

# Digital Ethics

Rhetoric and Responsibility in Online  
Aggression

Edited by

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## 12 Confronting Digital Aggression with an Ethics of Circulation

*Brandy Dieterle, Dustin Edwards, and Paul “Dan” Martin*

Sharing writing is a ubiquitous feature of networked life. Generally, sharing invokes positive, if not saccharine, feelings (who, after all, would make an argument *against* sharing?). On social media platforms, the directive to share elicits seemingly progressive values of social participation and building toward a better, more connected, world. As John (2016) noted in *The Age of Sharing*, “sharing, we are told, is caring, and as such, has a warm glow around it” (p. 3). Despite its general warm glow, our contention in this chapter is that sharing is not always caring—indeed, sharing can cause harm to individuals, communities, and publics. While sharing or circulating texts does important world-building work, the (re)circulation of writing on social media has also been utilized for shaming, harassment, and bullying, forms of digital aggression that have only intensified in the last decade.

This chapter bridges scholarship in circulation studies and rhetorical ethics to address ethical relationality in social media circulation. To do so, we argue that the act of circulating preexisting writing *is* writing; it is a curatorial and rhetorical practice that invites participation, assumes an exigence and audience, prompts further circulation, and so on. Second, we position (re)circulating writing as a “habit of citizenship” (Wan, 2011), a world-building act that has implications for public discourse in an algorithmic age. Finally, we conceptualize an ethics of circulation, arguing that sharing preexisting writing—retweeting, forwarding, sharing, reblogging, and so on—assumes and constructs a rhetorical relationship with others and thereby deserves thoughtful contemplation about what such a relationship entails. Paying specific attention to acts of digital aggression (Sparby, 2017), we advocate for circulatory writing practices that promote inclusivity, social justice, and mindful contemplation in a current political climate where, in some cases, politicians and other influencers exemplify the exact opposite.

To more fully explain our argument, we briefly explain the ethical complexities of circulation in two particular cases. Our first case example examines the development and curation of a GIF of Donald Trump tackling a CNN logo (Trump, 2017) and what Trump’s tweeting of the GIF means as a form of online harassment and digital aggression.

This GIF originated on a subreddit known for sharing misogynistic, sexist, racist, ableist, and other problematic content, which Trump then recirculated on Twitter to make a claim about CNN being “fake news.” The location where the GIF originated is problematic, as is the content of the GIF itself as it promotes violence and aggression toward the news media specifically. With our framework, we also consider the ramifications of (re)circulating such content, either in support of or in critique of the message, because by sharing content, the user provides further exposure across more networks and, essentially, amplifies the message. Our second case example follows the reverberations of the online harassment Leslie Jones received after the release of the *Ghostbusters* movie trailer on YouTube. After briefly detailing how such aggression emerged on Twitter and other platforms, we note how individuals and communities mobilized to confront the racism and misogyny attached to the harassment and violence Jones experienced. Drawing attention to circulatory practices such as those used in coordination with hashtags (e.g. #StandWithLeslie and #BlackMenSupportLeslie), we use our second case example to highlight how circulatory practices can amplify support and solidarity for those facing gendered and racialized violence. We do not presume to arrive at any definitive or easy answers related to the dynamics of circulation. Rather, through our framework and these two cases, we have formulated a set of guiding principles and questions for navigating ethical sharing that we hope initiates further research and discussion on what is and is not ethical behavior for spreading content and being part of a network.

### Circulation, Writing, and Ethics

Indicating speed, flow, and movement, “circulation” refers to processes of cultural, rhetorical, and affective transmission and transformation. Circulation, what Gries (2018) identified as an emerging threshold concept for rhetoric and composition/writing studies, has also emerged as a key concept for digital rhetorics. Though circulation is nowhere near a new concept (Rickert, 2018), circulation has paved the way for a new wave of scholarship at the intersections of rhetorical theory, practice, and method (Brooke, 2009; Eyman, 2015; Gries, 2015, 2018; Porter, 2009; Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2009, among others). We want to acknowledge the wealth of work that has emerged in circulation studies, but we also want to pay attention to the *unfinished* work of conceptualizing ethical frameworks that can come to grips with a concept marked by speed, change, and dynamism.

For example, we are wary about how virality has come to mark “rhetorical success.” Widespread circulation, while important for digital economies of writing, should not be the benchmark for “good” or “successful” rhetorical practice (Bradshaw, 2018; Brooke, 2015). This concern is made palpable in examples of viral compositions that spread for

racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, or otherwise problematic reasons. As we highlight in this chapter, the spread of insensitive, injurious, or violent content can be damaging for particular individuals or communities.

There's a more mundane dimension to our argument, too. In an age of retweets, shares, and reblogs, it's often easy and expedient to recirculate already flowing content without fully interrogating its origins or anticipating what its further spread may accomplish. Once someone decides to share content, the person sharing becomes, in a sense, a coauthor of that content. Authorship in digital writing environments takes many nonconventional forms and is embedded in the value and currency of increased share counts, comments, and likes (Beer, 2016). The expansion of intertextual entrances for liking, remixing, and sharing online harassment increases the kairotic opportunities for trolls to generate and spread hate. In addition, sharing, liking, and commenting on content obfuscate the responsibilities for authorship a circulator assumes when engaging with harassment and expanding its reach (Prentice, 2015). In the sections that follow, we work through the framing assumptions embedded in our ethics of circulation framework.

### *(Re)circulating Is Writing*

Sharing writing today is rather easy. Those with access to networked technologies can boost already existing writing with the click of a button. Not a particularly laborious act, continuing the circulation of writing, it would seem, carries little intellectual energy and, as such, may not seem like a worthy topic of concern for writing and rhetoric researchers. Thus, it may be easy to write off sharing already existing writing as something other than writing. There are lots of stand-in conceptualizations for such work (many of which we've already used in this chapter: sharing, circulating, delivering, and redistributing). Why, then, would we want to call such activities "writing acts?" What would be the purpose or use value of *that*?

For us, situating circulation practices as writing practices, as a kind of authorship, ascribes a certain amount of accountability and consequentiality to circulating content. As mentioned, and not unlike other kinds of writing practices, choosing—or not choosing—to boost writing teems with material and rhetorical consequentialities. Furthermore, beyond individual choice in any simple sense, the ways in which networks and platforms order and arrange our circulations likewise entail ethical decision-making. In both cases, situating acts of (re)circulation as a kind of writing practice demonstrates the need for ongoing research and pedagogical reflection on matters that may otherwise be written off as too mundane or inconsequential. In other words, such an orientation suggests that *recirculating writing matters*—that it's a topic and practice that should enter our critical discussions in scholarship and pedagogy.

And yet, such a notion—(re)circulating writing (a text) *is* writing (an activity)—cannot be understood as a new claim. We take our cue from a number of rhetoric and writing scholars who have expanded what constitutes the work we do—or might do—in our scholarship and classrooms. To give more coherence to our claim, we especially draw on Kennedy’s (2016) work with textual curation and Dush’s (2015) work with writing content. Kennedy (2016) defined textual curation as an arrangement-driven “compositional craft” (p. 177). Drawing on expansive definitions of writing and discussion of curation from varied disciplines, Kennedy positioned textual curation as a category of writing that disrupts traditional understandings of authorship, agency, and writing labor. Not a singular author composing alone, textual curation designates a kind of distributed writing practice that undergirds all digital writing platforms. Warner (2017) described curation as “grabb[ing] existing utterances and populat[ing] them,” thus making the text half ours and half someone else’s (p. 139). In Kennedy’s terms, textual curation involves packaging, filtering, tagging, recomposing, and—we would add—recirculating texts across writing ecologies. Textual curation, Kennedy argued, *is* writing, though it may sound unfamiliar to traditional understandings of writing.

Similar to Kennedy, Dush (2015) noted changing dynamics of writing on digital platforms. “Good writing practice,” Dush argued, “involve[s] both crafting well-written posts and optimizing these posts as transportable, findable content” (p. 173). Dush positioned writing *as* content to point out a few key characteristics of writing today: writing is often *conditional* (made malleable and remixable), *computable* (given numerical representation in the form of digital data), *networked* (connected to wider discursive and infrastructural systems that allow for easy distribution and circulation), and *commodified* (made into monetizable assets). In current contexts, Dush argued, the work of writing not only involves inventing new kinds of content but also managing flows of content. To combine Kennedy (2016) and Dush (2015), writing entails thinking through the “rhetorical velocity” (Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2009) of texts already in motion. In other words, circulatory practices—considering not only one’s own writing but also already circulating writing within given ecologies—are central to the activity of writing.

Throughout this chapter, we use the term circulatory writing practices to signal a range of interventional procedures that writers use to work with—or against—flows of content. Discussed both in academic scholarship and in Internet vernacular, circulatory writing practices include activities such as sharing, signal boosting, amplifying, redistributing, and forwarding, among others. We recognize we risk broadening our understanding of writing too much when we include such practices under the definitional sign of “writing.” Nevertheless, we open the door of definition to suggest that we will be in a better position to

see circulation through an ethical lens and as arising from practices that have consequences for civic participation in a digital age, a line of questioning we take up next.

### *Circulation Practices Are Habits of Citizenship*

Prior to the proliferation of networked technologies, much counter/public sphere theory noted the transformational capacities of the ongoing and reflexive circulation of texts, ideas, and bodies. In many landmark works (Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1989; Warner, 2005), scholars noted that circulation works to bring about change and build lifeworlds. In digital contexts, similar arguments have been made about the importance of circulation for public participation, citizenship, and activism (Hawk, 2012; Jenkins, Green, & Ford, 2013; Penney & Dadas, 2014; Sheridan, Rinaldo, & Michel, 2012; Simmons, 2018). Indeed, without the circulatory architectures of networked platforms, it would be difficult to imagine many tactics of digital counter/public work. Take, for example, practices such as digital activism, hashtag activism, and networked protest—all of these practices require pathways of circulation, where multimodal assemblages of text and affect accumulate throughout time and space (Edwards & Lang, 2018). From print to digital economies, circulation has always been inextricably linked to civic and counter/public work.

Yet, because such work takes place on platforms owned by private companies, digital circulation is subject to algorithmic gatekeeping (Tufekci, 2015). Gatekeeping control over circulation is not a new problem per se, but one marked by acceleration and opaque platform politics (Edwards, 2018). Moreover, circulating digital content is more than sharing visible writing with an immediate audience; it also shares streams of data with a range of corporate, third-party, and government entities (Beck, 2017; Reyman, 2013), leaving data trails that intimately map the kinds of content you are likely to share. In other words, when we recirculate writing, we also recirculate data, and the circulation of that data can have profound consequences for how we understand, encounter, and interact with others in networked publics (Beer, 2016).

For example, software engineers at Twitter explained that a user's timeline is determined based on a number of factors. They noted:

In order to predict whether a particular tweet would be engaging to you, our models consider characteristics (or features) of:

- The tweet itself: its recency, presence of media cards (image or video), total interactions (e.g., number of Retweets or likes)
- The tweet's author: your past interactions with this author, the strength of your connection to them, the origin of your relationship
- You: tweets you found engaging in the past, how often and how heavily you use Twitter. (Koumchatzky & Andreyev, 2017)

In other words, Twitter's algorithmic timeline is determined, in part, by what kinds of content the user has (re)circulated in the past. Though digital circulation is choreographed by way of many economic, cultural, and computational factors, users' own circulation practices can fold back on the kinds of circulations they may encounter in the future. Put otherwise, (re)circulating digital writing—regardless of intent—has meaningful consequences for the production of publics.

Given the relationship between circulation and public work, then, we position circulation practices through Wan's (2011) understanding of "habits of citizenship." Though not without critique, citizenship is a category that often describes the kinds of attributes needed for participating in public life. As Wan (2011) argued, citizenship has long been a cornerstone of rhetoric, writing, and literacy education. Rather than pinpointing a prescriptive list of attributes of citizenship, Wan (2011) suggested that citizenship "is located in more everyday activities that may be mediated through habits and practices like the literate skills learned in classrooms and beyond" (p. 45). Such habits, which Wan grounds in political theorist Danielle Allen's (2004) work, are the "deep rules" that determine appropriate behaviors and practices among citizens. As we explore next, digital writers need to cultivate habits that are responsive to the conditions of algorithmic circulation outlined earlier. In other words, considering the role of circulation is one habit among many that affects how citizens encounter and engage the world.

### *Toward an Ethics of (Re)circulation*

Given the two stances we articulated earlier (re/circulating writing *is* writing and circulatory writing practices constitute habits of citizenship), we proceed here by sketching what we call the ethics of (re)circulation and describe how circulation is always caught up in a process of relating to networked others. To further support what we've discussed in the previous sections, we draw on Porter's (1998) rhetorical ethics, Brown's (2015) networked ethics, and politics of affect to demonstrate the tenets of our ethical framework.

To begin, we reiterate that practices of circulation—as writing activities—are never neutral or inconsequential. According to Porter (1998), "all acts of writing are also ethical actions... in that they always inevitably assume a 'should' for some 'we'" (p. xiv). If, as we have argued, acts of (re)circulation constitute a kind of writing, it follows that circulating writing assumes a relationship with others. This is not to say, however, that such a relationship is determined once and for all. Porter's (1998) rhetorical ethics contends that ethical actions are kairotic; they are contingent, situational, and circumstantial. Negotiating ethical decisions, asking what is right and what should be, is always entangled in rhetorical practice. We would likewise suggest that managing flows of circulation involves making ethical decisions.

Of course, the writing environments Porter described in 1998 are quite different from what we encounter today. As such, building from Porter, though diverging from him by grounding his discussion in Derrida's notion of hospitality, Brown (2015) argued that we would also do well to account for how writing spaces themselves configure ethical relations. As Brown explained, "Any attempt to account for ethical action in networked life must account not only for individual choice but also for the digital environments that determine how those choices take shape." For Brown, and as we explained in the previous section, network infrastructures come to bear on ethical relations: they shape how we relate to and encounter one another. Brown figured his discussion of ethics in terms of "ethical programs," which he explained has a dual meaning, evoking "both the computational procedures of software (a computer program) and the procedures we develop in order to deal with ethical predicaments (a program of action)." Furthermore, "an ethical program, computational or otherwise, is a set of steps taken to address an ethical predicament." Like Porter's (1998) discussion of rhetorical ethics, ethical programs, when considered from the perspective of the human rhetor, are not easily arrived at—they demand a kind of puzzling through, a questioning that won't arrive at absolute answers.

To this end, recirculating writing doesn't necessarily imply that one ideologically supports the message. Rather, as we explore in the cases later, the writer may be further circulating the message for purposes of exposure, protest, or critique—so that others can interrogate the message in question. Though recirculating aggressive content often works to amplify sentiments of warning and/or critique, part of the ethical challenge here is the need to consider the affective and citational politics of (re)circulating writing. When highly circulatory content moves in networked spheres, it brings with it a surge of affective intensities. For example, Edwards and Lang (2018) described the circulation of affect in their study of #YesAllWomen, noting that affect—not emotion per se, but a kind of atmosphere that emerges in particular ecologies (Edbauer, 2005)—piles up and accumulates to have certain kinds of rhetorical effects. In other words, recirculating harassment for the purpose of offering critique may have difficulty breaking through the affective swell of the already flowing content.

In short, there are no clear-cut answers, as we need to explore ethics of circulation on a case-by-case basis. Developing an ethical stance toward circulation will always be somewhat of a moving target due to the changing dynamics of networked environments. Still, digital writers would benefit from understanding that mundane actions of (re)circulating content are not without consequence. As scholars and teachers of digital rhetoric, we would do well to include into our habits of citizenship fuller understandings of how circulation creates public lifeworlds that are central to civic action.

## Ethics of Recirculation in Action

The remainder of this chapter considers the ethical implications of circulating writing in two particular cases of online aggression and harassment. We chose the following cases because they best demonstrate the rhetorical complexity of circulation and how circulation is a form of writing and authorship. The first case considers a tweet from Donald Trump that prominently featured a GIF of him tackling the CNN logo, which he deemed to be “fake news” (Trump, 2017). By applying a rhetorical and ethical frame of circulation and curation to this tweet and the origins of the GIF, we are able to examine how sharing harassing content increases the impact of that harassment and thus entails a set of fraught ethical relationships. The second case examines the harassment Leslie Jones garnered after the release of the *Ghostbusters* movie trailer on YouTube. We examine how supporters of Jones countered the online aggression she received using ethical circulation approaches to spread positive messages and support for Jones. While the first case largely focuses on the rhetorical–ethical work accomplished by the recirculation of a single text and its modification, the second case explores how people can use similar circulation techniques to offset online harassment.

### *Case 1: Donald Trump, Fake News, and Aggression*

On July 2, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted a GIF of him tackling the CNN logo shortly after he made claims they were “fake news” (Trump, 2017). The accompanying caption read, “#Fraud-NewsCNN #FNN.” The GIF depicted a clip from a 2007 recording of *Wrestlemania* that featured Trump tackling another person, but the GIF had been modified by a redditor depicting the “person” being tackled as the CNN logo. The post originally appeared on the subreddit “r/The\_Donald,” a space that often circulates racist, misogynistic, ableist, and other problematic content. The user who modified the GIF (“HanAss-holeSolo”), who had a history of circulating aggressive content, has since deleted the original post alongside other content and issued an apology. At the time this was taking place, Trump had ramped up his attacks on the news media, expressing his view that news stories were biased and attempting to silence what was really taking place. Often, his comments on “fake news” targeted news media outlets that included unfavorable coverage. The White House claimed that the GIF was not taken from reddit, although they didn’t identify where it came from, and at the time of writing this (almost one year later), the tweet had approximately 136,000 comments, 346,000 shares, and 570,000 likes on Twitter, making it his most retweeted tweet of 2017 (Kelsey, 2017).

Of course, we can discuss the potential harm Trump caused in recirculating the curated content. We can deduce that Trump wants to frame

himself as machismo, as exerting strength and unafraid confidence, even if the imagery of the GIF emerges from a scripted television show. In the process of recirculating the GIF, Trump sets up a series of relationships—between himself and the reddit poster; between himself and the press; between himself and his supporters; and between himself and those who oppose him. Considering the rhetorical value of this GIF prior to its recirculation, the spread of the GIF by @realDonaldTrump gave this object even more power and velocity. In essence, in establishing a relationship between himself and someone who expressed extremist views, Trump promoted a violent and aggressive rhetorical position that rippled out toward others who may encounter the GIF through its recirculation.

In addition to the ethics of Trump sharing the GIF, we are more interested in the everyday acts of recirculating Trump's use of the GIF. When the GIF began to circulate on Twitter and other social networks, we recall a range of people in our own networks recirculating the tweet for a number of reasons. Some retweeted the message in support of the president, while others amplified the message to oppose it. For those in opposition to the GIF, we suspect people began to recirculate the tweet to make sense of and question what had actually happened. As CNN responded, "It is a sad day when the President of the United States encourages violence against reporters" (Stelter, 2017). Recirculations were, as we see it, attempts to bring such a statement to the fore.

Though we acknowledge the many reasons someone might recirculate content, in retrospect, we wonder what those kinds of recirculations accomplish. As mentioned earlier, the affective atmosphere generated from widespread circulation should not be discounted. How might contributing to the velocity of text already in motion contribute to an atmosphere that was manufactured from the start? According to the report "Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online," Marwick and Lewis (2017) described "strategic amplification" as a tactic used to control media messages where content is purposefully "amplified beyond its original scope" (p. 39). Looking particularly at the role of traditional news media (but we'd include everyday citizens, too), Marwick and Lewis (2017) noted:

For manipulators, it doesn't matter if the media is reporting on a story in order to debunk or dismiss it; the important thing is getting it covered in the first place. The amount of media coverage devoted to specific issues influences the presumed importance of these issues to the public. This phenomenon, called agenda setting, means that the media is remarkably influential in determining what people think about.  
(p. 39)

We might think of such agenda setting through strategic amplification as constructing an affective atmosphere that limits the kinds of responses that are likely to emerge. Of course, we don't want to suggest

that opposition is unimportant or not worthwhile; rather, we question the efficacy of participating in a pre-framed affective atmosphere where oppositional voices can easily be drowned out.

Relatedly, in an age where data circulations and “metric power” (Beer, 2016) determine the contours of networked encounters, there is a need to consider the deeper logics of recirculating content. The continued recirculation of this GIF increases its value as it spreads and expands across networks, and in this way the object develops its own power and authority as a result. Brown (2015) argued for paying attention to how digital environments program ethical relations. In this case, if we consider how reddit and other social networks promote sharing, sometimes sharing content isn’t necessarily intended to advocate for the content. Instead, it may be something that the person sharing found to be funny, amusing, touching, critique-worthy, thought-provoking, and any number of other reasons. Furthermore, when we consider the design of these digital environments, they are constructed to make the recirculation of such content easy. One click and a text is shared to a whole other network of connections. One screenshot and an uploaded image moves texts across platforms. However, regardless of intention, the ethical implications of these acts of writing are that the people who shared this GIF are advocating suspicion of and aggression toward news agencies and journalists by presenting an anti-news agenda.

### *Case 2: Ghostbusters, Leslie Jones, and Counter-Circulations of Anti-racism*

The second case we detail here focuses on how circulatory writing practices can work to counter online harassment and aggression. In other words, where we largely focused on the damaging effects of circulating content in the first case, we focus attention here on the more positive effects of amplifying content in efforts to redress and reroute already existing streams of harassment and aggression. We examine the reverberations of a well-known case of targeted harassment in recent years: the coordinated effort to harass actress and comedian Leslie Jones following the debut of the women-led *Ghostbusters* reboot. The hate and violence Jones faced cannot be detached from her positionality as a Black woman on the Internet, as the barrage of vitriol Jones faced was—and continues to be—sexist and racist in nature. Because we want to outline how circulatory practices are tethered to issues of social justice, we look at the ways in which coalition-building and anti-racist praxis circulated in response to the harassment Jones faced.

The harassment of Jones began in the comments section of a YouTube movie trailer for *Ghostbusters* before quickly hardening into a sustained form of brigading. As of March 2018, over 44 million people have

viewed the movie trailer, and over 275,000 people have made comments on the trailer. Thousands of users wrote racist and misogynistic comments about Jones and the other women in the film and then circulated the trailer, along with the comments and memes, within their social media networks. According to *The Guardian*, the *Ghostbusters* movie trailer is the tenth most disliked video on YouTube (Shoard, 2016). This public dislike of the film set in motion an additional barrage of online harassment, starting with Milo Yiannopoulos, who wrote a sexist and racist review of *Ghostbusters* for *Breitbart* that over-energized white supremacist groups and further accelerated the spreading and intensity of hate for and violence against Jones and the other women in the film. The harassment drastically escalated when it connected to trending algorithms on platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. Harassers implemented hashtags like #freemilo to directly coordinate the circulation of hate-filled tweets, and they made fake Twitter accounts for Jones, assuming her identity and tweeting out falsehoods. Jones left Twitter for a short period of time to escape the hatred. After months of harassment, Jones's website was hacked and nude photographs of her were posted in a case of what many have called revenge porn (Sanghani, 2016).

In relation to such harassment and violence, we find that the argument from our first case stands—that is, recirculating harassment regardless of one's position, intentions, or ideology can participate in the further amplification of said harassment, violence, and/or aggression. So instead of focusing on the initial circulatory practices that framed the coordinated effort to harass Jones, we examine how networks of support emerged to amplify anti-racist and intersectional sentiments. In response to Jones's visible harassment, several individuals and groups organized efforts to challenge and redirect the circulatory practices that brought the initial swell of harassment against Jones to a roar. Instead, many people engaged in circulatory practices that advocated for solidarity and support of Jones in particular, while also calling attention to the experiences of being harassed as a Black woman in general.

For example, in reference to the revenge porn posted to Jones's website, pop star Katy Perry (2016) tweeted, "Do not give your eyeballs to this racist, hate-filled, misogynoir crime. I #StandWithLeslie." Invoking misogynoir here, Perry is calling attention to Black feminist Moya Bailey's term for describing the anti-Black racist misogyny Black women experience in daily life (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). Such a response—and the decision to create a new hashtag—works not only to draw attention away from the strategic amplification of harassment but also to redirect circulation flows into a discussion about the unique violences women of color experience. Similarly, the tag #BlackMenSupportLeslie emerged to vocalize the cybercrime inflicted upon Jones, while also affirming the experiences of other Black women. For example, the tag was often recirculated with variations of Malcolm X's famous quote, "the most

disrespected person in America is the Black woman.” As activist April Reign (2016) wrote on Twitter, “#BlackMenSupportLeslie. It is really important that y’all stand up for us, too.” Here, we can see the double work of the hashtag at play—not only does it confront the harassment of Jones without keying into already toxic circulation flows (e.g. recirculating racist content), but it also broadens the discussion to include the lived experiences of other multi-marginalized people. Taken together, these examples demonstrate how mindful circulation techniques can combat online aggression with great effect. Sharing positive messages that function to dismantle online harassment is an example of ethical circulation acting rhetorically to disrupt the social norms that shelter and perpetuate that online harassment.

From a platform policy and computational angle, other hashtags such as #BanNero (@Nero was Yiannopoulos’s Twitter handle) were also circulated to draw attention to Twitter’s consistent failure as a platform to address and punish this type of aggressive behavior. In addition to Jones publicly commenting about Twitter’s lack of response, other high-profile supporters directed efforts to banning some of the most vocal promoters of harassment on the platform. For example, the director of *Ghostbusters*, Paul Feig, publicly denounced the harassment of Jones and became the central catalyst for setting the hashtag activism for Jones into motion. Feig facilitated the circulation of these hashtags into the news feeds of prominent public figures and well-known celebrities so they could help spread support for Jones through their networks. Increasing the exposure of the message within larger social networks widened the support for Jones and brought more awareness to these forms of online injustices and to the frequency at which they occur. In the end, Yiannopoulos’s account was removed from Twitter, though it should be mentioned that it took significant and coordinated effort for the removal to happen.

Such coordinated pushback on online aggressors functions much like an “ethical program” (Brown, 2015). Brown maintained that ethical programs are the approaches and steps individuals take to solve ethical issues, concerns, and problems. The retaliation to the harassment that Jones received, with the use of multiple hashtags and the controlled spreading within particular networks that allowed for the most rhetorical traction, operates as an ethical program that resulted in a permanent Twitter ban for Yiannopoulos, and, according to *Think Progress*, the New York Department of Homeland Security investigated the harassment of Jones in 2016. An ethical program for circulation can result in social justice. Put otherwise, circulating support for Jones as a means to confront digital aggression is the type of “habits of citizenship” (Wan, 2011) for circulation and world-building we advocate for in this chapter. The ethics of circulation we propose support these forms of sharing because they promote the inclusivity, social justice, and mindful contemplation needed to navigate dense and complex social and political cultures.

## Conclusion

In the past decade, the circulatory nature of the web has led to more participatory writing environments. Yet, from these case examples, we can see that the ease of circulation within and across networks can propagate harm, harassment, and violence. In our experiences, many digital writers do not consider sharing instances of online harassment as a kind of writing practice, nor do they consider the ways in which circulation participates in the formation of digital aggression. These cases suggest that we all have a responsibility to consider who is in our networks, how our networks function, and how the movement of content into our networks can bolster the circulation of online harassment. Given the complexities of the aforementioned cases, we end this chapter by briefly considering how researchers, teachers, and writers may better understand the ethical implications of recirculation. Below, we provide some guiding questions to consider when contemplating an ethics of circulation on digital platforms. We envision these questions as a place to formalize discussions about what constitutes ethical circulation writing practices and to move these conversations forward for greater consideration.

*What are the ideological and political assumptions attached to the circulation of the content?* Are there traces of cyberbullying, harassment, or aggression? Circulating content puts your name—and digital identity (Beck, 2015)—behind those messages and in front of more and more people. Regardless of intent, circulation draws an association between yourself and the original message espoused as you enter and engage in conversations surrounding the content. Such an association could have larger implications than considered at the time of circulation.

*Is the content circulated with a sense of care, empathy, and compassion?* If there is something that needs to be shared to make a statement, such as wanting to speak out against cyberbullying or harassment, consider the potential harm caused by recirculating the content. For example, during a talk about this topic and research at a national conference, an author of this chapter chose not to share the GIF referenced in the first case example. She described it and discussed her concerns with it, but she specifically avoided sharing the GIF in an effort to weaken its circulation.

*How might the content be reshaped as it circulates in and beyond your own network?* Attempt to understand whom you are connected to and how those connections could potentially engage or enhance online harassment. Consider how far your network reaches and the ways in which writing gets reshaped as it moves through and beyond your network. Think about how some of your connections may be connected to other, more dangerous, networks that you may be unaware of and cannot see.

*What role do platform policies, architectures, and data practices play in amplifying and/or diminishing aggressive content?* Because platforms use distinctive computational procedures, it's important to consider

how circulation flows are ordered and filtered differently across social media. Furthermore, because individual platforms employ distinctive community guidelines and algorithmic procedures to manage reports of harassment and aggression, further research on platform policies and procedures, as well as careful and kairotic contemplation of the affordances and constraints of individual platform architectures, can be helpful starting points for considering the role platforms play in boosting and/or suppressing harmful content.

*How can scholars, teachers, and writers rethink logics of speed and slow down the circulation process to strive for circulatory practices that are meaningful for the long-term vitality of communities?* Bradshaw (2018) has emphasized the need for researchers and citizens to consider how the speed of circulation can facilitate and/or impede the goals of particular communities. In an all-things-viral era, it's important to consider how community goals can be achieved through deliberate acts of "slow circulation."

*How do you account for anonymous communication and make sure to provide accurate representation of yourself without placing yourself in danger?* Brock and Shepherd (2016) contended that we need to avoid using social media that supports anonymous interaction, and that this avoidance is a form of ethical social media use and resistance. The anonymity and ease at which we can spread content around the Internet aid new forms of online harassment that are restructuring how we interact with each other in digital spaces, and how the circulation of new media and digital writing shapes our identity.

Ultimately, we advocate approaching circulation with attention toward inclusivity and social justice. Ethical sharing takes into account how spreading content creates a powerful force that can both hurt people *and* amplify socially just causes. The dialogue that arises from recirculating hateful, aggressive, or problematic content brings needed awareness and conversation, but here we argue that digital writers and digital scholars should approach engaging in that dialogue in thoughtful and critical ways. We've focused here on redressing online harassment by cultivating habits of citizenship—in our scholarship, classrooms, and public work—that recognize the ethics and responsibility embedded in everyday acts of sharing writing. Making a world worth living in is a shared project. When habits are cultivated to sustain more ethical circulation practices, we might find ourselves in a better position to realize that shared goal.

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