

Chapter 25

A Culture of Survivors: SlutWalk, Third Culture, and New Media Communication

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from the literature in Intercultural and New Media Studies (INMS), this study explores the SlutWalk social movement, a transnational movement of protest marches. The author conducted interviews with seven SlutWalk organizers from various cities in the United States to understand what culture SlutWalk organizers are fostering through their work and the role of new media communication in their organizational efforts. Results of the interpretative analysis suggest that although SlutWalk organizers foster a survivor culture through activities consistent with intercultural dialogue and third culture building, their use of various social media outlets might be motivated by various definitions of localized need. In addition, organizers highlight a tension between prioritizing more global survivor experiences over individual experiences with sexual assault and reveal the possibility for new media communication to enable anti-social cultural interactions. These findings contribute to the continued development of theorizing in INMS related to virtual third culture and continued scholarship exploring the intersections between new media and intercultural communication.

INTRODUCTION

On January 24th, 2011, Officer Michel Sanguinetti, in a speech about sexual violence to a group of law students at York University in Toronto, Canada, stated, “I’m told I’m not supposed to say this, but women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” (SlutWalkToronto.com). Many students equated this statement with blaming the victim, and on April 3rd, 2011 - a mere six weeks after Sanguinetti’s original remark – SlutWalk, a demonstration against victim blaming and slut shaming, was born. Four thousand people, some dressed in sweatpants, others in lingerie (Valenti, 2011), engaged in this public protest on the streets of Toronto, Canada.

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Although the story detailing Sanguinetti's comments was originally broken by the York University student newspaper (Kwan, 2011), new media technologies played an important role in diffusing the story and in the organization of the first walk. News of Sanguinetti's comments reached national and international audiences when several online outlets cited the incident. News of Sanguinetti's comments also circulated through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Lawrence, 2011). As described by McNicol (2012):

On 18 February, a call for public protest in Toronto was posted on the community blog section of feministing.com (a feminist blog), and the first tweet from @SlutWalkTO appeared. SlutWalk co-founders Sonya Barnett, an artist, and Heather Jarvis, a Guelph University undergraduate student, heard about Sanguinetti's comments in February, and came up with the idea for a "SlutWalk" in the weeks following. (p.x).

Since this initial protest in the spring of 2011, the SlutWalk movement, aided by new media technologies, has gone viral. SlutWalk organizers forward that both Sanguinetti's comment and SlutWalk "lit the spark of what turned into a global firestorm" (SlutWalkToronto.com). Although organizers attribute the popularity of the movement to the collective outrage of sexual violence and the myths surrounding sexual assault, others attribute the success of the movement to new media. Wininger (2011) states, "What's striking about SlutWalk and its associated movements is not that women spoke out against sexual violence and the victim-blaming that is a hallmark of violence against women, but that this movement has such an immediate transnational online presence" (p. 144). With demonstrations organized all over the world in over 13 countries including New Zealand, South Africa, India, Singapore, Israel, Nepal, and the United States (SlutWalkToronto.com), it is important to explore how new media technologies have contributed to the organization of this global movement. Therefore, grounded in the literature surrounding Intercultural New Media Studies (INMS), I conducted interviews with SlutWalk organizers to explore if the communication in SlutWalk promoted virtual third-culture building.

INTERCULTURAL NEW MEDIA STUDIES, INTERCULTURAL DIALOG, AND THIRD CULTURE

As a growing approach to the study of intercultural communication, Intercultural New Media Studies (INMS) provides a useful framework by which to explore the intercultural communication embedded in the SlutWalk movement. Shuter (2012) argues that new media is transforming how we communicate across cultures and that, due to this transformation, new intercultural communication theorizing is warranted. Shuter (2012) asserts that traditional approaches to intercultural communication, conceptualizing difference in terms of nation-state, ethnicity, and race, should be expanded to include myriad cultures and hybridized cultures, which are possible due to new media technology. Within this paradigm, Shuter (2012) offers several directions for future research; however, of primary concern to this research are the concepts of intercultural dialog and third culture.

Intercultural *dialog* (i.e., Internet text as opposed to spoken discourse) has been an important approach to understanding intercultural communication that is gaining prominence in INMS. Characterized by expressiveness and empathy (Ganesh & Holmes, 2011), intercultural *dialogue* (spoken discourse) necessitates individuals in an interaction to accept difference to achieve deep understanding of the *other*;

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