

“If your institution refuses to provide what you need, create it yourself”: Feminist praxis on #AcademicTwitter

Feminism & Psychology
2022, Vol. 32(1) 101–118
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DOI: 10.1177/09593535211052234
journals.sagepub.com/home/fap



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Abstract

Previous research has demonstrated the impact that Twitter can have for promoting and discussing a feminist agenda. Given the gendered neoliberalism that exists within academia, tweets under the hashtag “#AcademicTwitter” may also be an important space for feminist praxis. Yet, to our knowledge, there is no empirical work analysing the function of “Academic Twitter” from a distinctly feminist perspective. Thus, we asked “How is Academic Twitter used for feminist praxis?”. We conducted a reflexive thematic analysis of 596 tweets containing the hashtag #AcademicTwitter. This generated four themes showing how Academic Twitter can be a valuable site for feminist praxis, by enabling academics to “give testimony to academia”, “access the hidden curriculum”, and engage in both “academic kindness” and “resistance and advocacy”. Despite these benefits, we also observed a tension between Academic Twitter as a site for feminist practice yet also as potentially complicit in promoting the competitiveness and overwork that pervades academia. We recommend that future feminist research interrogates the ways in which more diverse forms of feminist praxis, including more negative experiences, are negotiated on Academic Twitter.

Keywords

advocacy, feminist methodology, online communities, Twitter, social media, support

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Academia can be a hostile, oppressive, and lonely field to navigate. It is entrenched with neoliberal values, a culture of overwork and competitiveness, and widespread job precarity in the UK and US (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2021; Tynan & Garbett, 2007). Therefore, the challenge of navigating the demands, “hidden curriculum”, and workload of academia is pervasive. One increasingly popular method of navigating these discipline-specific challenges is engaging with fellow academics on Twitter, hereafter referred to as “Academic Twitter”. Twitter is a microblogging platform that was established in 2006 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). On Twitter, account holders send tweets, or short statements, that are limited to 280 characters. The primary focus of Twitter is sharing information and expressing opinions (Kwak et al., 2010), and tweets can be shared (i.e., retweeted) many times, meaning they have the potential to reach a vast audience and have a significant impact (Highfield, 2016).

Previous research demonstrates how Twitter serves practical functions for academics specifically. For example, a recent study showed how academic papers that are tweeted receive more coverage and citations than papers that have no Twitter presence (Luc et al., 2021). Similarly, Twitter can be a useful place to forge academic collaborations (e.g., Prosser, 2020), engage in science communication and outreach, and “keep up” with academic conferences (Letierce et al., 2010). This demonstrates the advantage that scholars with an active Twitter presence have, allowing them to more readily “compete” in the neoliberal academic environment, while also gaining all-important access to the “hidden curriculum”, or “insider knowledge”, of mainstream academia. Here, we are interested in how some of these functions of #AcademicTwitter may go beyond practical, logistical benefits, and also be inherently aligned with a feminist agenda.

The value of online communities

Subsections of Twitter, such as Academic Twitter, are essentially crafted online communities. Scholars have demonstrated how online communities, such as those afforded by social media, can build and nurture collective identities and interactions (Talbot et al., 2020), provide space for the sharing and co-creation of online content (Lyons & Veenstra, 2016), and foster collegiality and togetherness (Schuster, 2013). Some have also called for a feminist analysis and appraisal of “new medias” such as Twitter (Kingston Mann, 2014), noting the capacity for online spaces to serve distinctly feminist functions. Importantly, digital spaces can also be used to prompt action, in the form of social movements (Wilkins et al., 2019) and intersectional activism (Zimmerman, 2017).

Beyond these benefits, it is important to note that digital spaces can also be places of trolling and online abuse (e.g., Chetty & Alathur, 2018). In a linguistic analysis of the abuse directed towards feminist activist Caroline Criado-Perez, Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) note the prevalence of online misogyny and gendered hate speech on Twitter. Their analysis showed that feminist rhetoric online was subjected to misogynistic insults and discourses of sexual violence. This risk or threat of online abuse on Twitter is amplified for people who occupy minoritised or marginalised identities (e.g., Barlow & Awan, 2016).

In contrast, some scholars suggest that Twitter may be particularly *useful* for marginalised or oppressed groups, because it facilitates online communities that can empower,

unionise, and support people from these groups (e.g., Lee-Won et al., 2018). Despite the abuse that can feature in online spaces, some scholars have argued that digital platforms are generally well aligned to the goals and agenda of online feminisms (e.g., Locke et al., 2018). That is, social media platforms can be important spaces to engage in feminist activism (Turley & Fisher, 2018). Social media can be used to both discuss and gauge public opinion on gender issues, and to advocate for social justice issues in diverse and inclusive ways (Scarborough, 2018). Twitter, in particular, serves as an important space for “doing” feminist work online.

Feminist praxis on Twitter

Before we discuss how online communities enable academics to navigate their work, it is first important to establish how we define and conceptualise feminism in this context. We appreciate Ahmed’s (2018) notion of feminism, as a “a dialogue, a dance, a chance, what we have to do to be” (para. 26). We align our feminist epistemology with the celebratory and optimistic sense of opportunity that feminism can offer. Feminism, to us, is about empowerment, sharing experiences, finding what unites us, and using our platforms to advocate for others. As Thelander (2014) notes, rather than “getting stuck” on difference, feminism’s goal should be to strengthen political and personal consciousness that allows for difference while “working as one larger self” (p. 529).

We are informed by other definitions and demonstrations of how this feminist praxis is achieved online; for example, Puente (2011) provides a discussion of feminist cyberactivism, noting the internet’s potential for “collective action, political influence, and collaborative empowerment” (p. 335). This definition is useful, because it acknowledges how online spaces can be beneficial for collegiality and empowerment, but also flags how it is entangled with other dominant discourse of politics and power that must also be grappled with.

Previous research has also demonstrated the impact that Twitter can have for promoting and discussing a feminist agenda (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018; Turley & Fisher, 2018). Rentschler (2015) documented the feminist response to #SafetyTipsForWomen, a trend criticised for promoting victim-blaming and rape myths, noting how tweets in this instance served as a “collectivised expression of feminist ‘fed-upness’” (p. 354). Similarly, Zimmerman (2017) appraised Crenshaw’s notion of *intersectionality*, which describes how social identities intersect in interlocking systems of “oppression” and applies this concept to identities in the digital era. Zimmerman notes that Twitter provides a space for solidarity and activism, as well as a means of disseminating knowledge. In turn, this can identify and contest power dynamics, inequalities, and social justice concerns that are at the heart of a feminist agenda.

There is a lively body of research which recognises specific “moments” on Twitter as important instances of feminist activism. Puente et al. (2021) analysed a sample of tweets following the #8M feminist movement in Spain, highlighting how Twitter provides opportunities to “give testimony” on gender-based violence. Likewise, Barker-Plummer and Barker-Plummer (2017) explored collective identity on Twitter and focused specifically on the #YesAllWomen movement, which considered how viral movements on social media can be an “agenda building” event with worldwide impact. Other examples

include Bowles Eagle's (2015) appraisal of #BoardTheBus and the Everyday Sexism Project, Mendes et al.'s (2018) account of the #MeToo Twitter movement, and Lommel et al.'s (2019) analysis of feminist identity in the #DayWithoutWomen hashtag.

Given this earlier work which explored the feminist function of other spaces and "moments" on Twitter, we define feminist praxis, in this context, as also being about feminist collectiveness and intellectual companionship. This provides a valid alternative to the (implicitly masculine) demands of individualism that are present within typical, hierarchical university structures, and allows us to critically reflect on inclusion and exclusion mechanisms in the creation and use of knowledge (Gardiner, 2005). Moreover, although our work focuses on how *academics* use Academic Twitter to fulfil feminist functions, rather than necessarily how *women* use the platform, we are informed by the ongoing discussions on how women's friendships facilitate navigation of neoliberal and postfeminist discourses. This is echoed in Martinussen et al.'s (2020) discussion of women's friendship as a means of "escaping the regimes of productivity" (p. 8). In their analysis, Martinussen et al. (2020) showed how participants construct their female friendship to constitute an "escape", which centres around authenticity, intimacy, and comfort. Women in the study described their friendships as a space to subvert, reject, or reinscribe feminine norms of "niceness", thus giving way to empowerment by resisting the ever-present pressure of self-management and self-scrutiny. This demonstrates, in one neat example, the powerful feminist function of collegiality and togetherness.

#Academictwitter

Given the gendered neoliberalism that exists within academia (Hawkins et al., 2014), Academic Twitter may also serve some of the functions outlined by previous feminist scholarship in studies of activism in digital spaces. Indeed, an online presence on Academic Twitter has many personal and professional uses, such as the creation and sustainment of one's "academic brand" (Singh, 2015), the sharing of career advancement opportunities (Gregory, 2018) and the capacity to dismantle imposter syndrome online (Taylor & Breeze, 2020). Importantly, unlike other academic online spaces such as ResearchGate or Academia.edu, Twitter may subscribe less rigidly to some of the hierarchies and power imbalances that are implicit in academia, because it has the capacity for both "personal" and "professional" identities to coexist, thus giving way to some "messy" identities and vulnerabilities (Budge et al., 2016; Taylor & Breeze, 2020). As Stewart (2016) argues, Academic Twitter allows scholars to build online networks through humour, commonality, and identity, and these networks may otherwise not be afforded through institutional access alone. This space may be particularly useful for early career researchers (ECRs), by providing a space that can foster support and collegiality (Ferguson & Wheat, 2015).

The interplay between feminist agendas and the function of Academic Twitter has been subject to some scholarly discussion, but there is a notable lack of empirical work that analyses the feminist function of tweets. We address this gap in our work, which sits at the intersection of academia, feminism, and online communities. Thus, in this paper, we ask: "How is Academic Twitter used for feminist praxis?"

Method

Data collection and sampling

On 17 October 2020 16:44, Ncapture was used to collect tweets containing the search term “#AcademicTwitter”. Ncapture collected a total of 17,909 tweets, including 11,958 retweets, posted between 9 and 17 October. As we were primarily interested in the content of individual tweets, retweets were excluded from the sample, reducing the sample to 5951 tweets. To ensure the amount of data collected was not unwieldy, we used a random number generator to sample 10% of tweets, resulting in a final sample of 596 tweets. Because we were interested in the feminist function of Academic Twitter rather than how feminist academics use Twitter, the sample comprised tweets from a range of people in academia and was not limited to self-identified feminists.

Analysis

Tweets were imported into NVivo 12 and analysed thematically, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis approach. We considered this type of analysis appropriate because we were interested in patterns of meaning and wanted to centre our subjectivity in the analysis, using it as an important “analytic resource” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 3). That is, given that we both actively participate in Academic Twitter, and thus share perspectives that cannot be disentangled from the analysis, we wanted to ensure that these subjectivities were centred throughout the analytical process.

First, both authors met to discuss the theoretical framework and key concepts underpinning the analysis. This included the “feminist function” of Academic Twitter, as per the academic literature. For example, we discussed the capacity for Twitter to destabilise and challenge power, to validate experiences, and to collectivise and unionise people towards a common goal (e.g., Careless, 2015; Locke et al., 2018). We also discussed how Twitter has the capacity for people to be trolled online, given how social media are often spaces of misogyny, online abuse, and harassment (e.g., Campbell, 2017).

Both authors then read 100 tweets, marking initial codes ideas for subsequent phases of the analysis. We then regrouped to share ideas and generate initial codes. Following this, the first author coded all 596 tweets. Tweets were coded in a deductive and latent way, reflecting existing feminist concepts (e.g., exposing inequalities; supportive communities; access to knowledge) and reporting assumptions underpinning the data. In the process of coding, semantic codes (i.e., codes reflecting the specific content of the data) were also generated. After tweets were coded, initial themes were generated and critically evaluated by both authors. Themes were then refined until both authors agreed on the finalised versions.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Leeds School of Psychology Ethics Committee on 16 October 2020 (Reference: PSYC-108). The British Psychological

Society Code of Ethics (2021) states that unless consent has been sought, observation of public behaviour must take place in spaces where individuals would expect to be observed by strangers (see also BPS Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research, 2021). Public tweets can, therefore, be viewed as public behaviour. This is consistent with recent research that uses tweets as data (e.g., Talbot & Branley-Bell, 2021; Williams et al., 2017), reflecting a consensus among social media researchers (and the ethics committees that have approved their research) that public tweets can be classed as publicly available data (British Psychological Society, 2021; Franzke et al., 2020).

Despite this, as researchers, we have a social responsibility to consider the potential harms of our research and employ appropriate measures to protect account holders. In research that uses tweets as data, it is possible that account holders' anonymity could be compromised in any reporting of data (British Psychological Society, 2021; Franzke et al., 2020). This is because a Google search of quoted tweets could lead directly to the accounts from which the tweets were posted. To promote good practice and protect the anonymity of participants, the data presented here are paraphrased in a manner that retains the original meaning. We made this decision with the aim of minimising potential harms to account holders, given the precarity of academia and widespread reports of abuse, trolling, and the silencing of academics online, particularly women (Campbell, 2017; Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2021). Reporting the original tweets could draw attention to individual account holders, potentially holding them accountable to their universities and making them vulnerable to online abuse. While we appreciate that paraphrasing tweets may cause some of the nuances of the author's original meaning to be reclaimed and reinterpreted by the researchers, we were conscious of the potential harm that de-anonymised data may prompt, and thus championed anonymity via careful paraphrasing over verbatim representation of participants' words.

Both authors attended a virtual meeting where we worked together to paraphrase the tweets, carefully considering how each tweet could be paraphrased but still retain its original meaning. This involved making minor changes to tweets, such as using synonyms, full form abbreviations, and not including certain hashtags. These discussions continued until both authors agreed upon the final paraphrased version of each tweet. Paraphrased tweets were then input into Google and Twitter's search engines to ensure that quotations do not lead directly to the original poster.

Reflexive statement

In a discussion of reflexive thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 591) write that qualitative research is "context-bound, positioned, and situated". Thus, we approach our work with an understanding that we are *active instruments* in the research process and any outputs are a product of our researcher subjectivity and thoughtful engagement with the analysis. We also acknowledge that as two white female early-career academics who are very much a *part of* the praxis we are investigating, we have a unique perspective that must be navigated sensitively. As early-career academics, we are increasingly attuned to the capacity for Twitter to allow us to "compete" with the escalating demands of precarious academic life. We also both identify as feminists and are active users of Twitter,

often engaging with and contributing to Academic Twitter. In fact, upon collecting the data, we recognised that some of our own tweets were featured in the data, showing that we are active agents in the research design, “creation” and collection of data, analysis, and outputs. We excluded our tweets from the sample; however, we recognise that future autoethnographic research may yield further insights on this topic. For us, Academic Twitter has been a valuable resource during our academic journeys, providing much needed support, information, and humour.

We approached our analysis with this understanding, while also trying to remain sensitive to the notion that although we occupy marginalised spaces within academia as early-career researchers, we also both occupy a unique position of privilege as white women. Although we have both experienced trolling and “backlash” on Twitter – experiences which have guided our reading of the data – our whiteness means that this trolling is distinct from the racially motivated abuse and discrimination that academics of colour have faced. In light of this, we were conscious of the “white academics upholding whiteness” (Brooks-Immel & Murray, 2017) discourse that can lead to “colour blindness” and erroneously regarding one’s experience as normative. Our concern for avoiding “colour blindness” is also in recognition that there are spaces within Twitter that are championed by black academics, which provide unique functions (e.g., Sharma, 2013). These conversations guided our analysis, and our reading of the data was framed within the cultural capital and positions of simultaneous privilege and marginalisation that we share as researchers.

Results and discussion

We generated four themes from the data: (1) Giving testimony to academia; (2) Collegiality and democratising knowledge; (3) Academic kindness; (4) Resistance and advocacy. Our findings illustrate the various ways that Academic Twitter can serve as a space for feminist praxis. Connecting these themes is a sense of communality and collegiality that was created by academics on Twitter through feminist fed-upness and a desire to change the system. As one person tweeted: “If your institution refuses to provide what you need, create it yourself”.

Theme 1: Giving testimony to academia

We observed that Academic Twitter is a space where negative narratives of academia are communicated. As per Rentschler (2015), we interpret these tweets as collective expressions of “fed-upness”. Account holders shared narratives of busyness, overwork, and looming deadlines, which served to normalise the day-to-day labour involved in academia and demystify the experience of being an academic in the contemporary university:

Each week when I’m not lecturing I spend my time revising lectures to work with three different modes. This shit is tiring and stressful.

These struggles seemed particularly amplified by the strains of the COVID-19 pandemic, with academics facing heavier workloads and increasing job precarity (Kınıkoğlu & Can, 2021), an issue which is heightened among women and other minoritised groups (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020). In line with this notion of “collective fed-upness”, other account holders described experiences of fatigue, burnout, and the struggle of balancing research and teaching. For example, one account holder tweeted:

I promised myself that today would be better, but now I'm feeling more exhausted and burnt out than I ever have.

Tweets served to expose the toxic culture permeating academia, which was exemplified by stories of overwork and being undervalued. This allowed Twitter to serve as an emancipatory space, where the unjustness and overwork of an academic career can be exposed and shared. Some account holders spoke about this explicitly, taking to Twitter to express guilt, sadness, or feelings of imposter syndrome that result from a culture of overwork.

Today is the first holiday I've had “off” officially in over five years not writing or researching. #AcademicTwitter why is it that I feel guilty?

We know from previous work that tweets can draw attention to key issues and provide opportunities for account holders to “give testimony”, which is an important facet of feminist advocacy (Puente et al., 2021). In the context of academia, we observed that Academic Twitter provides some account holders with a safe space that facilitates honest discussions about the harsh realities of academic life, allowing academics to calibrate their experiences. This echoes Bayfield et al. (2020), who suggest that certain “‘is it just me?’ moments” (p. 423) online serve to empower and unionise academics. Consistent with this, account holders often questioned whether their experiences were the norm.

#AcademicTwitter: Is it NORMAL to lie in bed all day and watch TV to escape reality? (Reality to me is editing my thesis)

Beyond the practical, day-to-day aspects of academia, other account holders reached out to Academic Twitter to gain advice on dealing with difficult gendered situations, such as “mansplaining”:

Any advice on how to politely tell your manager that he has mansplained you in a meeting? I really don't think he meant to do it, but I found myself saying “That's what I just said” quite a bit.

In this sense, Academic Twitter provides academics with a space to calibrate their experiences online. While negative stories of academia were prominent, account holders also used

Academic Twitter to document their accomplishments. Account holders sent tweets about accepted publications, thesis submissions, receiving and submitting grants, amongst other academic tasks:

Here's to my first post and first article that was accepted for publication!

We interpret these acts of self-promotion as inherently feminist, especially for women and marginalised groups; however, it is also possible that a proliferation of such tweets could serve a negative function, by encouraging upward social comparisons and facilitating competition between peers:

Nothing like some time spent on #AcademicTwitter to make you feel really rubbish about yourself. Who has time to write articles and books right now?!

Thus, our findings suggest there is a tension between Twitter being a space for feminist praxis, yet also potentially being complicit in promoting the competitiveness and overwork that pervades offline academic settings (Tynan & Garbett, 2007). This mirrors Gill's (2016, p. 610) observation that feminisms online are "intimately connected to neoliberalism". Therefore, future work should elaborate on this point, noting how Twitter may also reproduce some of the competitiveness that is implicit in academia more broadly. Moreover, our analysis was concerned with the feminist *function* that tweets serve on Academic Twitter, rather than necessarily the *experiences* that academics have when engaging with Academic Twitter. This now gives way to a new line of research, which could consider how different intersecting groups of academics experience the benefits and challenges of Academic Twitter in unique ways (e.g., Barlow & Awan, 2016).

Theme 2: Accessing the hidden curriculum

Our second theme centred around democratisation of knowledge and using Twitter to access knowledge online. Account holders used Twitter to inspire a sense of collegiality; in turn, democratising access to the hidden knowledge or "hidden curriculum" of academia. For example, account holders took to Twitter to directly gain access to the hidden curriculum of academia, by demystifying academic processes such as applying for fellowships and grants:

Hello #AcademicTwitter! When you apply for fellowships is it ok for postgraduates to put "in prep" manuscripts on their fellowship applications?

Access to the "hidden curriculum" of academia has been a common feminist concern (e.g., Margolis & Romero, 1998). In our data, account holders used Twitter as a platform to gain access to this hidden knowledge and insight into the wider structural challenges of academia. Thus, Academic Twitter serves an important function to democratise access to knowledge about the processes of academia, such as grant-writing, applying for academic jobs, and publishing papers. One way in which account holders achieved this was by

asking direct questions to the Twitter community about the “nuts and bolts” of academic work:

Any top tips for finding jobs and funding? I've relied on mailing lists & various internal opportunities at my university but I'd like to know if there's more out there?

Importantly, this capacity for Twitter to open up academic spaces and improve the accessibility of knowledge aligns with recent shifts towards open scholarship in academia, which has previously been conceptualised as extending the feminist agenda (e.g., Pownall et al., 2021). As well as using Twitter to ask for help, some account holders also used it to provide information. This often looked like crowd-sourced resources for academics, academic job advertisements, or useful “hints and tips” for navigating the field. For example, one person tweeted:

If you have been affected by the #AcademicFreeze, my PhD supervisor is still hiring post-docs! Wonder what are the “proposal secrets” behind such a well-funded lab? This thread summarises my top tips!

We view this knowledge sharing as occupying a distinctly feminist function, aligned with the “democratising of knowledge” feminist concern that has arisen from the advocacy of civil rights and accessibility (e.g., Blackmore, 2003).

Theme 3: Academic kindness

Community is a hallmark of feminism; as Lorde (1984, p. 18) notes, “without community there is no liberation”. A concern for community and togetherness was present in our data, with some account holders taking to Twitter to encourage, support, and mentor others. This is consistent with Taylor and Breeze's (2020) assertion that Twitter can be a useful place for academics to grapple with imposter syndrome in the neoliberal academy. For example, one person tweeted:

If you are struggling or doubting yourself right now, don't let imposter syndrome tell you otherwise. You are amazing and you deserve it. #keepgoing

One way in which academics supported one another was through online writing communities that were promoted on and facilitated by Twitter, using hashtags such as “#Acwri”. This mirrors Hammond's (2020) observation that writing retreats can serve an important feminist function, by creating a space for academics to reflect, practise self-kindness, and re-examine the internalisation of neoliberal ideals. This is exemplified by one person's tweet promoting an online writing retreat:

Is anyone around tomorrow? If you're planning to do some lonely writing, consider joining my online writing retreat for a bit of community support! It's a full day of writing together and feeling great!

Other researchers have found that virtual writing groups can be an effective resource, transforming writing from a solitary practice into a social one (O'Dwyer et al., 2017). This in itself is a feminist practice; as scholars have noted, writing groups engender collectivity and thus challenge neoliberal discourses of writing as an individual practice that is competitively ranked and measured (Grant, 2006). Therefore, we interpret Academic Twitter writing groups as also serving a feminist function, by fostering connections and collective writing practice.

The sense of community and kindness observed in our data aligns with a concern for care, nurturance, and “communality”, which is inherently feminist (Friedman, 1995). Academic Twitter appears to be having a positive impact on some people's lives, as evidenced by users who explicitly thanked it for providing access to knowledge and communities:

I am thankful for all the brilliant people I've connected with on #AcademicTwitter. Thank you so much for coming on this ride with me, everyone!

Thus, Academic Twitter may provide a useful outlet for academics who are increasingly competing in a neoliberal academy. Hawkins et al. (2014, p. 330) argued that neoliberal universities are “increasingly permeated by isolation and individuality”. Attempts to deconstruct this competitiveness, through sharing kindness online, are all inherently aligned with a feminist agenda. Our findings suggest that Academic Twitter is providing one way of countering the culture of individualism within the academy, by facilitating communities of support.

Theme 4: Resistance and advocacy

Advocacy was a core component of Academic Twitter. Hill (2018) noted how online spaces can be useful for resisting dominant discourses and carving out new narratives, in their discussion of the “pedagogy of resistance” on Black Twitter. This was also true for Academic Twitter, where account holders amplified the voices and experiences of diverse voices in academia and drew attention to systemic issues:

Some professors describe requests for inclusivity, e.g., for disabled learners, during COVID as taking things “too far”. If inclusivity and accessibility are too great a burden for you, you are the problem!

These discussions were facilitated by a range of hashtags such as #BlackAcademicTwitter; #BlackInStem; #BlackInTheIvory; #LgbtStem; #PhDParent; #WomenInStem. Other feminist scholars have written about the value of women “taking up space” (Martin & Valenti, 2013), which we see reflected in the use of these hashtags. These hashtags enabled women and other marginalised groups in academia to take up space on Twitter, providing a platform where their narratives could be communicated and potentially facilitate change.

Read this and use it to reflect upon your research: “The academic publication process has legitimised scholarship that obfuscates the role of racism in determining health care.”
#BlackLivesMatter

Consistent with these acts of advocacy, we found that account holders also used Academic Twitter to applaud organisations who took positive steps towards inclusivity:

Great news! [@journal] now has a policy of honouring name changes for transgender and non-binary authors, follow this link for more info!

While using Twitter as a vehicle for social change, we found evidence of account holders resisting the doctrine of neoliberalism. Specifically, some used Academic Twitter to resist a culture of overwork. Mountz et al. (2015) suggested that reclaiming time through “slow scholarship” champions a feminist ethics of care and allows for the neoliberal pressures to be actively resisted. For account holders, this often included a sense of self-advocacy and frustration with the systems that govern academia:

Who else thinks “fuck you!” to Friday?! So near the weekend, yet oh so far. I’m doing absolutely nothing tomorrow.

Another way in which academics resisted the neoliberal academy was through using Twitter to promote self-kindness and self-compassion. Other feminist scholars have claimed that self-care is “political warfare when coping with ongoing everyday injustices” (Adams-Hutcheson & Johnston, 2019, p. 463). Academics discussed their “self-care” strategies and celebrated their own non-academic achievements:

As of today, I’ve covered two thousand miles since I started cycling in June!

Non-academic goals really help keep me motivated when work is difficult. So, what non-academic goals are you working on? #AcademicTwitter

We interpret these kinds of non-academic tweets as engendering a sense of togetherness and solidarity among users, which serves to dismantle the erroneous “personal-professional” binary that can be present in academic spaces. As Bayfield et al. (2020) note, there is much to be gained from blurring the boundary between the “personal” and the “professional” as this can foster a sense of collegiality online.

Conclusion

Our reflexive thematic analysis demonstrated the various ways in which Academic Twitter aligns with the goals of a feminist agenda. Some account holders use their platform to “give testimony”, advocate for other academics, and break down the inaccessibility and “hidden curriculum” of academia. Others used Twitter to engage in “academic kindness”, establishing a sense of collegiality and togetherness online. Some users also

notably used Twitter as a form of resistance; account holders often took to Twitter to resist the doctrine of neoliberalism that pervades academia. Taken together, our analysis demonstrates that Twitter can provide a space for solidarity, collegiality, and activism, suggesting that Academic Twitter may provide an important site for feminist praxis. This largely echoes previous feminist work on the functions of social media platforms (e.g., see Locke et al., 2018). Despite these benefits, we also observed a tension between Academic Twitter being a site for feminist practice yet also potentially being complicit in promoting the competitiveness and overwork that pervades offline academic settings.

Given our reflexive position as white women and our decision to analyse tweets rather than experiences, our analysis primarily reflects the positive aspects of Academic Twitter. We recognise that there are certain privileges associated with accessing digital platforms such as Twitter, which means that not all academics are able to as readily participate. Firstly, Twitter's openness means that employers may be able to locate an academic's online profile, which represents another powerful force that users must contend with. The open accessibility of Twitter also means that the platform is open and accessible to trolls, bullies, or online abusers (Campbell, 2017). Negative experiences on Twitter largely intersect with privileges; certain minoritized groups may be more susceptible to these online harms. Beyond our experiences, we appreciate that there are lively bodies of literature which consider how other minority groups navigate this online (e.g., Mathew et al., 2018).

Our analysis focuses predominantly on how Twitter can serve specific *feminist functions*, rather than looking specifically at how *feminist academics* use and experience Twitter. Thus, future work may also wish to ascertain how Twitter is used by different groups of academics. For example, prior work demonstrates how ECRs, people of colour, and women, are typically marginalised from mainstream spaces in academia (Gruber et al., 2020; Macoun & Miller, 2014) and thus face unique barriers to participation, which may be navigated differently online (Thwaites & Pressland, 2017). Therefore, future work may tease apart these nuances more explicitly, by analysing other "areas" of Academic Twitter, such as #Momademia, #LGBTStem, #BlackInTheIvory.

Analyses of more niche areas in Academic Twitter can provide a more comprehensive picture of how Twitter may also reproduce some of the narratives of competitiveness and overwork that are implicit in academia broadly. For example, academic mothers face unique challenges in the navigation of the explicit and implicit competitiveness and "productivity mandate" that is present in academia (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2018), and are, therefore, likely to experience Academic Twitter in different ways. Therefore, future research could investigate how different groups of academics experience Academic Twitter differently, to add wider nuance to the findings presented here.

In summary, our findings suggest that Academic Twitter can be a valuable site for feminist praxis, by allowing academics to share and calibrate their experiences online, advocate for others, democratise access to knowledge, and engage in self-care and self-compassion. However, our findings also suggest that Academic Twitter may promote the competitiveness and overwork that permeates the neoliberal academy. We recommend that future feminist research interrogates the ways in which more diverse forms of feminist praxis and more negative experiences are negotiated on Academic Twitter. In doing

so, this will extend the feminist agenda to also consider the more complex relationships that academics have both *with* and *on* Twitter.


Declaration of conflicting interests


The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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