## Digital Identity and Everyday Activism: Sharing Private Stories with Networked Publics

Vivienne, Sonja
Palgrave Macmillan Springer Nature, 2016

Book Review

Tags: faculty identity   |   student identity   |   teacher scholar-activist   |   transformative teaching

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**Date Reviewed:** September 20, 2016

This small book is a brilliant example of grounded research that is thoroughly infused with theoretical insight and practical engagement. At first glance people looking for pedagogical wisdom might not be attracted by the title, but at the center of the book are questions of identity and everyday activism – topics that are vitally important in the midst of higher education contexts permeated with fears of "coddling students" and arguments over the value of "trigger warnings."

Vivienne is based at Flinders University of South Australia. This book draws on her background in media production and working with marginalized communities towards social change, and focuses on research she did with GLBTQ communities learning how to create in a specific form of digital storytelling:

Digital stories are short (3-5 minutes) rich media autobiographical videos, combining personal photographs and /or artworks, narration, and music. They are traditionally created in a workshop context that takes place over 3-4 days and includes a story circle, technical instruction, and celebratory screening for fellow storytellers and invited guests. (3)

Because persons within GLBTQ communities must constantly negotiate how they represent themselves, when and how they claim specific forms of identity, and in what ways they make these claims publicly, digital storytelling offered a compelling medium for a research project interested in exploring the challenges of sharing private stories with networked publics. The book is full of descriptions of how these stories emerged, with links to specific videos referenced available online.

Vivienne's work is both participatory and activist in methodology, drawing on the theoretical work of scholars such as Benhabib, Butler, Young, boyd, Jenkins, Bahktin, and Foucault. She ensures that the complexity of these theoretical interventions are made vividly accessible by using them to attend to the conundrums of claiming identity in the midst of highly contested spaces. She highlights the capacity of digital storytelling for reaching across various forms of difference:

bridge building is reflected in the capacity to negotiate one's position as a part of or apart from networked publics – including familiar, intimate, counter, and unknown. Digital storytelling creates opportunities to 'bring things up,' to broach difficult discussions 'out in the open.' Ownership of one's position in society (as represented in a digital story) is reflected in the capacity to receive and give affirmation. Further, public expression of marginalized voices opens space for others to speak as they also negotiate how and where they fit in the world. As a medium that facilitates speaking across difference and bridge building, digital storytelling evokes the profound significance of participatory media as a widespread global phenomenon. (196-197)

Along the way she defines and describes digital storytelling, everyday activism, erosive social change, and a concept she names "Intimate Citizenship 3.0," as well as exploring issues of identity, nominalization, authenticity, coherence, and congruence in such media.

Her research concludes with four specific findings:

Institutions and facilitators can be transparent in *actively acknowledging their discursive mediating influence upon the construction of individual and collective identities.*

*[A]wareness of networked identity work* provides an opportunity to sculpt *congruent rather than coherent narratives* and this labour can have both *personal value* and *constitutive cultural value.*

*[A]ctive consideration of distribution* of private stories amplifies personal and social benefits, especially as a tool for everyday activism.

[I]nitiatives benefit from reflective analysis of *cross-disciplinary community engagement strategies,* social movement theory, and strategic listening across difference. (205-206)

While this book does not directly highlight pedagogies for religious studies or theology classrooms, it is full of stories in which workshop participants confront and contest religious claims their families, their communities, and broader "imagined" publics are making. By

offering compelling descriptions of ways to engage such meaning-making that invite people into dialogue across various divides, this book embodies transformative adult learning and offers a rich collection of pragmatic advice for nurturing such learning.