communication field, as well as considerations of global intersectionality (Bachmann & Proust, 2020). Efforts, such as #CommunicationSoWhite and #RhetoricSoWhite demonstrate that by talking about how communication is centered on white patriarchy, we can begin to move beyond it.

We also point to the need for building a model of marginalization and technology use. There has been a long-standing theme in scholarship at the intersection of marginalization and digital technology that highlights the double-edged nature of being online, particularly for individuals from marginalized groups. For example, Birnholtz et al. (this issue) identify this in their discussion of gay men in India using spatial location apps; Soriano and Cabañas (this issue) reference this in their discussion of Filipino gig workers reinforcing a sense of entrepreneurial solidarity over Facebook. Indeed, again and again, we see the benefits and the risks that come with the heightened visibility of being online. This is likely true for all individuals, but, as Toyama (2011) notes with his
theory of amplification, because technology amplifies human forces, these risks are greatest for those that are already at the social margins. Given this long history, we argue that the field is overdue for a model that can be operationalized and tested as it predicts a specific set of outcomes associated with social media use by marginalized groups. For example, this could be an elaboration of the concept of socially mediated visibility articulated by Pearce et al. (2018), who state,

The exposure of communication in and beyond the original intended audience, unidirectionally perceptible and without spatiotemporal constraints, and facilitated by masspersonal ties. As a relational concept, SMV also encompasses individuals’ or groups’ strategic management of content and associations that can be viewed through social media channels, as well as the resulting inferences and consequences. The visibility of content and associations shared in socially mediated settings can vary, with users typically retaining only partial control. (p. 3)

This partial control is at the heart of how socially mediated visibility interacts with marginality. While for everyone, mediated and socially mediated visibility are double-edged swords because of the lack of control and the source of a “new and distinctive kind of fragility” (Thompson, 2005, p. 42), for marginalized individuals and groups, the tension and fragility brought about because of the risks and benefits of increased visibility on social media are amplified. For example, Fritz and Gonzales’ (2018) notion that “It is possible that social marginalization may amplify both the benefits and costs of online self-expression and support seeking” (p. 1191). As such, visibility may work against individuals with a marginalized identity—who may face personal and legal consequences simply for voicing their opinion. For those in marginalized positions, pre-existing vulnerabilities and lack of resources are more salient and more precious. It follows that the visibility management technical and social strategies as well as the outcomes for marginalized individuals and groups are of scholarly and practical importance that need to be more completely theorized and tested.

Finally, we view this special issue as a means of underscoring the intimate relationship between practitioners or activists and scholars. These relationships have long been fruitful and crosscutting: practitioners use research findings to complement their hands-on experiences helping marginalized individuals, and scholars observe how people engage technology in real-life to know what to study. Our hope is that by bringing these two groups together within a single special issue, we underscore the benefit of greater conversation between practitioners and scholars. For example, Alice Wong, from the Disability Visibility Project, confirms experiences long described in research literature, such as the risks of becoming vulnerable to hateful attacks online, and she also points to phenomena that have received less attention by researchers, such as the emotional labor that comes from constantly educating strangers about disability rights. Points of disconnect between practitioners and scholars can reveal exciting opportunities that may invigorate scholars and give practitioners an opportunity to ask for help in understanding difficult problems in the real world.

Conclusion
We are in an important era of social change, one that has been fueled, in part, by social media. We believe social media scholarship benefits from centering issues of marginality and envision a future where such work is better represented and appreciated in the academy. This special issue is a step in that direction.

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ORCID iD
Katy E. Pearce https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3837-5305

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Author Biographies

Katy E. Pearce (Ph.D. University of California, Santa Barbara) is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Washington. Her research interests include technology and inequality in diverse economic, cultural, and political environments, specifically the South Caucasus.

Amy Gonzales (PhD, Cornell) is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research interests include digital inequalities, social support, and well-being.

Brooke Foucault Welles (PhD, Northwestern University) is an associate professor of Communication Studies at Northeastern University. Her research interests include networked communication, online activism, and marginalization.