



Uio • University of Oslo

## #Wearadammask

### *A textual analysis of citizen-led surveillance and digitally mediated shaming during the coronavirus pandemic*

Hanna Marie Nicholas

Master's Thesis in Screen Cultures

Department of Media and Communication  
University of Oslo

Spring 2021



## **#Wearadammask**

*A textual analysis of citizen-led surveillance and  
digitally mediated shaming during the coronavirus  
pandemic*



Copyright Hanna Marie Nicholas

2021

#Wearadammask: A Textual Analysis of Citizen-led Surveillance and Digitally Mediated Shaming During the Coronavirus pandemic

<http://duo.uio.no>



## **Abstract**

In this thesis I explore how digitally mediated shaming has manifested during the coronavirus pandemic in the United States. Focusing on what I perceive to be a distinctly American phenomenon: the politicisation and antagonistic nature of facemask disputes which have been recorded in semi-public, commercial spaces and subsequently uploaded and circulated in digital networks. In order to unfold the events, I have performed close, textual analysis of the audio-visual texts, in addition to their paratextual presentation and user-generated engagement on Twitter. While I do not suggest that newer, screen-based technologies are an exclusive cause of these modern, digitalised forms of public shaming, lowered access to material conditions, like phones with integrated cameras and instant internet connections, undoubtedly help facilitate the practice. Furthermore, I posit that the camera phone takes on a distinct and active role in shaping the recorded events and becomes a means for ‘ordinary’ people to weaponise visibility as a means to leverage power in social interactions with strangers. Recorded events and their subjects are subsequently distributed in affective networks where they are subjected to condemnation and punitive action by vast audiences. This is done through a hybridisation of sensational communicative styles, activism and vigilante practices. By observing the minutiae of these video recordings and their subsequent circulation and reception on Twitter, I claim that the texts provide invaluable insight into the negotiations of the everyday socio-political struggle of a fragmented, American public, whose failure to reach forms of cohesion is threatening the very foundation of democratic processes in modern society.





## Acknowledgments

As for many others, writing this thesis has been a rollercoaster of emotions and I couldn't have done it without the support and assistance of people around me.

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Steffen Krüger. Thank-you for your invaluable advice and guidance, and for your patience and confidence in me and this project. I couldn't have asked for a better supervisor, it has been a joy.

Thank-you to the thesis-crew, Jeevs, Matei and Basak, whose Monday morning Zoom-chats made working at my kitchen table for six months feel a little less lonely. Thank-you for brainstorming, stimulating discussions and for sharing your own frustrations throughout the semester.

Many thank-you's are in order to my family, who have all continued to believe in me, even during times when I wasn't able to share in their faith. You have kept me above water. I thank my dear sister, Michelle who, despite a busy schedule, took the time to proofread. Dad, thank-you for words of encouragement and a sympathetic ear. Mum, you deserve a thousand thank-you's for being my lifelong cheerleader. Thank-you for listening and for always showing up. To Jørgen, my love of loves. Thank-you for putting things in perspective, for calming my crazy, making me laugh and for being my best friend. And finally, to Nan-Nan. Completing this project was my quiet promise to you. I wish you were here to see it. Thank-you for everything. I miss you.



# Table of Contents

<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research questions.....	4
1.2 Project structure .....	9
<b>2 Literature review .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 A history of public shaming.....	11
2.2 A history of mediated, public shaming .....	12
2.2.1 Reality television.....	13
2.3 Digitally mediated shaming .....	14
<b>3 Theory .....</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1 Shame and stigmatisation .....	18
3.2 Context collapse.....	20
3.3 Affect and affective networks .....	21
3.4 A mediated culture of visibility .....	25
3.5 The Strangershot .....	27
3.6 Affordances.....	28
3.6.1 Twitter – affordances and techno-cultural environment .....	28
<b>4 Methods and methodologies.....</b>	<b>32</b>
4.1 Why textual analysis? .....	32
4.2 Textual analysis .....	33
4.3 Semiology .....	35
4.4 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).....	36
4.4.1 Discourse as visual methodology.....	39
4.4.2 Discourse and orders of discourse .....	40
4.4.3 Power and ideology.....	41
4.4.4 Subject Positions .....	42
4.5 Analysing discourse .....	43
4.5.1 Description.....	44
4.5.2 Interpretation.....	45
4.5.3 Explanation .....	45
4.5.4 Genres .....	46
4.5.5 Intertextuality and interdiscursivity .....	47
4.6 Data collection and sample .....	49
4.6.1 Coding.....	50
4.7 Ethics – Anonymity and NSD.....	51
4.8 Methodological reflections and reflexivity .....	51
<b>5 Audio-visual texts and the site of production .....</b>	<b>54</b>

5.1 The video footage .....	54
5.1.1 Formal and aesthetic properties .....	56
5.1.2 The supermarket – spatial-temporal setting .....	57
5.1.3 Subject positions – who is filming who? .....	59
5.1.4 The narrative force of the camera .....	60
5.1.5 Reporting versus (re)producing events .....	63
5.1.6 The poor image .....	66
<b>6 Digitally mediated shaming on Twitter.....</b>	<b>68</b>
6.2 What's happening: trigger tweets and anchorage.....	69
6.2.1 What's happening: interpretation and re-contextualisation .....	70
6.3 Activism and political mobilisation .....	72
6.3.1 Racism and racial privilege.....	73
6.4 Us and them – shame as stigma .....	75
6.5 Twitter do your thing: Identification and punitive action .....	78
6.6 Absence.....	79
<b>7 Screen cultural and socio-political contexts.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>8 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>98</b>

# 1 Introduction

From the beginning of March 2020 onwards, the lives of citizens globally have been severely disrupted by the sprawling pandemic COVID-19 (also known as coronavirus). In Europe and the United States, government officials and public health authorities have, since the outbreak of the virus, promoted or imposed various recommendations and regulations to curb the spread of infection. A great deal of uncertainty marked the period, and significant sacrifice for millions of people as national and regional lockdowns, stay-at-home-orders and social distancing regulations were put into effect. Rules and guidelines were adapted as the pandemic progressed, but the impact of preventative measures resulted in the destabilisation of many previously unquestioned social norms.

In addition to a continuous flow of information from authorities, digital networks were also dominated by significant user-generated, pandemic-related content. This included photographic and audio-visual material of individuals and groups shown not abiding by the new social norms. The inability to adapt and act in a communally oriented manner, was met with public outrage and condemnation on social networking sites, like Twitter. Imagery of overcrowded public spaces, supermarket hoarders and a substantial number of anti-lockdown protests, predominantly, although not exclusively, in the USA (BBC, 2020a) were often cited as shameful acts of behaviour.

*Digitally mediated shaming*, or the more vernacular term, *online shaming*, are umbrella terms for a wide range of digitally facilitated practices of public humiliation (see Laidlaw, 2017, p. 6). In an article in Slate magazine, Eric Posner (2015) writes that such forms of public shaming usually take the form of a perceived wrongdoer being openly criticised, avoided, or ostracised by their peers. Further elaborating on such behaviours, Daniel Trottier writes that it refers to the “(p)ractice of denouncing someone on the basis of acts they have committed, or in response to some other stigmatising feature” (2018, pp. 172-173). In his investigation into the phenomenon, British journalist Jon Ronson reasoned that while there were many pitfalls to online shaming, most users who engage in such practices are usually driven by a “desire to do good” (2015, Location no. 38). Similarly, the pervasive act of digitally mediated shaming groups and individuals during the coronavirus-pandemic has been legitimised with rhetoric that was often oriented towards awareness-raising and the public good.

At the same time, the early stages of the outbreak were marked by a substantial level of uncertainty and fear, and social norms were not fixed. The virus was a new strain of infection, and its pathological nature was therefore not entirely understood by medical experts at the time. Hence, national and regional guidelines and restrictions were often made from the vantage point of educated guesswork rather than based on empirical knowledge. Because of this, rules and regulations were subject to swift change and often without much forewarning. To make matters even more complicated, some restrictions were applied in certain regions (such as areas with high transmission rates) but not in others. This effectively meant that expected or required behaviour and preventative measures were volatile and in flux. Returning to the practice of digitally mediated shaming during the same period, this also means that those shamed were sometimes shamed by different rulebooks.

In an American context and the topic that forms the basis of this project, one issue emerged as particularly poignant: the use of, or refusal to use, facemasks in public settings and the recording and circulation of these interactions in public settings and digital spaces. Mask mandates, which were primarily enforced at a federal, as opposed to a national level, became a central feature of digitally mediated shaming during the beginning phases of the pandemic. This topic is especially interesting in terms of shaming because it was not dealt with in public health discourse but also as a political issue. Thanks to the (now former) president of the United States, Donald J. Trump's persistent undermining of expert opinion and medical authorities transformed the humble face-covering into a symbol of partisan allegiance.

On April 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2020, the CDC and Trump held a joint press conference to present new guidelines pertaining to the use of face coverings and transmission rates. The CDC was represented by one of America's leading immunologists, Dr Anthony Fauci, an unassuming and graceful man who pleaded with the American public to wear face coverings in public spaces, but especially in urban areas with high transmission rates and in locations where safe distancing measures were improbable, such as in supermarkets and on public transit. Fauci, considered an expert in infectious diseases, cited the humble face covering to be an essential preventative measure in reducing the spread of COVID-19 among the American public (New York Times, 2020). The recommendation was considerable, mainly because it was presented almost two months before the World Health Organization moved officially took the same position (WHO, 2020). After Fauci had finished presenting the benefits of its usage, it was Trump's turn to take the stage, to which he claimed he did not plan on wearing face covering's and that it was voluntary for anyone to do so (Rev, 2020). By doing this, Trump

undermined the medical expertise of both Dr Fauci and the CDC and told millions of Americans that they were within their rights not to wear one. While it was certainly not the first or last time that Trump publicly expressed alternative viewpoints than that of scientific, expert knowledge, his failure to present a united front with the CDC resulted in a communicative strategy burdened by inconsistent and dissociated messaging amongst a largely divided and confused American public.

The press conference was the catalyst of the facemask's transition from a neutral measure in the prevention of contagion to a symbol of the ongoing and increasingly stark, cultural-political divide in the United States. The overarching narrative of the face mask dispute has been framed as a struggle between two binary political oppositions: pro-mask Democrats and anti-mask Republicans. Digital audiences have been supplied with a stream of information to that effect, ranging from articles and imagery covering the (former) Vice President Mike Pence's maskless visit to a renowned medical facility, the Mayo Clinic (Mangan & Wilkie, 2020), to the former First Lady, Michelle Obama, who in her public address to the Democratic National Convention (DNC) stated:

(R)ight now, kids in this country are seeing what happens when we stop requiring empathy for one another. They're looking around wondering if we've been lying to them this whole time about who we are and what we truly value. They see people shouting in grocery stores, unwilling to wear a mask to keep us all safe. (DNC, 2020, 1:53:53-1:54:18)

In other words, the dispute also becomes emblematic of a polarised citizenry who, in their lack of unified leadership and coherent guidelines, have taken it upon themselves to increasingly monitor and patrol their community's behaviour. It is reasonable to consider The United States as an especially fertile place for such practices due to their often-prided modes of self-governance. This is also mirrored in their culture of private gun ownership and 'stand your ground' politics (see, for instance, Ferraro & Ghatak, 2019). For while the circulation of videos depicting potentially incriminating behaviour is *not* distinct to the US, the brazen manner in which events are recorded is, at present, a more or less American phenomenon. This reveals a cultural acceptance for private citizens to police and guard behaviour in social arenas. Furthermore, the tendency to unapologetically film perceived wrongdoers without concealing the recording device also speaks to how privacy is understood within an American discourse. Here, the dominant understanding is, to a large degree, oriented towards threats to liberty, as opposed to a more European sensibility that privacy is connected to dignity (Whitman, 2004, cited in Ess, 2019, p. 74).

Summarised, I posit that the camera phone is rendered an extension of weaponised self-governance and that visibility and subsequent shaming are used to manipulate social interactions and enforce norms exempt from the realms of legality. Targeted individuals are subsequently exposed to a digital audience and circulated widely in social networks. Here, distant strangers are connected through a sense of shared affect, but shame and punish individuals based on their own sets of circumstance.

Now that I have broadly introduced the topic, I will move onto the project's field of research and my research questions.

## **1.1 Research questions**

As outlined, this paper is concerned with digitally mediated shaming practices during the coronavirus pandemic, with a specific focus on facemask disputes in the USA.

To understand the phenomenon more thoroughly, I have sampled eight audio-visual texts uploaded and circulated on Twitter between 01.04.2020 and 31.08.2020. Due to Twitter's commercial profile as a site for sharing and locating topical information and events, in addition to its position as a social network (see Burgess & Baym, 2020), I decided to conduct my research on Twitter at a very early stage. Apart from this deliberate choice, I had a grounded approach to finding the suitable material for the analysis and wasn't initially looking for mask-specific content. Instead, I was interested in digitally mediated shaming in all its facets, but within the context of the pandemic. The manual process of locating my material was exploratory and, in the end, incredibly time-consuming and labour-intensive.

My initial searches began with utilising the hashtags #COVID19 and #coronavirus. Using these general terms resulted in vast amounts of information at a global scale, much of which irrelevant for this specific project and its orientation towards shaming practices. However, with time and patience, these results eventually yielded other discoveries, notably the hashtags #covidiot, #moronavirus, #maskhole and #wearadamnmask, which allowed me to narrow my search significantly. Using these hashtags, I scoured hundreds of user-generated visual contents on the site, and I realised that one specific type of video was noticeably more prevalent than others: antagonistic facemask disputes in commercial settings in the United States. My interest was further peaked due to the active role of the camera and cameraperson



in these exchanges, as the aggressive behaviour appeared, to me, to be somewhat spurred on by their sudden visibility. Interestingly, audience engagement with the material revealed none of the scepticism I had on the matter, and I knew then that this was a phenomenon that warranted more inquiry.

While there are a plethora of such videos online, I chose to narrow it down to the eight I have included for two reasons. One: The videos are sufficiently representative of the wider phenomenon: all depict antagonistic, mask-related confrontations between strangers in semi-public locations such as grocery shops and big-box stores, and every video has been recorded on a camera phone. In contrast to recordings captured on store surveillance cameras or other concealed devices, the camera is acknowledged in the exchanges in my sample. Those recorded have not given their consent to being on camera. Two: To provide rich, in-depth descriptions of the texts, the sample size needs to be relatively small.

While my sample of videos is moderate, I go on to analyse user engagement with the material on Twitter. I have chosen to do this because I am interested in the production of meaning among audiences. Therefore, I have also scoured Twitter and collected and analysed 1647 comments and quote tweets pertaining to the video footage. By doing so, I am able to shed light on how meaning is made among individuals in the Twitter community and how they use the information at their disposal to judge and shame those caught on camera.

My research questions are, therefore:

- What are the central characteristics of these anti-masking videos?
- How do Twitter audiences discursively construct recorded events, and how does shaming manifest within these networks?
- How do Twitter's affordances facilitate digitally mediated shaming?
- In what way(s) do these digitally mediated shaming's speak to the current cultural and political climate in the United States?

To understand sense-making among users and how they utilise technological affordances in digital social interaction, I have performed close textual analysis and drawn on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and some basic concepts from semiology to inform my interpretations. These forms of analysis are rigorous, qualitative methods. Because of this and

the small sample of empirical data, the analysis provides exemplary generalisations, as opposed to ones that can be considered completely representative. In other words, this paper is oriented towards the production of theory. I approach the material with a hermeneutic understanding of knowledge production. This means that the analysis is theoretically and methodologically interpretative. I believe the process of knowledge production is discovered through mutual understandings found in the society, which, in turn, are expressed and interpreted through language (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, pp. 342-343).

That said, it is not enough to evaluate texts in isolation. My primary interest is in how shame and visibility are leveraged in social interactions and how these interactions are negotiated and interpreted by a wide range of social actors utilising new, interactive technologies. While the specificity of sampled recordings and commentary pertains to facemask disputes, I posit that recording and outing people in digital spaces extends well beyond the parameters of the coronavirus pandemic. Instead, these new tendencies speak to a significant shift in visibility culture brought forth by new technologies and the increasing ease at which it is now possible for anyone to record and publicise events and persons to a vast network of potential strangers. As John B. Thompson (2020) writes of new forms of visibility:

It is difficult to over-estimate the significance of these transformations in the nature of visibility and the ways that are reshaping the fields of social and political life today. Individuals, actions and events are visible in ways that they were not visible in the past, and anyone equipped with a smartphone has the capacity to make things visible to hundreds or even millions of others in ways that were not possible before. (pp. 19-20)

While I do not adhere to the techno-deterministic view that new technologies and ways of connecting, such as social media, are the culprit to these emergent behaviours, I do believe that shaming is a communicative and relational act (Trottier, 2018, p. 173) and that social media, as a site for modern forms of sociality, is not only compatible with, but also facilitates digital shaming practices.

Given the cultural and historical specificity, it is also interesting to see how these digitally mediated objects are constitutive of and constituted by an ongoing socio-political struggle in the United States. I suggest that the media texts tie into a wider realm of visibility culture and are of significance to the increased cultural-political polarisation of the American public.

With this, I mean that the texts should be considered as cultural products of a community of individuals who repeatedly fail to reach mutual understandings of cultural common sense.

Yes, this is partly due to poor leadership, but these social divides were well underway prior to

Trump's election (see, for instance, Nagle, 2017). Furthermore, while this project is set within an American context, my analysis will shed light on similar processes that are happening in Europe. While the active role of the camera phone is distinctly American, stigmatising forms of shaming are otherwise seen internationally. Many European nations, whose public spheres, partly due to emergent screen cultures and the multiplication of mediated environments, are similarly going through processes of political fragmentation and polarisation (see, for instance, Stroud, 2017; Fletcher & Kleis Nielsen, 2017). Here too, content is circulated through networks that come together through a collective agency that is oriented towards shaming and punishing individuals and groups.

So, to clarify, it is not in the project's interest to evaluate the pros and cons of facemask use in public spaces during a pandemic; rather, the aim is to map how these interactions become sites of contestation, which are subsequently circulated through digital networks. From the spatial-temporal setting of the recordings through to their widespread digital circulation in networked communities. I posit that these objects offer insight into how visibility makes the subject vulnerable to ridicule and scorn amongst a culturally fragmented public. In addition, these texts shed light on how visibility can be weaponised to shape and even produce the social.

Before moving on to the outline for the rest of the paper, I wish to briefly outline a few key points regarding shame and shaming in this paper. Shame is an ambiguous concept, but to clarify, I share an understanding with those scholars who identify the experience of shame as akin to being exposed (Lynd, 1958, p. 27). With this, I also consider shame, while internally experienced, to be interconnected to the social. I also follow Helen Merryll Lynd's understanding of shame as a product of cultural relativism. What is considered shameful is, in other words, defined by specific times, settings and traditions (1958, p. 36). Lynd distinguishes between shame and guilt, writing that guilt pertains to action, whereas shame manifests as inadequacy and is expressed through degradation (1958, pp. 23-24). This contrasts with Silvan Tomkins, whose theories on affect do not tend to separate the two (Segdwick, Frank, & Alexander, 1995, p. 133). Another constructive definition is Sara Ahmed's, who, following Tomkins, writes that shame is the "affective costs of not following the scripts of normative existence" (2004, p. 107). In other words, shame becomes a result of failing to reach a social ideal.

All of the above are beneficial to my inquiry on how shame is experienced and expressed as a dimension of digital networks and screen cultures. In terms of Tomkins conflation of guilt and shame, I suggest that the two are different, but that they are often merged in social arenas because those who pass judgement are unable to detach the transgression from the person. In turn, this results in forms of shaming which largely resemble Erving Goffman's conceptions of stigmatisation (1963) and, consequently, what Kristy Hess and Lisa Waller call a "public exposure of one's frailty or failing" (2014, p. 103).

When it comes to how shame is internally experienced, this is a question that my analysis is ill-equipped to answer. On the other hand, because I am utilising the sociality of shame, a polarised citizenry will also mean that there are many perspectives among the public on what is considered shameful. When this is combined with the social uncertainty brought forth by an unknown pandemic and near-ubiquitous access to new technologies and internet connections, this means that 'anyone' with digital access can be an amateur filmmaker. It also means that 'anyone' is vulnerable to exposure and the potentiality of being made visible within this practice. Consequently, when visibility is ascertained on digital platforms, an individual can be subjected to severe, shame-oriented, disciplinary actions by a plethora of actors, most of whom are faceless strangers. Punitive measures include condemnation, ridicule, disgust and scorn, in addition to actions with real-life consequences, like identification and job loss.

In some ways, these new shaming practices are reminiscent of what Meredith Clark (2020) calls the *callout* because it follows a similar trajectory to accountability practices like boycotting and blacklisting. However, these practices have traditionally targeted those in very literal positions of power. The same can be said of John B. Thompson's mediated scandal (2020), which does not bear the same social orientation as the callout, but also functions as a type of transgressive accountability practice for the rich and powerful. In the mediated scandal, private and public boundaries are increasingly erased and the scrutiny that scandalised persons are subjected to, are not retrospectives, but what largely came to constitute the scandal as an actual event (Thompson, 2020, pp. 25-26).

By observing these areas of conflict, I will offer interpretations of how shame is networked from the early stages of interaction, which are depicted in the video footage, through the widespread circulation of content on digital networks and punitive measures perceived

wrongdoers are subsequently subjected to. I will use the terms *digitally mediated shaming* and *online shaming* interchangeably when discussing the phenomenon in broad terms.

## **1.2 Project structure**

The paper does not seek to invalidate previous research. Rather, its orientation is towards supplementing existing bodies of knowledge. My offering will be a hermeneutic, textual analysis of digitally mediated interactions during the coronavirus pandemic. This type of in-depth analysis is relevant to the field of social media studies because, as Eve Ng writes, social media needs more “(q)ualitative accounts of specific practices” (2020, pp. 623-624). A lot of research pertaining to digitally mediated shaming has utilised quantitative methods (see, for example, Basak et al., 2019; Rost, Stahel & Frey, 2016), but as Ng suggests, as a screen cultural practice, online shaming should also be analysed at an in-depth level because it will produce additional knowledge. As social media is a significant part of the social fabric of the present day, understanding how shame and punitive action is exerted in these spaces will therefore be a beneficial contribution to the field of screen cultures generally and social media research specifically.

In order to provide a qualitative, in-depth analysis, I must first give an outline of public shaming, shaming in traditional media and the current status of academic research pertaining to online shaming. In the next chapter, I will therefore present a summarised literature review. This chapter will address major topics about public shaming, and digitally mediated shaming researched prior to and that are relevant to this project. This is done to demonstrate how my research is situated within an ongoing discussion in social media studies. It will also set the scene for my project and provide perspectives supporting or challenging my analysis.

After this, I will move on to chapter 3, where I will present relevant theories and clarify key concepts that will be applied in the analysis. Due to the ambiguous nature of the texts, the theoretical framework has been constructed by drawing on theory from several academic fields, notably social media studies, visibility studies, surveillance studies and sociology. The combination of fields is utilised to show how these multimodal materials can form a hybridised media product. This product is contextually distinct but with features that can be transferred to other disciplinary practices that have utilised communal shaming as a primary method for punitive action.

Chapter 4 will outline my methodological approach and elaborate on the empirical data, which serves as a foundation for my research. I will discuss why I chose specific methods over others and reflect on methodological limitations pertaining to these choices. I will also address ethical concerns, including the handling of personal data, NSD and DPIA. Finally, I will discuss the research's validity and plausibility. As a researcher, I too am part of the discourses I construct, and it is, therefore, important to be transparent about my own biases when conducting qualitative research.

After clarifying these points, I will begin with the analysis. Chapter 5 is oriented towards answering my first research question: What are the central characteristics of these trigger anti-masking videos? During this first stage of the study, I will perform close readings of the video recordings and offer a detailed description and interpretation of their formal, aesthetic, and narrative properties. This analytical stage is crucial because it lays the groundwork for comprehension during the second stage of analysis in chapter 6. Chapter 6 will analyse the presentation and circulation of audio-visual materials on Twitter and answer my second research questions: How do Twitter audiences discursively construct recorded events, and how does shaming manifest within these networks? These questions will also be answered through close textual analysis, drawing on components from critical discourse analysis (CDA) and some primary concepts from semiology when relevant. I will follow the basic principle of the *hermeneutic circle* (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p. 345) and move back and forth between materials to construct the mediated interaction as a whole event.

In chapter 7, I will answer my third and fourth questions: How do Twitter's affordances facilitate digitally mediated shaming, and in what way(s) do the texts and interactions speak to the current cultural and political climate in the United States? It is important to ask questions like these because, while my first and second questions provide description and interpretation, the third and fourth offer explanations and provide a wider (screen) cultural context. Finally in chapter 8 will offer a summary of the paper and concluding remarks. I will also offer suggestions for future research.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 A history of public shaming**

Public shaming is a slippery concept, partly to do with the ambiguous concept of shame itself. As written prior, some scholars deem shame, at a sufficient level, to be akin to guilt (Sedgwick, Frank & Alexander, 1995, p. 133). Others posit that these are two different experiences, socially and psychologically (Lynd, 1958, pp. 23-24). The complexity of public shaming as an event is also apparent in the many ways in which it has taken form culturally and historically. Put broadly; public shaming can occur because of a person or group's perceived social norm violation. Still, it has also been utilised in more formal types of punishment, such as witch trials, floggings and the pillory, which were administered by the governing body, or the Church of the pre-industrialised West (see Roth, 2014; Jensen, 2020).

Before the Industrial Revolution, public punishments and shaming sanctions were commonplace, and courses of justice were largely dependent on communal participation in enforcing disciplinary measures (e.g., Roth, 2014; Jensen, 2020; Hess & Waller, 2014; Litowitz, 1997; Braithwaite, 1993; Laidlaw, 2017, pp. 1-2). These punishments were often staged as events in the community, could draw large crowds and often bore an element of theatricality when staging the wrongdoer in immobilised public display. Here, crowds and passers-by were expected and encouraged, by authority figures, to verbally and physically humiliate the perpetrator. Typical forms of collective punishment could be heckling, spitting and throwing rotten vegetables at the person (e.g., Hess & Waller, 2014, p. 103; Jensen, 2020; Litowitz, 1997, p. 54).

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the Industrial Revolution and the rationale of Enlightenment transformed Western society, public punishments became increasingly rare (Jensen, 2020). One explanation widely accepted among scholars cites increasingly urbanised living conditions as the main reason for this change (e.g., Litowitz, 1997; Jensen, 2020; Foucault, 1977). While it is understood that shaming worked well in small communities where everyone knew everyone else, mass migration to urban cities meant that shaming stopped being considered an appropriate punitive measure in what Litowitz calls an "(i)ncreasingly atomistic, impersonal, secular and industrial society" (1997, p. 54).

Furthermore, he writes, “(t)o make a spectacle of punishment in front of perfect strangers seems an invasion of privacy, an affront to individual dignity” (1997, p. 54).

Another reason for the gradual decline of public punishments was the emergence of a punitive order. It was no longer considered adequate for the modern criminal justice system to merely punish rulebreakers. An emergent principle of the new penal system was also to rehabilitate and correct deviant behaviour, in order for offenders to successfully re-enter society after time served. Reintegrative strategies are generally incompatible with public forms of punishment, and effective corrections were only possible within the confines of prisons and reformatories. In other words, away from the scathing gaze of the public eye (see Foucault, 1977). This was a fundamental principle in modern, Western criminal justice for over a century. Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that modern shaming penalties were reintroduced as legitimate forms of sentencing in some federal branches of the American judiciary system in the 1990s. Litowitz (1997) writes that defenders of this revival claim that the publicity of punitive ritual will in some way invoke feelings of shame among those whose crime(s) have rendered them *shameless* in the eyes of society. Furthermore, the humiliating experience of such punishments should encourage remorse and a lack of want to transgress again (Litowitz, 1997, p. 55).

## **2.2 A history of mediated, public shaming**

While institutional and brutal public punishments were phased out during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, public shaming did not entirely disappear. Instead, it moved from town squares and the scaffolds and was reproduced and commodified by the daily press, which took on the role of society’s watchdog. This served to monitor and report on deviant behaviour and abuses of power and was (is) generally accepted and revered as an extension of open justice. This effectually meant that it was the media’s job to monitor and report on judicial procedures, the consensus being that this form of naming and shaming was an ‘unavoidable price of the system’ (Hess & Waller, 2014, p. 104).

As a pillar of democratic principles for governance, press freedom is fiercely a means to keep tabs on those in power and keep elected officials accountable (Hess & Waller, 2014, p. 104). At the same time, this freedom has granted the press enormous power to shape public discourse, set agendas and determine the newsworthiness of information under the guise of



public interest. As the industry became increasingly competitive and commodified, the focus and practice of large segments of the news media became increasingly tabloidised. Covering not only actions and decisions made by powerful people in their professional capacities but also how these individuals and groups conducted themselves privately (Thompson, 2011, 2020). Here, the boundaries between public and private became increasingly fuzzy, and the opportunity to remove oneself from the glare of the public became increasingly rare. Because of this shift, it seems it was no longer sufficient to be good at one's job; one had to be an upstanding citizen during leisure time too.

According to Daniel Trottier (2018), the press' new orientation towards exposing private behaviour resulted in being a powerful tool for shaming. Such coverage was shaped within the same realm of information and morality as other stories that warranted public interest (p. 176). It is also clear that the role of traditional media in post-industrial shaming became influential because of its power to shape public discourse, promote agendas and report on current issues. During the decision-making process of what gets published and what does not, journalists would and do have to go through critical reflection of not only what constitutes shameful behaviour but what is newsworthy and financially lucrative. The power to push agendas means that some posit that rather than such stories being in the public interest, they are instead a type of weaponised visibility (Trottier, 2018, p. 176).

### **2.2.1 Reality television**

Not only have sensationalist themes and tabloidised forms of reporting expanded the boundaries of what is deemed newsworthy, but it has also led to a significant shift in how news can be produced. This is exemplified in tabloidisation, *infotainment* genres and soft news. In addition, certain tropes of reality television now comprise hybrid forms of mediated news in which stories have been financially and logistically *created* by media production companies (Kohm, 2009, p. 196). In these programmes, Steven A. Kohm writes, “(h)umiliation has emerged as a viable and symbolically rich vehicle for social control, commodified and refracted through the lens of popular culture the outcomes are unpredictable and may contain the seeds of discontent” (2009, p.189). This is particularly accurate with regards to reality policing programmes like *Catching a Predator* (2009, pp.

195-197) and *Mission Investigate*<sup>1</sup> (Danielson, 2013), which often conflate media, law enforcement and, on occasion, encourage audience participation to solve crimes or track down perpetrators. According to Kohm, the success of these programmes can be a symptom of an audience who believes that the criminal justice system has failed them (2009, pp. 201-202).

### **2.3 Digitally mediated shaming**

It might go without saying that online shaming deviates from previously outlined shaming practices in several distinct ways. The most obvious being the way that modern technologies facilitate the practice. One consideration is how the internet has granted informational access to millions of people, which, in turn, has also given the same people the ability to air their grievances and share their opinions in digital spaces. The engagement of a wide range of actors is one reason for online shaming's often uncontrollable and sprawling nature. Trottier, citing Hanne Detel, writes that "(d)igital media play a pivotal role in citizen-led shaming, notably as they broaden the scope of actors who "are able to disclose transgressions, as well as to determine who and what behaviours are susceptible to shaming" (Detel, 2013, p. 94, cited in Trottier, 2018, p. 177). Every person who interacts will subsequently draw on their perceptions and motivations for engaging, giving the phenomenon a chaotic and ambivalent quality that is hard to regulate or control.

A digitally mediated shaming often begins with an action or utterance that is perceived to be in breach of the law or with expected social norms and practices of the time, being recorded or documented in some way and after that circulated online to a broader audience. The content can be audio-visual texts, photographs, or even written words. Sometimes a person distributes the texts themselves, presumably unaware of the outrage and onslaught they would receive after the fact (e.g., Ronson, 2015; Laidlaw, 2017). Others have been exposed without their knowledge or consent (e.g., Cagle, 2019; Jane, 2016; Trottier, 2018). The tendency for cross-pollination across networked sites, combined with the speed and scale at which content can spread, contributes to its viral and often ferocious nature.

The shamed are often subjected to scorn, outrage, ridicule, and condemnation and severe punitive measures, including threats and *doxing*, where a person's personal information, such

---

<sup>1</sup> The original title is Uppdrag granskning (Danielson, 2013).

as name, address, and place of work, is located and distributed online, subsequently leading to harassment, loss of livelihood and death threats (e.g., Ronson, 2015; Trottier, 2017).

Precisely because of the troublesome fallout of these interactions, digitally mediated shaming has been a topic of concern for a wide variety of scholars and journalists and much research and popular coverage conveys a pessimistic view of the phenomenon. Areas of research have included: the virulent nature of comments (e.g., Bouvier, 2020; Basak, Sural, Ganguly & Ghosh, 2019; Laidlaw, 2017, Ronson, 2015; Cagle, 2019), the speed and voracity of which content is shared and mob mentality, online firestorms and internet pile-ons (e.g., Pfeffer, Zorbach & Carley, 2014; Baccarella, Wagner, Kietzmann & McCarthy, 2018; Ronson, 2015), breaches of privacy (Laidlaw, 2017; Cheung, 2014; Cagle, 2019), bad actors (Baccarella, Clark, 2020), stunting reasonable debate (Ng, 2020), cancel culture (Henderson, 2020; Ng, 2020; Clark, 2020), disproportionate punishments to the offence (e.g., Laidlaw, 2017; Ronson, 2015), and as mentioned, digital vigilantism (Jane, 2017; Trottier, 2017; Kasra, 2017).

Due to the nature of how some of these elements are enforced and expressed, some have situated online shaming on par with trolling and cyber-bullying (Basak et al., 2019). There are undoubtedly significant similarities between trolling and some forms of digitally mediated shaming. However, for clarification, I consider shaming to be oriented towards issues of morality and legality and therefore justified on the basis of righteousness. This mirrors Jon Ronson's observations that people shame others with an orientation toward good-doing (2015, Location no. 38).

This means of good doing has manifested in a recent, and contested, neologism: *cancel culture*. In broad terms, cancel culture should be understood as the withdrawal of public support of people whose behaviours are deemed unacceptable or troublesome (see Clark, 2020; Ng, 2020). According to Eve Ng, these behaviours often pertain to identity issues, such as racism, homophobia and sexism (2020, p. 622). Sanctions are often geared towards prominent public figures like celebrities and politicians and can include vocal outrage, boycotting products and calls for a person's resignation or termination. Like other online shaming critiques, critics of cancel culture say its ferocity can contribute to confining free speech and meaningful debates (see Henderson, 2020, p. 37). Others write that there seems to be no differentiation of scale. In digital spaces, mild transgressions and missteps often receive

the same types of punishment as actions that had the intent to harm (Brookes, 2019, cited in Ng, 2020).

Meredith Clark (2020) challenges these concerns and writes these malignant associations are due to a socially elitist manipulation of the Black discursive accountability praxis of the *callout*. The callout, Clark writes, is a type of resistance work that has historically been utilised by marginalised, Black communities in the United States. The callout was usually directed against powerful elites and social or political actions which upheld or promoted structural inequalities. Rather than labelling cancel culture as censorship, *cancelling*, in its true form, should be understood as an adaptation of activist practices like blacklisting and boycotting (pp. 88-91). Clark explains,

(C)ancelling is an expression of agency, a choice to withdraw one's attention from someone or something whose values (in)action, or speech are so offensive, one no longer wishes to grace them with their presence, time, and money. (2020, p. 88)

For Clark, the current malignant association with the term cancel culture is a product of the media, which has utilised it to silence groups that used the callout as a form of resistance work. It is traditional media's selection and circulation of stories, as opposed to social media engagement, which has problematised the callout (2020, pp. 88-90). In other words, it is unlikely that the stories would have received as much attention in mainstream discourse had it not been for legacy news production and coverage. Attempts to thwart or undermine this practice by equating it with censorship and silencing is only beneficial to those who wish to uphold the status quo, which, in turn, are the elites themselves (p. 90).

While Clark makes some strong points about the merits of the callouts as a means for marginalised and oppressed groups to leverage a form of 'networked collectivity' (2020, p. 90-91), one of the more challenging issues is that it is no longer only those in literal positions of power who are subjected to scrutiny. There are many accounts of 'ordinary' people who have been made the target of severe punishments and cancellations during digital exchanges that draw on the same tools as the callout (see, for example, Ng, 2020; 2020; Ronson, 2015).

The ambiguity and unruly nature of online shaming allows me to further delimitate the subject matter before moving onto the paper's theoretical framework. I have aligned research pertaining to digitally mediated shaming practices within a realm of traditional and social media, in addition to activism. Furthermore, I have established that much research considers there to be an underlying orientation to promote or uphold certain behaviours and attitudes at the expense of others. If one then considers the collective act of shaming as a disposable tool

in vigilante practices of citizen policing and amateur journalism, it can be a compelling way to mobilise actions of social change. Emma A. Jane (2017), writing on feminist activists in digital spaces, terms the coin *digilantism* as a practice which involves “(p)olitically motivated, extrajudicial practices in online domains that are intended to punish or bring others to account in response to a perceived lack of institutional remedies “(p. 461). This is a helpful but somewhat imperfect working definition for my subject matter. While I agree that several highly politicised causes drive mask-related shaming in the United States, the texts and interactions are still incredibly ambiguous. There also seems to be an underlying current of frivolity and schadenfreude in these collective punishments, which could be linked to online subcultures that are reluctant to the commodified forms of mainstream social media culture (see, for instance, Nagle, 2017). Because of this, I cannot fully account for the phenomenon behind a collective moral compass of good doing. In the next chapter, I will establish some key concepts from social media studies, visibility studies, surveillance studies and sociology, which will support my analysis.

## 3 Theory

As I wrote in the previous chapter, digitally mediated shaming is a complex and somewhat ambient field of study. It can pertain to many niche fields of study and is therefore not easily accounted for without considering and merging several theoretical concepts. This chapter will outline key concepts from social media studies, including affective networks, context collapse, and affordances. To supplement, I will unpack central theories regarding shaming and stigmatisation, visibility studies, digital vigilantism, and polarisation. It is my position that these have all had a significant influence on the social dynamics of digitally mediated public shaming. Furthermore, I posit that these challenges have been amplified during the coronavirus pandemic's tumultuous and uncertain initial period.

### 3.1 Shame and stigmatisation

While the criminal justice system phased out public shaming during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, John Braithwaite (1993) dismisses the widely accepted explanation that it was because shaming is an incompatible punishment in modern social structures. In *Shame and Modernity*, he writes that there is no "(s)tructural inevitability about the impotence of shaming in industrialised societies; there is no inexorable march with modernisation where shaming does not count" (p.1). In this, Braithwaite contends that while state-driven punishment was increasingly administered in private settings, communal shaming did not (and will not) disappear. Instead, he suggests that modern, urbanised, anonymous subjects, rather than be protected from the threat of being shamed, are, in fact, *more* exposed. This, he explains, is due to the emergence of new divisions of labour and social interdependencies that exist in modern society (1993, pp. 2-3).

Because interdependency is much more integral to socialisation in modern, urbanised society than in close-knit communities prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the modern subject is much more vulnerable to potentially being exposed to shame. He distinguishes between two types of shaming: *stigmatisation* and reintegrative. Reintegrative shaming is a practice that focuses on the deed rather than the person. On the other hand, stigmatisation creates a dominant character that overrides all other aspects of a person and is a shaming practice that attacks the person in their entirety. Shaming a deed, rather than a person's character, should allow for

redemption, remorse, and eventually forgiveness (p. 1). Reintegrative shaming is meant to serve an educational purpose and is geared towards betterment and change. This is loosely accepted as the official aim of the modern judicial system to reintroduce criminals into society after time served. It also resonates with the overarching purpose of activism and awareness-raising because of its orientation towards change.

According to Erving Goffman, stigma can be divided into three broad categories: abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character and tribal stigma (1963, p. 14). It should be noted that these are all highly personal but, for the most part, irreversible features. Because of this irreversibility, stigmatisation allows little room for reunification. Stigmatisation is a much more prevalent form of shaming in modern culture because of detached and weak social ties. However, Braithwaite writes that stigmatisation would have more devastating consequences in a small village, but that it would also be more unlikely to occur. This, he explains, is because “(t)he understanding villagers have of the complex totality of their neighbours renders them less susceptible to the stereotypical outcasting of deviants that is normal in the metropolis” (1993, p. 14). In this situation, it is more likely that their erroneous behaviour will be condemned rather than their personhood in its entirety. If we accept this logic, it then stands to reason that people who have partial, if any, prior knowledge of an offender is more likely to judge the person in their entirety than their offence.

According to Braithwaite, an individual is more at risk of exposure to shame due to the multitude of roles a subject in modern society must assume. The modern subject moves between several distinct milieus, each of which has a specific set of expectations and knowledge about a person. This proliferation of different identities increases the likelihood of shame because of the myriad of ways one could make a mistake in any given setting. He writes,

Precisely because we make ourselves comfortable in a role-segregated world by partitioning audiences in a way that enables us to present radically different selves to those different audiences, our shame can be many-sided and more unmanageable in a role-segregated world. In the village society, there is limited segregation of audiences. (1993, p. 15)

However, whilst opportunities for shame are elevated, this segregation has been understood to offer a certain measure of protection; a misdeed in one social relation may go unnoticed in another. This logic has become problematised by the proliferation and interconnectedness of communication technologies and the global e-village (see Cheung, 2014). Communication

technologies have overturned geographical hindrances and, in many ways, transformed the world into a seemingly smaller place. At the same time, the global e-village is comprised of strangers and depersonalised attitudes that mirror urbanised habitats. This means that the modern subject is not only exposed to more opportunities for shame, but they are vulnerable to the same type of shame that Braithwaite criticises, stigmatisation.

### 3.2 Context collapse

The exposure to multiple opportunities for stigmatisation can be rooted in an important concept in social media studies, *context collapse*. Context collapse is understood as the merging of several audiences into a single context. As a social media scholar, it is essential to understand these processes of socialisation in digital networks.

Context collapse builds on Erving Goffman's conceptualisation that individuals behave differently in various social situations and depending on their audience (Goffman 1958/1990, in Brandtzaeg & Lüders, 2018, pp. 1-2). The self is understood to have a multitude of identities that are tailored to specific social arrangements. As a result, this also informs their role in various social situations and the expectations of others. There has been a shift in private and public boundaries as the modern subject shares more and more of themselves online. An understanding and negotiation of what should be considered private should be considered in terms of *contextual integrity* as these contexts determine the social norms of how and what information is shared (Nissenbaum, 2004, 2010, cited in Thompson, 2011, p. 61). Privacy is not a right that presides all others, and sometimes the people's right to know triumphs in debates about issues of privacy (Thompson, 2011, p. 65). In terms of the press, the public interest is a vital part of their freedom and allows journalists to cover a wide array of content in the name of increasing knowledge among citizens. This is important due to the expansive nature of digital networks in which there is potential for endless audiences and because audiences that might have previously been segregated are often merged into one group in digital spaces (see Davis & Jurgensen, 2014, pp. 477-478). Thus, Goffman's multiplicity of identities is incompatible with digital networks, particularly those oriented towards open profiles and free-flowing exchanges of information, like Twitter.

Davis and Jurgensen (2014) distinguish between *context collusion* and *context collision*. Collusions occur when a user utilises a site's affordances to blend various networked



audiences. It is an intentional act and a result of technological design and user practice. In contrast, collisions are unintentional consolidations of audiences (2014, p. 481). These are subsequently marked by chaos and a lack of informational control.

### 3.3 Affect and affective networks

According to the American psychologist and the originator of *affect theory*, Silvan Tomkins, the affect system is the organisation of primary motives in human beings (Sedgwick et al., 1995, p. 36). Tomkins distinguishes between eight basic effects. Two are considered positive: interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy. One is neutral: surprise-startle. Five are negative: distress-anguish, fear-terror, *shame-humiliation*, contempt-disgust and anger-rage (Sedgwick et al., 1995, p. 74). Affective responses are understood partly biological but are equally produced by external conditions which can activate, uphold, or lessen them (Sedgwick et al., 1995, p. 37). It is my understanding, in this, that affect thus equates to a type of emotive sensibility. Zizi Papacharissi explains affect as a ‘pre-emotive intensity’ that comes into being through anticipation processes (2016, p. 311). Should then *affective networks* or *affective publics* be understood as a coming together of communally shared, premeditated emotions?

In the simplest of terms, yes, but there is more to it than that. However, it is also more than that. Papacharissi writes that affective publics are emotive expressions that course through digitally networked crowds. Within these networks, structures of *feeling* can uphold discursive spaces for storytelling (2016, p. 320).

For Jodi Dean (2010), affective networks are a result of repetitive feedback loops. She writes,

Affective networks express/are the expression of the circulatory movement of drive – the repeated making, uploading, sampling, and decomposition occurring as movement on the Internet doubles itself, becoming itself *and* its record or trace. The movement from link to link, the forwarding and storing and commenting, the contributing without expectation of response but in hope of further movement (...) is circulation for its own sake. (p. 42)

For Dean, social networks “produce and circulate affect as a binding technique” (p. 21), wherein users are trapped in a circle of communicative repetition. Each communicative interaction (or lack thereof), such as liking, commenting, or forwarding, spurs a sense of affect – in this case, enjoyment. Furthermore, affective networks create a sense of community

without there being an actual community. Instead, these networks produce mediated, volatile, and unpredictable social connections (Dean, 2010, p. 22). Another concept I find helpful is danah boyd's *networked public* because it, in simple terms, explains networked spaces as intertextual constructs of technology, imagined communities and practice (boyd, 2014, in Marwick & boyd, 2014, p. 1052).

An important feature of social networking sites is their *affective flow*. Affective flow is how isolated updates, such as tweets merge into a stream of information. This is essentially what constitutes a *feed*. The feed captures a general sensibility or creates a type of cultural setting and therefore establishes brevity that exceeds a single post (Dean, 2010, p. 24). Culturally, affective networks are dominated by an orientation to communicate for communication's sake. In other words, the value of circulation for circulation's sake far outweighs the meaning, quality, or purpose of the content. This benefits communicative capitalism, which, in turn, results in vast amounts of data and subsequently a noisy and chaotic informational environment in which any post in singular is rendered of lesser value than the entirety of the collective feed (Dean, 2010, p. 27). This creates highly competitive digital environments that are geared towards ascertaining visibility through clicks and likes.

This also reflects Henry Jenkin's (2006) writing on convergence and forms of cultural token exchange. Jenkin's writes that the "tokens being exchanged are not that important in and of themselves, but they may become the focus of conversation and persuasion" (2006, p. 222). This seems a logical notion when considering how streams of affect function and sustain. The content circulated is not necessarily what is meaningful, but it can further drive affect. This, in turn, can further contribute to looped, networked behaviours promoting, in our case, outrage, disgust, vengeance and ridicule.

It is important to understand how affective networks work when considering user-generated information streams, such as in incidents of digitally mediated shaming on Twitter. Here, the merging of commentary and collective agency is what makes the event particularly harrowing. The coming together of affective networks does not mean that every post is near identical. Instead, it means that posts are organised around the same purpose of affect. Gwen Bouvier (2020), in her analysis of racist callouts and cancel culture on Twitter, writes that there is a type of veiled racist discourse circulating in society. Yet, digital reactions and callouts usually treat racist polemic as isolated incidents detached from structural causes and socio-political contexts. Bouvier writes that feeds of affect may tolerate contradiction and

disconnection as long as they are in affective agreement and collectively geared towards spurring clicks and shareable content (pp. 2-3). The affective feeds in my sample are dominated by a need to ascertain visibility in the highly competitive digital environment of Twitter and rooted in three of Silvan Tomkins primary affects: shame-humiliation, contempt-disgust and, perhaps surprisingly, interest-excitement. As an overarching setting for the production of affect, Twitter offers a milieu in which the condemnation and annihilation of others can be fun and exhilarating, becoming a virtual echo of Bakhtin's *carnival laughter* (see Bakhtin & Sollner, 1983). Jocular communicative styles and the feeds overall tone of voice, which permeate feeds reveal this sensibility. I will elaborate on this in chapter 6.

Dean echoes the notion of interest-excitement and claims that participation and repetition are rooted in a user's enjoyment. Users contribute and engage because it is fun, further driving a form of communicative capitalism (2010, p. 37). Here, constant communication is obligatory. However, what is posited as conversation is the furthering of affects (2010, pp. 34-35). Despite this, Papacharissi notes that affect should not be equated to emotion. Rather, affect is the degree of emotional experience and during the production of these experiences (2016, p. 316).

The democratisation of communication channels has also overrun expert knowledges. In its place are citizen produced knowledges shaped as opinion. As Dean writes,

Not only has amateurism and gut-level or street knowledge supplanted what was previously considered expertise, but even amateur and everyday knowledge is now rejected as nothing more than opinion which is necessarily limited, biased, and countered by others. The ability to falsify *is* unlimited. The lack of capacity to know is the other side of the abundance of knowledge. (2010, p. 35)

In the absence of knowing, consideration should also be made to the point that Dean makes in her book from 1998, *Aliens in America*: reception of content is, in large part, contingent on whatever elements the person disclosing events has chosen to focus on. This information can be highly persuasive for a modern subject looking for truth and guidance from trustworthy sources (2009, p. 55). Considering that networked media now allows modern subjects to create and widely circulate their own content, this naturally brings forth a set of uniquely modern challenges.

Visual communication is highly interpretative. The supplementary text in the tweet becomes a way for the distributor to elucidate recorded events and attempt to steer how audiences receive the visual content. This choice to include, exclude or emphasise certain information

and the specificity of worded choices equates to a *lexical field* which functions as a map in which events and persons are defined and how boundaries are made (see Fowler, 1991, in Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 31). In this, the tweets share similitude with traditional media and their power to not only select who and what is made visible but also *how*. In discussing the role of journalists in traditional news media when presenting politicians to a wider public, Thompson writes that they shape,

(w)hat is communicated to whom and what is made visible and what is not. These organisational players become gatekeepers who shape the flows of communication, the ways that messages and symbolic content are presented and the visibility or invisibility of actors in the field. (2020, p. 21)

This mode of gatekeeping follows a largely similar pattern on Twitter. The main differences are that those posting aren't usually media professionals. Of course, there are many more actors involved, all of whom discursively shape the feeds now that any individual with a mobile phone and an internet connection can circumvent traditional media organisations. In the case of shameful behaviour, which is determined in a highly polarised social milieu, who decides which narrative is deemed most correct? And with this, how is the affective flow adapted to these modes of storytelling?

For Silvan Tomkins, "shame is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation" (Sedgwick et al., 1995, p. 133). As affect, Tomkins does not differentiate between shyness, shame, and guilt. Instead, it is the accompanying components that determine different experiences of the same affect (p. 133). This offers challenges when considering how social networks are organised and the absence of nuance and reasoned debate. Twitter lends itself to 'affective modalities of storytelling' (Papacharissi, 2016, p. 318) and amplifies certain voices over others. However, given the site's organisation and affordances, such as its well-known character limitation, there is little room for elaborate or complex conversation and narration. In turn, this makes the site an incredibly potent place for online shaming because there is no differentiation of scale or reasonable way to offer a sufficiently nuanced explanation or two-sided modes of storytelling.

Pfeffer et al. (2014) write that online shaming offers limited and binary types of opinion processing that do not allow gradualist opinions. A subject can either position themselves in agreement or against an issue (p. 121). In terms of affective networks, these positions can thus merge into a more or less continuous and cohesive flow of sentiment in which there is no room to assess the gradation of error. The result becomes sweeping, collective judgments that

do not differentiate between severe wrongdoings and unintentional mistakes. According to Dean, it is users who uphold the status of current communication networks, producing their affects and causing their own entrapment in which they are unable to escape (2010, p. 43). In terms of the project at hand, users engage in punitive acts of affect, to which they risk being subjected to themselves at a later point. Therefore, the reproduction of these communal engagements contributes to the fragility of modern subjects and a constant and unrealistic attempt to uphold semblances of personal immaculacy. In these streams of affect, particularly when nuance is sidestepped, there is no longer room or tolerance for human error or opportunity to improve and grow.

### **3.4 A mediated culture of visibility**

The central component to most, if not all, theories on shame and shaming is its close links to sociality and the threat or experience of being exposed by another. In this way, modern technologies and their affordances are a logical companion (and culprit) in the contemporary (re)enforcement of public displays of shaming. The modern subject has become increasingly vulnerable in two ways: First, the pervasiveness of handheld devices and rapid internet connections means that we are constantly available to one another. Second, there is now a digitally mediated, cultural steering towards living ‘transparently’ and ‘authentically’ online. This subsequently results in opportunities for error or inadequacy in the eyes of another, particularly when we consider the aforementioned concept of context collapse and the differing expectancies we have of one another.

Drawing on the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, John B. Thompson (2005/2011) writes that in this emergent culture of visibility, there has been a boundary shift when it comes to what constitutes the private and the public sphere. While Thompson does not specifically mention shame as affect, he does discuss how new communication technologies have provided a site of constant negotiation and struggle between these spheres (2011, p. 49).

The visible is what can be seen, that which is perceptible by the sense of sight; we can contrast this with the invisible as that which cannot be seen, is imperceptible or hidden from view. (Thompson, 2011 p. 56, but see also Thompson 2005)

Today, thanks to new forms of technology, there are now mediated *visibilities* that directly affect the public sphere what he classifies as a *mediated publicness* (2011, p. 56).

Thompson attributes the materiality of media technologies in combination with the paratextual for its significant role in this shift, writing,

seeing is never pure vision: it is always shaped by a broader set of cultural assumptions and frameworks and by the spoken or written cues that commonly accompany the visual image and shape the way it is seen and understood. (2011, p. 57)

What is meant by this is that these assumptions will contribute to a text's reception and understanding. For Thompson, the best way to define privacy is in the sphere where one can remove oneself from the glare of the public and proposes that the most promising way to determine privacy is in terms of controlling one's information and how and what is shared (2011, p. 60). While my analysis does not seek to address privacy concerns specifically, this is important because the recordings I will analyse have been uploaded to social media without the person's consent. The role of exposure and what information is made public and *visible* is vital to my understanding of shame as a social bond and social control.

When considering visibility as a means for social control, thoughts move quite quickly on to one of the most utilised examples, at least in the Humanities: Bentham's *panopticon*, which Michel Foucault (1977) applied in order to explain how power is exercised through visibility. The panopticon was a circular designed prison in which all cells were visible from the building's centralised control tower. In turn, the control tower was visible from all cells. However, it was impossible to see if anyone was manning the tower. The effect of this design was to "(i)nduce in the inmate a state of consci(i)ous and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (p. 201). Foucault claimed that people tend to modify their behaviour in anticipation of being watched. The panopticon's disciplinary success rested on the principle that whilst power was visibly present, the prisoners never knew if they were being watched or not. In addition, they did not know who their potential observers were as anyone could inhabit the role in the control tower. This combination resulted in a perpetual state of anxiety for the inmate and resulted in an automated, self-induced mode of self-discipline (pp. 201-203). The panopticon, which largely led people to believe they are constantly being monitored, resulted in a system of automation with people consciously self-monitoring and disciplining themselves (p. 201). The central idea is that those monitored also monitor themselves, thus upholding the power structure in which they are embedded. The connotation of the panopticon can be applied today, as the modern, technological society continues to (re)produce this self-sustaining culture of visibility and discipline. We uphold and enforce overarching behavioural norms for ourselves and others, and we do this highly

labour-intensive job willingly. In this culture of curated transparency, there is also a pervasive notion that anything or anyone can be made visible.

### 3.5 The Strangershot

For Lauren Cagle (2019), the ubiquity of smartphones has paved the way for a new genre in digital visual culture, *the strangershot*. The strangershot, a distinct expression of online shaming, is categorisable through form and content in addition to its circulation and audience reception in digital networks. According to Cagle, a strangershot is a photo taken of a stranger without their knowledge or consent and subsequently uploaded and circulated on social media networks at which they are subjected to derogatory comments (pp. 67-68). She explains the genre as an assemblage of human and non-human actors and situates it within a well-established frame of surveillance and discipline and writes,

Surveilling and disciplinary practices (re)produce biopower as a relational force shaped by conceptualisations of normality and deviance. The genre of strangershots function as such practice, serving as a recurring response to a complex exigence that not only reifies ideas about what bodies may move through public space, but also (re)produces those ideas as photographers, audience and subjects interact with those texts (Cagle, 2019, p. 72).

Cagle makes some interesting observations and key arguments central to my enquiry into shame as a discursive construct and presents some notable theories on how the strangershot, which in many ways resembles the texts that serve as the basis for my analysis, works as a tool in discourses of discipline and surveillance and how it draws on the Foucauldian notion of productive power by teaching audiences which (bodies) are acceptable (2019, p. 77). However, what she fails to address is how subjects have been conditioned, largely through traditional media, to conflate private and public spaces. What I mean by this is that in contemporary society, a subject is continuously exposed to mediated content that also blurs boundaries between public and private. This blurring is commodified and financially lucrative for those that are successful and there are entire branches of the media industry that are geared towards these types of productions. An example of this is reality television in general and reality policing programmes specifically. As written previously, these shows encourage viewers to assist law enforcement and journalists by undertaking forms of vigilantism, and other types of crowd-sourced surveillance, in the pursuit of tracking down and exposing individuals and groups (see Kohm, 2009; Danielson, 2013; Laidlaw, 2017, p.

4). In turn, high viewer ratings financially benefit the television network due to advertising and sponsorship deals.

### **3.6 Affordances**

Before we move onto methods, I would like to take a minute to clarify what is meant by affordances and how Twitter has organised what affordances are specific to the site.

The term *affordance* was first coined by James Gibson (1986), as he outlined how certain objects in the material world can *afford* certain functions or properties. Affordances can vary significantly, and Gibson differentiates between *attached* and *detached* objects. For Gibson, attached objects cannot be altered without damage. On the other hand, detached objects afford manipulation, which means that they can be wielded to will. (p. 133). In a very simple way, an environment's affordance dictates what can and cannot be done. In and of itself, the term affordance is neither distinctly positive nor negative, and affordances do not automatically change as a participant's requirements change (pp. 137-139). Gibson writes,

The theory of affordances is a radical departure from existing theories of value and meaning. It begins with a new definition of what meaning and value *are*. The perceiving of an affordance is not a process of perceiving a value-free physical object to which meaning is somehow added in way that no one has been able to agree upon; it is a process of perceiving a value-rich ecological object. Any substance, any surface, any layout has some affordance for benefit or injury to someone. Physics may be value-free, but ecology is not. (1986, p. 140)

In other words, affordances are environmental features that allow certain actions over others. Some are mutable and open to manipulation by actors in that environment, while others are more stable. In terms of this project, one affordance is the ability to record video footage on a mobile phone. Another is the ability to upload said video to a digital network more or less immediately after recording the event. Twitter has its own set of affordances. I will now present a brief outline of some of these.

#### **3.6.1 Twitter – affordances and techno-cultural environment**

Twitter was launched in 2006 (Marwick & boyd, 2010, p. 116), and its purpose has been a site of constant negotiation between “the idea of a simple social technology (...) for updating your friends on the on hand, and an informational public communication platform on the



other” (Burgess & Baym, 2020, Location no. 7) By Twitter’s own admission, it is an “information network made up of short messages (...)” (Twitter, 2021).

Twitter’s affordances include users being able to create and update their profile, follow other accounts, post tweets, share other user tweets (retweet) and reply to tweets (McCay-Peet & Quan Haase, 2016, p. 202). Twitter also introduced the opportunity for users to provide their own comments on tweets that they repost. This affordance is called a quote tweet (Twitter, 2021).

Another well-known affordance on the site is the hashtag which is “any word or phrase immediately preceded by the # symbol” (Twitter, 2021). The hashtag can index content by keywords and topics and helps users navigate the site and create social connections with other user accounts they deem interesting or relevant. Hashtags have had an important role in political mobilisation and activism, such as #blacklivesmatter (Burgess & Baym, 2020, Location no. 40).

Users can follow accounts without being followed back, and information is largely circulated on public profiles. This can promote and uphold non-reciprocal modes of communication (Marwick & boyd, 2010, pp. 116-117). While users can and do directly address other people on the site by tagging them with ‘@’ username (McCay-Peet & Quan Haase, 2016, p. 202), the site is not exclusively organised around these forms of dialogue, and information can be shared without entering into mutual conversation. Previous research on Twitter reveals that “(f)eeds appear not so much characterised by coherent, rational discussion, but more by floods of emotion and affect, based around highly simplified narratives comprised of clear polarities of good and evil” (Bouvier, 2020, p. 2). Furthermore, Eve Ng (2020) writes that social organisation on sites like Twitter can provide fertile ground for detached attitudes, snap judgments and curtail any possibility of nuanced and reasonable dialogue.

Twitter has been called a “global newsroom” (Burgess & Baym, 2020, Location no 2), and the site’s orientation towards the circulation of information and events come to the fore in the sites prompt question, “What’s happening?” The question, which changed from “What are you doing?” in 2009 (Burgess & Baym, 2020, Location no. 8), encourages users to publish content that is deemed newsworthy and has a substantial influence on what type of information is circulated on the site. By asking, “what’s happening?” Twitter steers the distribution of information towards external events rather than the internalised world of its

users<sup>2</sup> (at least officially) and sets the stage for disseminating content that feigns a veneer of pseudo-objectivity i.e., news.

The original character limitation for a tweet was 140 characters (Marwick & boyd, 2010, p. 116), but Twitter increased the character limitation to 280 in 2017. Despite this extension, Twitter reports that a standard tweet usually comprises 33 characters (Perez, 2018), indicating that information is still communicated in a short and snappy manner. This tendency can negate detailed elaboration and nuance. On the other hand, this provides the opportunity for individual users to draw on their creative resources and construct tweets that are performative and playful (see Papacharissi, 2012).

Tweets can be posted from computers, tablets, and notably mobile phones. While users can draw on their creativity to construct attention-grabbing tweets, the basic act of tweeting in itself demands little effort or thought. This can result in users not thinking through their actions and may result in snap judgements, context collapse and, what Bouvier cites as shallow commitments (Foxman & Wolf, 2013, cited in Bouvier, 2020, p. 3).

Twitter is generally understood as a site for text-based microblogging (Grahl, 2013, cited in McCay Peet & Quan-Haase, 2017, p. 18; see also Papacharissi, 2012). While it is possible to upload multimodal texts (videos, images, and gifs), there are significant affordances that impose limitations on audio-visual content shared. While videos do not count towards the site's limitations of 280 characters per Twitter, videos embedded in a post cannot be more than two minutes and twenty seconds long (Twitter, n.d.). Therefore, in the milieu of social networking sites, other sites are more directly attuned to sharing video imagery, such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok.

At the same time, sharing visual content on Twitter has its benefits. While Twitter is not the largest social media platform in the United States, with 'only' 25% of the population as users, it has a significant role in informational flows. Half of this group regularly access the site for news (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). Because it is oriented towards the distribution of information, both by traditional media and by user-generated content, Twitter is an especially important site for the (re)production of public discourse. This role, in combination with its affordances, means that, on the one hand, Twitter serves as an efficient tool for agenda-setting and informational exchange. On the other, it demands minimal effort to shape

---

<sup>2</sup> To provide comparison, consider Facebook's more personable prod, "What's on your mind, \*name\*?" which has a more internalised focus.

opinion or rouse engagement. This can prevent meaningful exchanges and nuanced presentations because users must limit their commentary to character limitations. This does pose the risk of stifling meaningful conversation (see Ng, 2020; Bouvier, 2020).

## 4 Methods and methodologies

In this project, the research aims to identify and interpret central features of digitally mediated shaming during the coronavirus pandemic. Specifically, I am analysing video recordings that depict face mask enforcement and refusal in semi-public, commercial spaces in the United States that have been uploaded and circulated on Twitter between 01.04.2020-31.08.2020 so as to discuss them in the wider cultural context of the socio-political struggle in the USA. I have selected eight videos representing the phenomenon and performed close readings focusing on their aesthetic, formal and narrative properties, in addition to close textual analysis of their circulation and discursive reception on Twitter.

As a qualitative method, close readings mean that researchers must pay meticulous attention to the texts, focusing on details as well as overarching patterns. Therefore, it lends itself to richly descriptive analysis and is compatible with another method I will be drawing on in this project: critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is a type of close reading which focuses on power relations and ideological processes in texts (Fairclough, 2003, p. 109). At the same time, CDA cannot sufficiently support symbolic claims; for this, I will also borrow some basic concepts from semiology to effectively describe and interpret the material.

### 4.1 Why textual analysis?

Many studies on Twitter have been quantitative and utilised the wealth of big data which the site is known to produce in the research. This is also true of much research pertaining to online shaming on the site, with several notable studies utilising forms of content analysis (see, for example, Basak et al., 2019; Rost et al., 2016). Content analysis can produce an overarching view of how an issue is dealt with in a large data sample by breaking down elements into a text and dividing them into categories. While this is certainly advantageous in terms of mapping large scale patterns and producing generalisable results (McKee, 2003, pp. 127-128), it can overlook the nuances of digital practices on the site and fails to address how users act and how meaning is produced. Just because a word or phrase is applied frequently on social media does not offer insight into *its use*. According to Alice E. Marwick, qualitative research methods, on the other hand, attempt to understand these processes and places the technology into specific social contexts, places, and times (2013, pp. 117-118). Because I am

interested in how particular practices of digitally mediated shaming can manifest, the qualitative approach of textual analysis will be most meaningful. This is because textual analysis can contribute to the unearthing of “(s)ubtleties of interaction on Twitter, which may have been missed using more quantitative methods” (Marwick, 2013, p. 117).

Admittedly, other qualitative methods, such as interviews, would also provide insight into social interactions on social media. However, in consideration of my focus of research and the resources at my disposal, this method is not feasible for this project. Furthermore, I do not think that conducting interviews with Twitter users would answer the questions I am interested in. I am interested in the specific interactions depicted in the video recordings and subsequent digital practices of Twitter users. This can be best interpreted by reading these texts closely. While this method is interpretative, it is no more interpretative than conducting and analysing interviews. According to Alan McKee (2003) interviews also produce bodies of text which the analyst must then work to interpret using the resources and information at their disposal (p. 84).

## **4.2 Textual analysis**

Textual analysis means conducting educated guesses at likely interpretations of a text and making a case that these are reasonable interpretations (McKee, 2003, p. 70). A methodology, textual analysis, can be used to analyse how meaning is made by applying linguistic, symbolic, and visual cues in texts. The textual analysis provides an in-depth description and interpretation of the material studied and involves reading texts closely to produce knowledge about culture and cultural norms. While the term ‘text’ is often associated with the written word, it is used broadly in media studies. It can also constitute visual and recorded material, such as film, television, advertisements, and social media content (Hawkins, 2017, pp. 2-4). I will use textual analysis to interpret multimodal material, which consists of video recordings and written word.

For textual analysis to be meaningful, a researcher must understand the historical, political, and situational context of which the text(s) is produced and position the texts within the context of which it has been created (Hawkins, 2017, p. 4). In this paper, the coronavirus pandemic and the tumultuous socio-political landscape of the United States will serve as a backdrop to inform the results of my findings.

In my research, I am interested in how recipients construct meaning. Social media threads comprise large bodies of text, and textual analysis is particularly well-suited to interpret public, user-generated conversations and claims taking place on Twitter. This is because textual analysis involves reading and interpreting texts to produce knowledge about cultural norms (Hawkins, 2017, p. 4).

As a social practice, shaming is expressed through language, and what is considered shameful is culturally and historically contingent. CDA will therefore be of particular assistance when describing and interpreting data. Following Norman Fairclough's concept of discourse as "(l)anguage as a form of social practice" (1989, p. 20) and drawing on the poststructuralist linguistic philosophy that "(o)ur access to reality is always through language" (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 8), it is within these social practices that meaning can be made.

Compared to quantitative methods and even qualitative content analysis, my chosen methods require relatively small data samples to perform analysis (Marwick, 2013, p. 117). "What matters is the richness of textual detail, rather than the number of texts analysed" (Tonkiss, 1998, on discourse analysis, cited in Rose, 2016, p. 196). Due to these small samples, qualitative textual analysis cannot, and does not attempt to, provide generalisable facts. Rather, it can offer detailed descriptions and theoretical perspectives that can contribute to the field of knowledge production. Put another way, textual analysis and CDA are qualitative research methods and concern themselves with offering new perspectives and concepts rather than generalisations. That said, while my project looks at a very small segment of digitally mediated social behaviour, I believe it can provide insight that will be beneficial to other scholars of social media studies too.

Textual analysis is an interpretative methodology, and interpretations made depend on a researcher's theoretical viewpoint. I position knowledge production within a poststructuralist perspective. This means that I perceive knowledge as relative and that the same text can produce multiple understandings depending on the lens of which it is viewed and who is viewing it (Hawkins, 2017, p. 3). I acknowledge that my contribution to the field of social media is one of many possible interpretations and that this paper does not lay claim to absolute truths.

Due to this flexible idea of knowledge production, some critics claim that textual analysis can struggle to ascertain validity because of a researcher's subjectivity and the analysis' inability

to produce replicable results (McKee, 2003, p. 119). To counter concerns pertaining to such challenges, a researcher must make extra efforts to secure the quality of research in order to provide valid and trustworthy results. According to Margo Paterson and Joy Higgs (2005), the main criteria to ensure credibility are rigour and ethical behaviour (p. 352). They suggest following the general principles of the *hermeneutic circle* in which the researcher understands that numerous parts come to constitute the whole and where the whole also constitutes each part (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p. 345). When describing and interpreting the material, I will break the texts in my collection into three parts: production, publication and circulation. Here, I consider each part to constitute different stages of a unique type of digitally mediated shaming ritual. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse each section separately and move back and forth between parts before reassembling the components into an entire digital media object (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p. 345). The meticulous handling of data, in addition to the mobility of moving back and forth, constantly revisiting and reassessing, is what lends itself to the research and establishes the interpretation as valid.

### **4.3 Semiology**

Semiology is the methodology of signs and a helpful strategic tool when analysing visual culture. It concerns itself with representations of ideology and the social effects of its ideological meaning (Rose, 2016, pp. 106-107). While research often focuses on the image itself, some semiologists concentrate on the reception of an image, where meaning can be produced by audiences (Rose, 2016, p. 109). This form of semiology is called social semiotics, and I will draw upon both resources for my analysis.

At the same time, it should be noted that semiotics does not have a substantial role in my research. Instead, these semiotic appropriations should be considered an analytical supplement to my overarching methodology of textual and CDA. As a tool, semiotics is particularly complimentary to discourse analysis because it enables a way to identify symbolic content, which subsequently can point to overarching discourses and their ideological underpinnings (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 56). I, therefore, consider it productive to clarify a few basic semiotic concepts before moving on to CDA.

The terminology of semiotics is notoriously complex, but its basic principles are quite straightforward. The *sign* is the basic unit of semiology and comprises two parts, the *signified*

and the *signifier*. The first is a concept or object, and the second is a sound or image attached to that concept. There need not be a correlation between the two, and the signifier can have various meanings. A study of signs can be performed by looking at the relationship between the two (Rose, 2016, pp. 113-114).

Signs can have *denotive* or *connotative* meanings. Both terms, denotation and connotation, are already somewhat ingrained in the English language, but for the record, the former should be understood as descriptive while the latter pertains to a sign's underlying meaning.

Connotation can be *metonymical* when a sign represents something other than its literal meaning or *synecdochical*, which means that a sign represents a larger whole (Rose, 2016, p. 121). In this research project, I consider the lexical and visual symbolism of the 'anti-masker' to be synecdochical of a larger political movement that ascribes to a value system that is not necessarily made explicit in the video recordings. This will be discussed further in chapter 6.

Another concept I have borrowed from semiologists is *anchorage*. Anchorage is a paratextual accompaniment to an image that guides the reader to reach certain interpretations. It is a concept produced by Roland Barthes (1977, pp. 38-41) and of particular significance in this project because I perceive tweets, in which the videos are embedded, to serve a type of interpretative anchoring for meaning to be made amongst Twitter users and audiences. The textual supplement often provides additional information, or emphasises certain elements, or represses others. My own sample indicates that these texts contribute to how audiences understand and interact with the material, and to use discourse-analytical terminology, draw on their own *interpretative repertoires* or what Fairclough calls *member's resources* (MR) (see Fairclough, 1989, pp. 24-25).

#### **4.4 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Discourse analysis can be understood as both theory *and* method (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002) and "(f)ocuses on the systematic account of the complex structures and strategies for text and talk as they are actually accomplished (produced, interpreted, used) in their social contexts" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 198). When using CDA, the researcher is interested in the connection between the use of language and its social practice (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 69).



To explain what CDA seeks to do, I must first clarify what a discourse is and how it is understood to work. A discourse is the specific way we make sense of the world around us and express this sense-making through language. Being rooted in language makes discourse an intrinsic part of social interaction. As written in the chapter's introduction, Norman Fairclough's definition of discourse is that "(l)anguage as form of social practice" (1989, p. 22).

A discourse can comprise of 'ideas, and values, social roles and identities' (see Bouvier, 2020, p. 4) with the premise that discourse is never neutral, rather reflecting the underlying power relations that circulate in society at any given time (see Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, pp. 1-2). CDA seeks to address these power relations by identifying and interpreting the patterns that emerge in language construction. As the name suggests, *critical* discourse analysis approaches the 'common sensical' from a critical viewpoint precisely because of the underlying power or *ideologies* that provide the foundation for discourse (see Fairclough, 1989, pp. 77-86; van Dijk, 2002). Therefore, one of the main reasons to conduct CDA is to understand how discourse is used to produce or reproduce such ideologies. This is especially in cases where a discourse appears to promote unequal distributions of power. I will return to the topic of ideology and power in subchapter 4.4.3.

While some discursive theorists claim discourse is *completely* constitutive of our world (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 19), a critical discourse analyst positions themselves more broadly, acknowledging that a discourse can be both constitutive *and* constituted. In CDA, there are dimensions of society that are not discursive formations, and a discourse can, therefore, shape and reshape the social, but it can also *reflect* it (2002, p. 61). Fairclough writes that the relationship between language and society should be understood as a dialectical relationship, where language is a part of the social, but social is, only in part, language. In *Language and Power* (1989), he writes that "(a)ll linguistic phenomena are social, but not all social phenomena are linguistic" (1989, p. 23). The position that not all of society is discursive greatly affects how subsequent research and analysis is conducted. The view that discourse is only *part* of the social means that discourse alone does not provide satisfactory grounds for conducting analysis. Rather the analyst must reach beyond the text and draw on other social and cultural theory to describe and interpret discursive social interaction (see Fairclough, 1989, p. 24, Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, pp. 69-71).

All language used should be understood as *communicative events* (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, pp. 67-68). These events are conditioned and specified as ‘social conditions of production’ and ‘social conditions of interpretation,’ which in turn connect to three levels of social organisation. According to Fairclough, this means that “(t)he level of the social situation, or the immediate social environment in which discourse occurs; the level of the social institution which constitutes a wider matrix for the discourse; and the level of the society as a whole” (1989, p. 25). Put simply, CDA looks at the “the relationship between *texts, interactions* and *contexts*” which Fairclough visualises in a three-dimensional model (p. 26). This relationship subsequently relates the stages of CDA as an analytical approach: description, interpretation, and explanation. This means the description of the text, interpretation of its production and consumption, and explanation of its features within a wider social practice (see Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 68). I shall return to these later in the chapter when I write more on the specificities of CDA as a method (see subchapter 4.5, *Analysing Discourse*).

Different types of discourse analysis have certain qualitative premises; this also extends to the types of discourse up for analysis. In CDA, it is the “situated language in specific, interactional contexts” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 158) that is of interest, rather than language organisation at a rhetorical level – i.e., what was said and in what context. This can be explored in terms of the production location and how context contributes to audience reception (see Rose, 2016, pp. 214-215). Different audiences may react differently to the same text, or the same audience may respond differently to the text in a different situation, or if the event is presented differently (see Rose, 2016, p. 215). Because of this, we must consider specific and situated discourse rather than at rhetorical level. In my sample, it will be relevant to reflect on the unique cultural and historical specificity of the coronavirus pandemic, the location of the recordings (USA) and the context established in digital practices of social engagement in networked communities.

Norman Fairclough outlines the concept of ‘members resources’ (MR) (1989, p. 11, p. 24). MRs are cognitive resources each person draws upon to process texts. MR is the knowledge persons draw on when they (re)produce texts or offer interpretation and can, amongst other things, include values and beliefs, language, and assumptions. Whilst they exist in each person’s mind, MRs should nonetheless be understood as social processes because they emerge from, are dependent on, and are distributed through the social. This is subsequently internalised by people, who use these MRs in non-discursive and discursive social practices

(pp. 24-25). It is according to the specific sets of social conditions of discourse that “(s)hape the MR people bring into production and interpretation, which in turn shape how texts are produced and interpreted” (1989, p. 25). This means that the level of influence a text has is also largely dependent on certain knowledge people already have (see van Dijk, 1998, p. 244).

#### **4.4.1 Discourse as visual methodology**

So far, I have established that discourse analysis is the study of language as social practice. This means that much research is focused on written and verbal text (in its colloquial sense). At the same time, Fairclough contends that discourse can also comprise visual language . He writes, “(v)isuals can be an accompaniment to talk which helps determine its meaning, (...) [o]r visuals can be a substitute for talk as a perfectly acceptable alternative” (1989, p. 27).

For Gillian Rose (2016), discourse analysis can be applied to visibility insofar as images constructing the social and how particular regimes of truth are constructed and reproduced through images (pp. 192-193). In addition, visibility can be discursive in many of the same ways that traditional understandings of discourse can be, by regulating what is made visible and what is hidden in a specific image and the (re)production of subjects within this realm of visibility. Discourse analysis can also be drawn upon when one wants to know how visual imagery constructs the social. One can approach an image in much the same way as written text, carefully combing through the image for details that construct particular social perspectives (pp. 188-192).

As my material comprises audio-visual material, in addition to written text, this understanding is helpful. While discourse analysis cannot account for all that is present in a text, it does compliment the method of close reading because it involves looking closely at the material to establish what is and what is not made visually present. This is then rendered in detailed description. By looking closely at an image or recording, one can establish key themes and categories for constructing social meaning in the same way as one would with a written text. An example in my collection can be in the rendered visibility of recorded subjects interpreted as wrongdoers by audiences on Twitter. Much of the information pertaining to judgment and condemnation is precisely in their appearance and visual representation. This visual representation contributes to the construction of discursive

categories among audiences, leading to certain forms of typecasting. Here, an ‘anti-masker’ can be constructed as a distinct type of person whose behaviour and attitudes belong to a very specific social and political category. These categories are then expressed in language. The construction of these individuals as types is particularly persuasive and inherently ideological. I posit that it can have a notable effect on the forms of punishment that individuals are subjected to when exposed online.

#### 4.4.2 Discourse and orders of discourse

While I have broadly outlined the basic premise of discourse analysis and CDA, the concept of *discourse* is vague. On the one hand, it can relate to a specific practice; on the other, it can refer to conventions of practice. Furthermore, while these conventions always provide a foundation for discursive construction, there are significant limitations at play. A subject must interact within the boundaries established by the convention (see Fairclough, 1989, p. 28).

Fairclough writes that these discursive conventions are not isolated. Instead, they group in networks called *orders of discourse*. It is these orders that substantiate the ideological nature of discourse (1989, p. 28). An order of discourse can be understood as a specific kind of *social order* from a ‘discoursal perspective’ (1989, p. 29) and “a complex configuration of discourses and genres, within the same social field or institution” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 141). Orders of discourse organise *discourse types* at an institutional level, in addition to society in general and determine the way text production and interpretation is made (2002, p. 67). A specific discourse can draw on several discourse types and endless combinations (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 30-31). In turn, discourse types comprise of genres and discourses. Genres are linguistic parts of social practice, such as a news genre (Fairclough, 1995b, cited in Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 67). According to Teun A. van Dijk (1998), genres can also indicate specific sets of social domains, such as political discourse (p. 196).

The dimensions of an order of discourse are not fixed. Its structural and ideological mutability rest on how power and social conditions are negotiated at a societal or institutional level (Fairclough, 1989, p. 31). Because CDA is interested in the discursive ways that bring about change, it is important to consider orders of discourse when conducting analysis. This is because “(c)hange occurs especially when discourses are transported interdiscursively between orders of discourse” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 142). Because “(o)rders of

discourse embody ideological assumptions, and [that] these sustain and legitimise existing relations of power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 40), the reproduction of discourse is therefore largely dependent on the *how* the discourse is (re)produced.

#### 4.4.3 Power and ideology

In the last section, I briefly unfolded the concept of orders of discourse and how the structure of such orders is determined by the relationship of power and social conditions at an institutional and societal level. Power can be claimed and upheld through coercion or consent, but it is the latter, consent, that is most practised in a democratic society. Ideology is the foundation of consent (Fairclough, 1989, p. 34). The concept of ideological power can assist (non-discursive) power structures such as the economy, but it is also a power that is largely expressed through discourse (Fairclough, 1989, p. 33).

The power of ideology is a central component of society in general and discourse specifically because, when successful, it can, for the most part, operate undetected. This ideological invisibility is the reason CDA rejects common-sense assumptions and ‘taken for granted knowledge.’ The largely unquestioned nature of these pieces of knowledge largely rests on ideologies that have become *naturalised* parts of social interaction, and therefore no longer questioned (see Fairclough, 1989, pp. 91-92). As it is the dominant social power that determines what is considered common-sensical, it is through naturalisation that discourse appears to lose its ideological nature. There is no such thing as a neutrality when considering discourse. At the same time, because of the process of naturalisation, the understanding that ‘that’s just the way things are’ make room for people to (re)produce certain power relations without even being aware that they are doing it. This is an especially concerning thought if it contributes to upholding or promoting unequal forms of power (see Fairclough, 1989, pp. 33-41). As van Dijk explains,

Discourse allows direct and explicit expression of ideologies, but the crucial function of such (usually generic, general) expressions is in their social consequences, namely, the change acquisition, change or confirmation of social beliefs. (1998, p. 193)

This position is also shared by Foucault, who claims that discourse is powerful because discourse is productive and because discourse is everywhere. At the same time, whilst naturalisation is determined by discursive dominance, power itself is not structured as a top-down mode of control; rather, power relations are a *struggle* between (class) groups with

different interests (see Foucault, 1979 in Rose, 2016, p. 189; Fairclough, 1989, p. 34). Fairclough adds that “(t)hose who exercise power through language must constantly be involved in a struggle with others to defend (or lose) their position” (1989, p. 34).

There are innumerable discourses coursing through society at any given time, which means that there is always a multitude of perspectives attempting to fix meaning to the real (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 9). Therefore, the struggle is ongoing. If we then consider Foucault’s assertion that “(t)ruth is a discursive construction and different regimes of knowledge determine what is true and false” (Foucault, 1972, cited in Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 13), then this determination subsequently affects social action. This includes what one can or cannot say, rules of behaviour, the premise of what is true and what is not. The most powerful discourses control these truth claims, what Foucault calls, *regimes of truth*, and it is these regimes that are at the very core of power/knowledge (Foucault in 1977, in Rose, 2016, p. 190).

In my research, ideology comes to the fore, both in what is said and not said. On the one hand, power is assigned to those who control the narrative and therefore have the biggest claim that their statements are factual. Controlling the narrative force of storytelling means that, on the rare occasion that any individual counters these truth claims by asking critical questions or by offering alternative interpretations, they are usually undermined or ignored. I have no way of knowing whether these demonstrations of power are extensions of social standing offline, but they certainly present as highly persuasive forces in digital spaces.

Another way ideology goes undetected is in the way Twitter shapes discourses. Discourse analysis cannot account for the site’s affordances, but affordances can contribute to the way users construct and express meaning on the site. The social organisation of the site, the vast production of daily data through posts, clicks and retweets, hashtags and indexing, in addition to the struggle to establish visibility among an affective and networked public – all contribute to a discursive formation that is ideological driven by site-specific, techno-cultural affordances.

#### **4.4.4 Subject Positions**

For Foucault, “discourse disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting,” which means that the productivity of power means that rather than being repressed, “human subjects

are produced through discourses.” (Rose, 2016, p. 189). Fairclough likens *subject positions* to that of recognised social roles and explains that subject positions essentially mean that people are what they do. This means people, or subjects, are the roles they fill in a social interaction. Being in a specific subject position means that there are certain things a person can, or cannot, do, in terms of whichever subject position, they are positioned in, within a specific discourse. In this, different subject positions determine types of discourse and social structure. At the same time, subject positions can also reproduce these structures because it is only by taking these positions that the social structure is preserved or reproduced (Fairclough, 1989, p. 38). In this, subjects can have passive and active roles- they are passive in so much as they are limited by the social terms given by the discursive type. Still, they are active in the sense that as this constraint is a “(p)recondition for being enabled” and that the process of drawing on different types of discourse demands a certain level of agency (p.39).

To determine different subject positions in each social interaction, a researcher must identify who is involved in a situational context by observing what people are doing or not doing, saying or not saying. In the discourse of anti-maskers and digitally mediated shaming, subject positions can take the role of a cameraperson, recorded subject, citizen journalist, judge and jury, vigilante, and passive audience member. It is only by occupying these positions that the reproduction of social structures is upheld (see Fairclough, 1989, p. 41). It is only by taking on these roles that digitally mediated shaming can produce in full effect.

## **4.5 Analysing discourse**

Analysing discourse requires a study of primary material. This project constitutes a specific sample of video recordings and their subsequent circulation and reception on Twitter. To inform my interpretations, I will draw on secondary material of existing literature, as outlined in chapters 2 and 3.

Following the Foucauldian notion that discourse cannot ascertain ‘ultimate truths,’ but rather is oriented towards interpretations of ‘truth effects,’ the analysis aims to understand how discourses construct notions of the real, rather than to suggest that something is either true or false. The central questions in discourse analysis are “how is the social world, including its subjects and objects constituted in discourse?” and “how effects of truth are created (...)?”

(Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 14). As a discourse analyst, I am therefore interested in the condition and production of meaning.

According to Norman Fairclough, a language is a three-dimensional act of communication consisting of the following: it is a text, it is a discursive practice, and it is a social practice (1989, pp. 24-25). This means that a discourse analysis should consider a text's linguistic features, production and consumption, and broader social practice in which the text is situated. (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 68). An analysis should therefore comprise of description, interpretation, and explanation. I will now briefly unfold these stages of analysis.

#### **4.5.1 Description**

Description is the part of the analysis where the analyst identifies and codes the text according to its formal properties (Fairclough, 1989, p. 26). To explain social interaction and the workings of power, we must ask *how* discourse works and how it does what it does. For Gillian Rose (2016), much of Foucault's more meaningful work was produced in his detailed descriptions of how subjects and objects were produced. She writes that his best work was by "(o)ften focusing on their details, their casual assumptions, their everyday mundane routines, their taken-for-granted architecture, their banalities" (p. 191).

As the word suggests, description requires rich and meticulous detail of material analysed. This type of elaboration is an integral part of qualitative research methods like textual discourse analysis because it offers the reader a window into the empirical data and therefore contributes to upholding transparency. However, this does not mean that description is an objective practice. The act of description is highly interpretative because it is shaped by what the analyst has chosen to include or considers important to emphasise (Fairclough, 1989, p. 27). These choices depend on the researchers own knowledge and perspectives. While discourse analysis can focus on vocabulary or grammatical features, I will predominantly focus on the former, apart from when I consider the utilisation of pronouns in chapter 6. In addition, given the texts multimodality, I will also identify and describe visual patterns and how these construct specific perspectives of the social (see Rose, 2016, pp. 192-193).



### **4.5.2 Interpretation**

According to Norman Fairclough, interpretation pertains to the relationship between text and social interaction (1989, p. 26). He uses the term *interpretation* both as a procedural stage of discourse analysis and for the way participants interpret texts. Interpretation is a central component because this is where texts go through a social process of being ascribed meaning and value. He writes that interpreters draw on their previous knowledge (MR), when interpreting (1989, pp. 140-141). At the same time, in order to provide meaning, all three stages of the communicative event, the text, the discursive practice, and the social practice, must be considered. Research must be able to account for the cooperation of these stages in the process of producing meaning. This involves looking at institutional roles, the values and motivations of producers and receivers, in addition to different elements in the text. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the texts implicit and explicit assumptions (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 10-11).

According to Fairclough, there are six key domains for interpretation: surface of utterance, meaning of utterance, local coherence, textual structure and point, situational context, and intertextual context (1989, pp. 141-145). In my interpretation of user engagement and social interaction on Twitter, I have been particularly interested in the two latter domains pertaining to context rather than textual features and linguistic properties. I want to know how Twitter users interpret the recorded situation and what discourses they draw upon to create meanings of the events. Contexts cannot be taken for granted as participants can draw on various social orders, and within one social media feed, there might be more than one interpretation. Therefore, as a researcher, I must establish which situational contexts are drawn upon in user-generated commentary. Each context is a system of power relationships, and situations may be understood differently depending on different orders (1989, pp. 151-152). Following the Foucauldian notion of discourse, this is important because it means that the dominant power will have the greatest claim to knowledge and representations of truth (Rose, 2016, p. 190).

### **4.5.3 Explanation**

The final stage of analysis, explanation, regards the relationship between interaction and social context. Here, a researcher must demonstrate how discourses are positioned within, how they are determined, and how they reproduce, social practices and structures

(Fairclough, 1989, p. 163). Fairclough writes, “explanation is a matter of seeing a discourse as part of processes of social struggle, within a matrix of relations of power” (1989, p. 163). During the analysis, it is possible to focus on the social effects or the social determinants of discourse. These can be researched at a situational, institutional, and societal level.

For Carolyn Miller (1984), writing on the determination of *genres*, “(b)efore we can act, we must interpret the indeterminate material environment; we define, or “determine” a situation (p. 156). This is important because different levels of environment can require alternate perspectives. In brief, Norman Fairclough writes that we should consider the social determinants, ideologies present and the effects of a text when offering explanation (1989, p. 165). At the same time, a researcher can only provide explanation by drawing on their own MR; the work, therefore, requires a level of reflexivity (see subchapter 4.7.1).

#### **4.5.4 Genres**

Digitally mediated shaming draws on different genres. In his explanation of genres, Fairclough writes,

Genres are the specifically discursive aspect of ways of acting and interacting the course of social events (...). [W]hen we analyse a text or interaction in terms of genre we are asking how a text figures within and contributes to social action and interaction in social events (...) (2003, p. 65).

Some genres are stable, whilst others vary over time. New genres develop through a combination of different genres. (Fairclough, 2003, p. 66). Genres vary in abstraction, but many are tied to networks of social practices, such as a specific genre of interview. For Fairclough, genre-mixing is an aspect of the interdiscursivity of texts. Analysing allows us to locate texts within processes of social change (2003, p. 216).

Carolyn Miller (2017) writes that ‘new’ genres are adaptations of already existing types of text (pp. 2-3) and that genres emerge in response to technological developments and trends in socioeconomic conditions (p. 14). Changes in society will provoke genre change (p. 8). Therefore, genres should not be understood as isolated texts but as cultural categories (Mittell, 2004, cited in Miller, 2017, p. 16). To define a genre, one must examine what actions a text means to produce and how texts are configured by shared characteristics, namely substantive, stylistic and situational features (Miller, 1984, pp. 151-152).

Miller divides genres into *marketed* or *commercial* genres, *administered* genres, *institutional* genres and, the most applicable category for this project, *vernacular* genres (2017, pp. 23-24). Vernacular genres have few institutional or administrative constraints and are a means for people to form shared exigence (social motive) collectively. “News technologies,” like smartphones and internet connections, “give consumers the tools of production and of dissemination, which enable them through collective practice to create new vernacular genres” (2017, p. 25). She adds that these genres surface and are sustained when the ordering of features satisfies a collective need within a social interaction. In a previous publication, Miller also explains that the classification of discourses can provide great insight into the cultural and historical context of a text (Miller, 1984, p. 158).

The media texts analysed in this paper should be considered a vernacular genre as they are a specific response to the cultural and historical of the coronavirus pandemic. While users do have to abide by the terms of service outlined by Twitter, users are able to produce and circulate content without many institutional and administrative restrictions. The texts draw on features from several existing genres but are distinct in several ways. The first the way visibility is leveraged as a means of power in the recorded social interactions. Here, the camera phone plays a prominent role in shaping the social and, to my knowledge, this is very distinct to an American context. There are genres that are similar in style, notably Lauren Cagle’s *strangershot* (2019); however, the camera is in large part concealed in these productions. Furthermore, while the *strangershot* is circulated in digital spaces to rouse judgement and mockery, it cannot be understood to have the same political underpinning as the texts in my analysis which are (at least partly) oriented towards societal change or enforcing specific types of social behaviour pertaining to particular socio-political climates. At the same time, Miller writes that despite new or adapted specificities, we recognise new genres because of the similarities shared with previous genres (1984, p. 157).

#### **4.5.5 Intertextuality and interdiscursivity**

Building on genre, a question all textual analysts must reflect upon is, where does one text end and another begin?

Teun A. van Dijk writes,

There are many examples where there is an ambiguity between such discontinuous instalments of the ‘same’ text or talk, on the one hand, and sets of ‘intertextually’ related discourses, on the other. (1998, p. 195)

Intertextuality means that a text belongs to a series of other texts and/or comprises of features from other texts (Fairclough, 1989, p. 152, Fairclough, 2003, p. 47). A text always exists in relation to other texts, which requires the analyst to view texts in a historical and cultural trajectory (Fairclough, 1989, p. 155). A text’s meaning cannot be rendered in isolation; rather, its meaning is made when considered with other texts or images (Rose, 2016, p. 188). In its reproduction a text will draw on, include or counter previous texts and events (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 73, p. 151). To consider the intertextual features of a text, we must consider what voices are included excluded and are there significant absences? (Fairclough, 2003, p. 47) Analysts must also consider what parts of the text are considered presupposed (Fairclough, 1989, p. 152).

Interdiscursivity means that a text comprises of a combination of genres, styles, and discourses and how these are blended in a text (Fairclough, 2003, p. 218). When considering a texts interdiscursive features, one can consider the way discourses are combined in new and creative ways, thus working towards social change, or how discourses are mixed in traditional ways, thus upholding the current order (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 73).

Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are an important part of discourse analysis because an analysis of these can explain how discourse contributes to social change (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 139).

In my data collection, the video recordings and engagement on Twitter show numerous intertextual and interdiscursive features. I laid the groundwork features that I deemed relevant in the literature review and chapter on theory. The video recordings draw on an intertextual and interdiscursive mix of reality television, broadcast journalism and shaming penalties, in addition to citizen-led forms of surveillance practices, activism and vigilantism. Similarly, the engagement online extends from these tropes in combination and is exemplified through an almost ritualistic form of communal punishment, largely reminiscent of what scholars have likened to the pillory or town square (see Hess & Waller, 2014; Jensen, 2020). In addition, the premise of public health measures is not the force driving the circulation of the material. Rather, users draw a blend of politics, race, gender and class, to name a few.

## 4.6 Data collection and sample

As written in the introduction, my sample consists of eight videos and 1647 comments and quote tweets circulated on Twitter during the period 01.04.2020 – 31.08.2020. All videos and tweets were posted on opens profiles. My initial approach was grounded and exploratory. I began the search on Twitter using the hashtags #COVID19 and #coronavirus. This resulted in vast amounts of data, much of which was not relevant to digitally mediated shaming. However, doing this manually allowed me to discover the fruitful hashtags: #covidiot, #moronavirus, #wearadamnmask and #maskhole, which resulted in a significant amount of content that pertained to pandemic-specific forms of shaming. In terms of covid-related shaming in digital networks, one type of text was prevalent: facemask disputes in semi-public settings. I, therefore, narrowed my selection further, and these results were combed through meticulously and coded for overarching themes.

As textual analysis does not offer repeatable or numerical value, the quantity of data does not matter as much as data quality. On the other hand, what is of importance is that a sufficient foundation has been established so that the researcher can offer rich textual descriptions and interpretations. It is important to understand that the sample described in this project should be understood as exemplary. I chose the eight audio-visual texts and the ensuing collection of user-generated commentary because they represent the wider phenomenon. The sample size allows me to offer richly detailed forms of analysis. This is a crucial and deliberate choice on my behalf. I want to illuminate these practices at the level of minutiae because more abstract and distant forms of analysis which are performed with more extensive data samples cannot offer the insight that interests me. I want to know how people use technologies and visibility to shape social interactions and uphold normative expectations during a time of great unrest and within a (screen) cultural context. It is in these digitally mediated practices that meaning is produced. Therefore, the analysis will only be satisfactory if detailed elaboration is provided. Given my limited time and resources, I would not have been able to offer such in-depth analysis had my sample size been larger.

Finally, while the video footage has been recorded locations in the United States, I cannot ascertain the nationality and location of those engaging with the material on Twitter.

#### 4.6.1 Coding

My approach to data collection has been grounded and exploratory. I let the material guide me to new discoveries, and I attempted to keep as much of an open mind as possible when sampling and later as I began to code the data for key themes. To identify key themes, I followed the basic, preliminary coding principle applied in content analysis, wherein I organised my material by using descriptive labels (see Rose, 2016, p. 92). I began broadly categorising into what I determined to be the most overarching forms of engagement: punitive, entertainment and play, information, judgment, and activism. Then I subdivided these into more precise categories pertaining to systemic critique and activism (including some forms of ‘callout’ and elevating marginalised voices), vigilantism, stigmatisation, entertainment, and play, hereunder sarcasm, joke and mockery. I have also been mindful of absences or less pervasive perspectives in the material. While certain patterns were reasonably evident from the onset, like forms of snap judgement and condemnation pertaining to moral failings, critical opinions and posing questions about the recordings and the featured interactions were rare. The same is said for any sympathies about the person posited as the “wrongdoer” in the interactions. These forms of absence or scarcity can also provide meaningful insights because there is an indication that only certain forms of sentiment are permissible in these feeds, and these are all within the same realm of affect (see Bouvier, 2020).

Textual analysis and discourse analysis provides the researcher with a degree of flexibility that is not given to content analysts. Where the latter demands a level of predetermined stringency, the textual and discourse analyst can be guided by the material and constantly return to it to review and reassess. In these reassessments, new categories can be established, which can provide additional or alternative insights. The key question is to understand how a particular discourse is used as a persuasive tool and how these discourses are constructed as truthful (Rose, 2016, p. 209). The key to meaningful coding is to look for the work “(t)hat is being done to reconcile conflicting ideas, to cope with contradiction or uncertainty, or to encounter alternatives” (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 255, cited in Rose, 2016, p. 209). In my sample, some of the most insightful are in the contradictions prevalent in feeds which draw on the same problematic behaviours that they are critiquing, such as when a man is shamed for uttering homophobic slurs but, in turn, is ridiculed as a gay man in Twitter feeds. It is

important to consider these elements carefully because they shed light on the volatility and ambiguity of voices and judgements present on the site.

#### **4.7 Ethics – Anonymity and NSD**

My empirical data, namely video recordings and commentary, was published and circulated on open profiles on Twitter. Despite this, some data did include personal information such as a person's identifiable appearance (face) or when someone was identified by name or when a username was the same as a user's actual name. To conduct responsible research, I applied to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and was granted permission to handle personal data without having to reach out to every participant to get their consent.

Following NSD's stipulations, all data was anonymised during collection. I removed all identifiable elements, such as names, geolocations, dates published and to be on the safe side, retail chains and shop locations. When such information was provided in the data, I wrote in square brackets: [geolocation], [name] and so on. NSD did not approve me to store video recordings on any of my devices, and they did not consent to me storing any links or screenshots of material. They required me to fill in a form about Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). After careful consideration, I decided that I could work around the restrictions imposed by NSD pertaining to handling personal data and subsequent storage. My solution was to utilise the bookmark function on Twitter and save relevant posts on the site itself. This was a good solution to prevent any privacy breaches, but it was not ideal for sorting and navigating through vast amounts of data. Because of this adaptation, NSD deemed a DPIA unnecessary.

#### **4.8 Methodological reflections and reflexivity**

Twitter feeds are fluid and subject to change as users comment or repost. Returning to Tweets I was interested in was a particular challenge and ended up being an unnecessarily time-consuming and frustrating process. This was especially evident as I largely sampled my collection during the Autumn of 2020, *after* the time period I had chosen for my project. It might have been easier to do a day-by-day collection, but I wanted to find material influenced

by the high level of uncertainty during the earliest stages of the pandemic. Future research may benefit from beginning their data collection in real-time.

Textual and discourse analysis are qualitative research methods and largely dependent on a researcher's interpretations. This means that a researcher's subjectivities and research practices will influence how the analysis is conducted, what questions are asked and what conclusions are drawn (see Rose, 2016, pp. 215-217). Critics of these forms of analysis question the validity of such interpretative methods because results are not replicable or generalisable, and results depend on analysts own (subjective) interpretations (McKee, 2003, p. 119). However, following McKee, I claim all research has an element of interpretation, even quantitative, numerical methods of analysis, which also generate bodies of text which must be interpreted (2003, pp. 120-123).

As acknowledged earlier in the text, my analysis is positioned from the perspective of social constructionism and hermeneutics. My analysis will not provide an absolute understanding, nor is it more truthful than other research done in the field. I am a product of the discourses that I have chosen to analyse, and my interpretations result from this. From the standpoint of social constructionism, knowledge production is contingent. I have applied specific theories and empirical data at the expense of others. My analysis might have produced other results if I had made different choices. Furthermore, the discourses applied are not concretised, discoverable objects; instead, they are products of my knowledge and ones which, as an analyst, I have constructed (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 144). This is important to keep in mind when I present my interpretations and points of discussion.

While oriented towards the great socio-political and screen cultural climate of the West, my research is contextually situated in the United States of America. I am not American, and I have no affiliation to the country apart from what I witness through various forms of mediation. In addition, I am white, female, I trust scientific reason and expert knowledge, and I lean left on the political spectrum. As Norman Fairclough writes, there is no objective analysis of a text (2003, p. 14). Like other textual analysts, my interpretations are a product of my subjectivity. I urge readers to keep this in mind when considering my results and interpretations.

I have strived to work as transparently as possible to ascertain reliability and validity. I have tried to offer as much insight into the material as possible while still abiding by NSD's stipulations. While I was not permitted to include screenshots or linkable material, I have



written detailed descriptions in order to shed light on the material and followed the principle of the hermeneutic circle to establish the phenomenon as a whole.

## 5 Audio-visual texts and the site of production

This project aims to understand how digitally mediated shaming has manifested during the coronavirus pandemic, specifically looking at recordings of mask-related disputes circulated on Twitter. My interest is in how visibility is negotiated to leverage power, uphold social norms and produce consumable content.

My first question is, therefore:

- What are the key characteristics of these anti-masking videos?

In this chapter, I conduct a textual analysis of the video recordings in my sample, offering rich description and interpretation of the text's formal, aesthetic, and narrative features. Here I will address key elements in the texts which I have determined to constitute a distinct type of digitally mediated shaming and which I understand to be culturally and historically situated. While I acknowledge that these texts bear many intertextual features, I nonetheless weight the prominent role of the smartphone as a powerful actor in shaping the social interactions depicted in the recording. Writing of digital genres and disciplinary function of biopower, Lauren Cagle writes that, "(t)he new technologies are a key explanatory factor in the emergence of strangershots, a genre that depends on ubiquitous access to both cameras and online distribution technologies" (2019, p. 71). This is also true in my own data collection. However, where the strangershot is taken without the photographed subject being aware of the fact (2019, p. 68), in my sample, the camera is often brought attention to during the recording itself. Because of the prominence of the recording device, the cameraperson often moves from bystander to active participant during the interaction. Additionally, it offers another setting for establishing power and inflicting feelings of shame and exposure before it is even made accessible online. Finally, drawing on Hito Steyerl's *poor image* (2009), I consider how the specificity of these recordings speak to the plurality of uncertainties of our time.

### 5.1 The video footage

The recordings depict persons in a confrontation in semi-public spaces, notably commercial spaces, such as large retail chains, "big box" stores and supermarkets. Whilst not always

explicitly expressed, the two dominant themes of exchange are either persons attempting to record that they are denied service at an establishment, or more commonly, the same issue, but from the opposing perspective. In the latter, the person(s) recorded are the person(s) who refuse to comply with either store policies and/or state-regulated mask mandates. They are filmed by fellow patrons or by store employees. In addition, those who record anti-maskers, do not record themselves or offer any other means of self-identification. In events where the person filming is the person being denied service, there is a tendency to offer some form of self-identification, such as turning the camera around on themselves or disclosing their name.

Regardless of the filmmaker's perspective, the interactions are always antagonistic. However, it should be noted that how it is expressed can vary, from measured annoyance, name-calling and full-blown temper tantrums. The persons filmed range in age and include both sexes, but notably, most perceived wrongdoers (according to how the recordings are presented on Twitter, see chapter 6) are white. The opposing party is represented by a more diverse group of people with a range of ethnic backgrounds. This juxtaposition can be especially noticeable in the recordings where patrons are recorded berating shop employees.

Video	Video Summary
1	Recorded Subject: White male, 40s-50s. Setting: Discount, retail chain.  Denied service for refusal to wear a mask. The man claims he is exempt because he does not have an ear. He threatens the staff with fines and hurls homophobic abuse at the person filming. The video comprises of two parts. In the second the man pretends to expose his genitalia, gesturing towards the camera. It is unclear whether the person filming is an employee or a patron.
2	Recorded Subject: White male, 30s-40s. Setting: Big box, retail chain.  Wearing patriotic, themed t-shirt recorded for refusing to wear a mask. The man rages towards the camera, with fist clenched. He shouts and roars that he feels threatened and orders the person filming to put the phone down. The person filming appears to be a patron. They do not have an American accent.
3	Recorded Subject: White female. 30-40s. Setting: Supermarket, retail chain.  Throws rageful rant towards store employees for being denied service due for refusing to wear a mask. The person filming is at first positioned at an observational distance and takes on a narrative style of reporting, including the specific information pertaining to the scene, such as location. They talk about the situation and address potential viewers of the recording. The video was uploaded to Twitter in three parts. In the last part, the woman who is now positioned in front of the camera, addresses the camera and claims she is medically exempt.
4	Recorded Subject: White male. 60s-70s. Setting: Big box, retail chain.

	<p>Wearing sportswear. Launches rageful, abusive tirade towards store employees for being denied service for refusing to wear a mask. Claims it is an infringement on his rights as a private citizen. The employees present are calm and continuously ask him to leave. All employees are wearing face masks.</p> <p>Person filming is an observational party, unclear if they are a patron or a store employee. They express condemnation to the man which results in their move from observer to participant.</p>
5	<p>Recorded Subject: White female. 60s-70s. Setting: Big box, retail chain.</p> <p>Woman (and her elderly mother) are recorded by (presumed) fellow patron who claims she is refusing to wear a facemask. The woman is holding two masks in her hands. The cameraperson is a participant in the antagonistic exchange, and both take on a mocking and derisive tone. She poses for the camera and the cameraperson's communicative style seems both performative and informative. The woman claims she is a doctor. Store employees appear to be unfamiliar with the situation.</p>
6	<p>Recorded Subject: White male. 40s-50s. Setting: Supermarket, retail chain.</p> <p>Male, store employee(s) is (are) recorded by a patron for denying admittance to the store premises for their refusal wear a face mask. The person behind the camera is female. The employees offer to shop for her, but she claims it is an infringement on her privacy. She then takes on a narrative style of reporting and addresses intended recipients of the video in which she identifies herself by name and offers information specifically pertaining to the scene and events.</p>
7	<p>Subject: White male. 20s-30s. Setting: Big box, retail chain.</p> <p>Male, store employee is recorded by a patron for denying service for patron's refusal to wear a face mask. The cameraperson threatens the employee with exposing him online, to which the employee responds by addressing the camera. The customer flips the camera on himself, a white male in his 20s-30s. and says he refuses to wear a mask because he woke up in a free country. His shopping cart is taken away and he is instructed to leave.</p>
8	<p>Subject: Latino male. 20s. Setting: Discount, retail chain</p> <p>Man is recorded for not wearing his mask in the store. The man recorded is holding his phone and recording the camera person, simulating a type of dual. The exchange is antagonistic and gets worse as the man on film misgenders a store employee repeatedly before threatening to upload his recording to social media, that the recording will go viral and that they will lose their job. The cameraperson states that it is more likely that the man harassing everyone will be unemployed.</p>

Fig. 1: Table of video selection and summary

### 5.1.1 Formal and aesthetic properties

As written in the introduction to the chapter, the interactions are recorded on handheld devices (smartphones). The camera movement is unsteady but centred and rarely moves the focus away from the perceived wrongdoer. Sometimes the incident is filmed by a third party, and sometimes by a person directly involved in the altercation.

Image resolution is poor; its rough, grainy visual quality producing an impression that the recording is unaltered. All footage is framed by two thick, black panels, a common feature of footage recorded on smartphones. Due to the footage being filmed on handheld devices,

recorded events unfold from the cameraperson's point of view, which skews the event from a specific viewpoint. In contrast, had the exchange been captured on the shop's surveillance camera, which is commonly positioned at an elevated, bird's eye view, it would have offered a more balanced overview because it could include both subjects in the dispute equally.

In a similar fashion, because the cameraperson is holding the recording device and is closest to the microphone, their utterances are much louder and more distinct than the other people present during the exchange. This contributes to underscoring their authoritative role in the production. This is made even more evident when others talk because the audio can often be muffled, rendering parts of the dialogue inaudible.

In addition, the soundscapes also appear unfiltered, and a flurry of background noises, which are common in retail settings, are a pervasive feature. In video 1, the monotone drawl of the shop's public address system calling customers to "cashier number three please" echoes in the background. In other videos, the sound of clattering trolleys and the undecipherable murmurings of uninvolved fellow shoppers buzz out of frame. We hear beeps and bops, scanners, and alarms. In certain recordings, the expansiveness of the retail area, with its high ceilings and wide floor spaces, provides an echoey soundscape. This alludes to the behemoth nature of the store, both figuratively and literally. In video 2, for instance, the man's angered outcry reverberates as if he is standing in a large sports hall. In other videos, retro pop music booms in the background.

In their claim to authenticity, recorded interactions are not presented as premeditated, but as chance encounters, wherein the suggested role of the cameraperson is as a reporter, not a producer. The unedited composition of material enhances these 'truthful' depictions and adds to a perception of the event's accidental nature. Furthermore, because of the aesthetic and formal properties, the distribution of the recording is linked to a sense of immediacy. The event has been recorded and uploaded in quick succession. In other words, the events are extended from spatial-temporal settings to distant audiences online in a matter of moments.

### **5.1.2 The supermarket – spatial-temporal setting**

The setting for all video recordings is in semi-public, commercial spaces, from coffee shops, kiosks and fast-food chains. However, most videos have been recorded in large retail chains, supermarkets and discount and big box stores.

As with the video's soundscape, the visuality of the recordings conveys the familiar bustle of busy stores. We see towering shelves of cardboard boxes, fresh produce, cash registers and promotional posters advertising '2 for 1' deals and the promise of big savings. Store employees, when seen, wear clothing items and accessories that signify their association with the store – sporting vests and shirts with the store's logo printed on the back, ID cards hanging around their neck. Mask-wearing customers move back and forth in the background, even as the recorded interactions get more heated and antagonistic. Some seem completely unfazed, while others swiftly glance over their shoulder to witness events. The swift shoulder glance usually happens in motion as they continue to push their shopping trolleys and continue their daily errands. No one stops, gawks or attempts to intermeddle.

I interpret the setting of the supermarket and big-box chain to be significant in three ways. First, supermarkets and large retail chains are lowbrow sites of mass-produced commodity. mass-produced. Notably, none of the recorded exchanges takes place in boutique stores or other upscale places of commerce. The setting provides a class situated backdrop for the interactions. Furthermore, as a site for cultural production, these settings are not entirely unfamiliar as spaces for entertainment and lampooning. Television shows like *Superstore* (IMDB, 2021) to websites like "People of Walmart" (Cagle, 2019, p. 70) have both oriented content towards the shameless behaviour or appearance of customers.

Second, while online options are abundant, most people still go grocery shopping at one point or another during the week or month. It is also one of the few commercial spaces that have remained open during the coronavirus pandemic and during regional and national lockdowns. Not only does that render it one of the few places where people have opportunities to interact with other people, but it is also a fertile place for people who would not normally socialise to encounter one another. The use, or lack, of facemasks is a visible signature, making it easy for people with opposing views to get into contestation.

Third, supermarket employees do not have the luxury of working from home. Because supermarkets have remained open throughout the pandemic, their employees are effectively rendered essential workers, similarly to, amongst others, healthcare professionals. This has established a new narrative for an often-undervalued workforce, in which their labour at the frontline of the pandemic is discursively constructed as favourable and honourable.

### 5.1.3 Subject positions – who is filming who?

So far, I have established some of the videos' distinctive features in greater detail. As mentioned in the preliminary introduction, two perspectives dominate the interactions – the pro-maskers and the anti-maskers. I have sketched the binary opposition of these two subject positions and documented how the positions command the discursive events captured on camera in broad terms. At the same time, taking the position of pro-masker and anti-masker needs further clarification. The first group, those I have concluded to be pro-maskers, are those who position themselves from the point of public health and safety amidst a global pandemic. These people conform to the CDC's recommendations and abide by the rules set in place by state mask mandates and/or store policies. Apart from the videos that feature store employees upholding company policy, these people are usually behind the camera, recording those without masks. In this discourse, facemasks are a significant part of disease prevention measures, and the people who are recorded are non-compliant rule-breakers.

In the opposing group, the refusal to comply is positioned from the perspective of self-governance – forcing a person to wear a face mask is a threat or breach of their constitutional rights as Americans. A similar sentiment is expressed in their aversion to being recorded, which is an additional infringement on their personal space and bodily autonomy. Those I have identified to subscribe to this position often articulate sentiments pertaining to *harassment, being threatened or issues of privacy*. Several people state that they are medically exempt from wearing a face covering and, in several videos, it is claimed that refusing service for not wearing a mask is against the law. In video 1, a man who pretended to expose his genitalia and made numerous homophobic slurs repeatedly threatened the employees with fines if they forced him to leave the premises.

Apart from the two main positions addressed above, provided information about the person filming is scant. Aside from the man in video 7, who flips the camera to feature himself, and the woman who identifies herself by name in video 6, very little is otherwise revealed about the people recording. In video 5, the woman recorded attempts to wave him away, claiming he knows nothing about her situation, to which the man responds, "what you know about me, ma'am, is that I'm wearing my mask."

Because they are positioned outside of the frame, the cameraperson is afforded a level of anonymity that is not offered to the other participants in the interaction. There is no evidence in any of the videos that any attempt has been made to conceal the identity of the person

perceived to be in the wrong. Furthermore, because it is not a requisite that they upload the content to social media themselves, the person filming can both document and shape events without substantial risk of being subjected to the culture of visibility they have (re)produced. Many of the videos in my sample have been uploaded by a third party, and what is made visible or known is, therefore, at their discretion. What is made known is important because it affects how sense-making is produced among audiences. Here, there is reason to reflect on Foucault's notion that "visibility is a trap" (1977, p. 200) because the ability to remain concealed and the protection and freedom that offers should not be underestimated. As I will demonstrate in chapter 6, the volatility of people's perceptions and the polarisation of audiences reveal that scathing judgments of shame and condemnation are overwhelmingly directed at those on camera. Because shame is so intrinsically linked to being exposed, the sole fact of being made visible to an audience means the subject is vulnerable to becoming the target of a wide range of judgement calls which, while rooted in the same affective sensibilities, are nonetheless diverse perspectives of a given situation and driven by a spectrum of motivations and causes. Furthermore, as many scholars and journalists have acknowledged, the unruly and sprawling nature of the internet means that once something is published, digitally mediated information is virtually impossible to control or contain (e.g., Pfeffer et al., 2014; Ronson, 2015; Laidlaw, 2017; Basak et al., 2019).

#### **5.1.4 The narrative force of the camera**

Some of the recordings are filmed from the perspective of a third party. In others, the incident is filmed from the perspective of a person directly involved in the altercation. Often these two can merge as the camera is acknowledged in some way by the person caught on film. With this, the cameraperson can move from an observational party to an active participant within the same event. Whilst the verbal explicitness of drawing attention to the camera is not an exclusive feature, a notable commonality is that there seem to be no attempts to conceal the camera during the event.

In video 4, the person behind the camera has been positioned to the side of events for the duration of the recording, but towards the end exclaims, "I've got you on video, so why don't you just go ahead and leave?!" following up with, "Quit spitting all over people!" At this, the aggrieved man shifts his attention away from the employees he was yelling at and approaches the person behind the camera, asking, "Do you need my ID?" The physical proximity causes



the filmmaker and the man to be positioned in an intimate close-up. Their subsequent exchange offers additional insights into the unfolding of witnessed events, wherein the man suggests he has been threatened by the person behind the camera.

The presence of the camera is immediate in video 5, where the recording begins with a woman posing for the camera, whilst the man filming her states, "Say cheese! You're in [retail chain] not wearing your mask, refusing to wear your mask." The woman feigns a sad facial expression and responds with a tone of derisive, faux sympathy, "Yes... Call the police..." This incident and others like it, where the person filmed is aware that they are being recorded largely shapes and constitutes the following exchange between the person recording and the person being recorded. The woman asked to say cheese defiantly reacts by posing for the camera, puckering her lips, and making kissing gestures. Similarly, in video 1, the man gives a thumbs up demonstratively, unzipping his trousers and gesturing to expose his genitalia. In this incident, it is also notable to mention that whilst he addresses the store employee situated to the left of the frame, with a level of indignation and condescension, the person he directs derogatory, homophobic slurs towards is the person filming. Likewise, the aggression exhibited in video 2, is directed at the camera where a maskless man claims assertively, but calmly, he and his family are being harassed and that the person filming is creating a scene to which he feels threatened. The filmmaker, in socially distanced response, claims, "We are six feet away from you... I'm not harassing you." The audio cuts out for a millisecond, but at this moment, any semblance of measured response is tossed aside as the man stomps towards the camera in what can be interpreted as an outward expression of territorial aggression. His chest is puffed up, his arms are extended broadly, and both fists are clenched. In a frenzied rage, he shouts at the person behind the camera, "I FEEL THREATENED! BACK UP! THREATEN ME AGAIN!" As he charges forward, the camera retreats in tandem as the cameraperson steps backwards. The camera never falters to the side of the floor, continuously focused on the enraged man. The camera follows him as he begins to walk away. The man looking over his shoulder, again, charges forward towards the person filming and yells, "BACK THE FUCK UP AND PUT YOUR FUCKING PHONE DOWN!"

The recording of this interaction is a mediated representation of events. This means that distant viewers, like me, are at the informational discretion of whatever the tweet's author and cameraperson decided to disclose. I cannot know what happened before the recording device was switched on or what transpired when the recording device was turned off. For the text to be effective, I must therefore trust that the storyteller is being truthful. However, there is no

real way of knowing this. With all certainty, I cannot claim that the man's aggression would have escalated regardless of the presence of the video camera. However, given his expressed anger, it is reasonable to assume it would not have reached the same level of animosity. In a way, the unfolding of the situation becomes a very literal example of how this new visibility culture, provided in large part by smartphone technology, is "(r)eshaping the fields of social and political life today" (Thompson, 2020, p. 19).

There is perhaps no interaction in my collection that exemplifies the extremity of this new culture of visibility facilitated by new technologies more than video 8. Here, the recorded subject is holding his phone towards the cameraperson and simultaneously filming the exchange. In other words, the cameraperson, whose point of view we as an audience are witnessing, is also being recorded from the other perspective. Both subjects threaten each other with online destruction and job loss. In this way, the interaction is a modern take on the infamous gunfighting duels of the wild west, wherein both parties are armed, pitted against one another and, importantly, where the one who draws first is usually victorious.

It is not that the pronunciation of the camera is the only reason why this situation and others like it reach extreme levels of violence and pugnacious behaviour. There are thousands of videos online where similar interactions have been documented either with hidden cameras or surveillance recordings. On Reddit, there are numerous subreddits, like [r/publicfreakout](#) (n.d.), that is exclusively designated to sharing video footage of people displaying various degrees of antagonistic or embarrassing behaviour. In many of these videos, the transgressor is seemingly unaware that they are being recorded. This can be witnessed in my collection too. For example, the man in video 4 is rampantly aggrieved prior to the presence of the camera being made known to him. He does not seem aware of the fact until the filmmaker begins shouting that he is caught on film and that he needs to stop spitting on people. These utterances come across as an intentional insertion on the filmmaker's behalf to make the presence of the camera known.

Another example of how the camera is weaponised as a means to leverage power is in video 7. In this recording, a man utilises the proposed threat of visibility in a very direct manner. The man begins filming a [retail chain] employee in close shot for refusing him service at the store's check-out. The proximity of their face-to-face interaction ensures that the man's face and personal id-badge are easily distinguishable in the shot. The man filming states, "I'll just put you on my 3,000 follower Instagram feed, mostly locals." At this, the employee waves to

the camera, locks eyes with the lens before addressing the viewer, "Hi everyone! I work for [retail chain], and I'm asking this member to put on a mask because that is our company policy (...)."

Interestingly, whilst the employee tells him to wear a mask, the man filming flips the camera around to himself. Then, in rebuttal to the employee, he states assertively, "And I'm not doing it 'cause I woke up in a free country." The filmmaker is a white, brown-haired, bearded man in his late twenties to thirties, wearing sunglasses and a t-shirt with a large NASA slogan on the chest. It is the only incident in my collection where the person filming shows their face on camera. The warning he issues to the employee is that the video will be posted and seen by thousands of people on social media, which suggests that he understands and anticipates how content can be received by an online audience. At the same time, by identifying himself in the recording, he does not perceive the same visibility as a threat or consequence to himself. Rather, he seems to be righteously emboldened by the fact that he is in a 'free country.' The implicit political dimension of this utterance and interaction offers insight into how the camera can be weaponised and how the action of filming non-consensual subjects is attributed legitimacy because it is rooted in a cause. In some ways, this draws on similar sentiment to that of digital whistle-blowers, who, according to Thompson, "see the leakage of sensitive information into the public domain as part of their 'mission' or self-understanding – that is, it is part of a political project or set of political beliefs" (2020, p. 16).

### **5.1.5 Reporting versus (re)producing events**

In video 6, there is a similar exchange to that of the man that "woke up in a free country." A mask-less woman is denied entry and service to a supermarket. She decides to record the interaction between herself, the shop greeter and the store manager - both refuse her access to the premises. They are heard offering her a face mask or the option of someone shopping on her behalf. She rejects both options, steering the disagreement towards issues of privacy and an aversion to the idea that she might have to share personal information, hereunder shopping habits, and card details, with the staff. Drawing on a style reminiscent of on-the-ground reporting in broadcast journalism, she identifies herself by name and discloses the store location, "This is [first name and surname]. I'm at [geolocation, retail chain], so if anybody wants to shop here, you have to have a mask." This narrative style of reporting is applied in (some) other videos in my collection and suggests that they are being produced for a wider

audience rather than as evidentiary documents for other purposes, e.g., course of legal action. In video 3, the camera is positioned at an observational distance to the scene of a woman in heated disagreement with several store employees, who are distinguishable by their unified dress code. The woman is shouting, but the specificities of the exchange are inaudible. The filmmaker offers context immediately, in the (admittedly more colloquial) style of reportage, "Y'all, Karen is showing out in [retail chain]. She does not have on a mask, and somebody said, 'fuck you, leave,' and she is having it out. [retail chain]." We can hear the woman shouting, but it is hard to decipher exactly what is said.

Due to the time limitations for video content on Twitter, the video was uploaded in three clips, with an instruction by the author on Twitter to follow the thread. In the following clip, the woman, still at a distance, is seen gesticulating angrily, visibly heated, and heard shouting, "Do you think this is okay?!" to the shop attendant. The man behind the camera provides more information as the situation unfolds, "This is day one, this is opening day of [retail chain] in [geolocation]. This is Karen." The woman throws her shopping basket on the floor, crying out, "You fucking pigs, you fucking democratic pigs!" To which the filmmaker in gleeful *schadenfreude* exclaims, "Woo!" The woman then starts to walk away from the situation, which positions her closer to the camera, making it within her field of vision. Continuing her discernible tirade, she stops, places herself in front of the camera and addresses both (presumed) crowd on the shop floor and the camera lens - airing her grievances about her medical condition and the store's harassment.

The commentary and interaction in these videos demonstrate an intent to reach a large audience and resonates with Thompson's idea of mediated online interaction, which is largely "oriented towards a plurality of distant others" (2020, p. 10). It is also reminiscent of the mediated scandals that have dominated much of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century political discourse. It has made present marginally unacceptable behaviours, which used to be hidden by the majority of the public. For Thompson, who understood the mediated scandal to constitute its own genre, there are actors who, consequentially work, not only to disclose these scandals but to produce them (2020, pp. 25-26).

If we return to the weaponisation of the camera phone and the interaction it often provokes, it will position the videos in a different light than simply democratised styles of reportage or even raising political consciousness. In many cases, the belligerent behaviour of the transgressor-victim is often the expressed provocation to the fact that he or she is being

filmed. This can also mirror specific styles of reality television geared at policing and scandal, in which there is intent on capturing a particular moment, a certain behaviour. In other words, there is a desire to produce the undesirable. As one Twitter user comments in response to video 8, but which could easily have been featured in any one of the feeds in my sample: "Why must everyone in America be their own reality TV channel hoping to capture that one gotcha moment that'll go viral?"

I have now established several ways in which mediated visibility largely constitutes the interactional nature of events in my sample of videos. This visibility can offer both premise and legitimacy for the shaming and condemnation of the individual. After all, the antagonism displayed provides one of the most fertile premises for shaming when the footage is subsequently uploaded and shared online. In video 5, where the woman was instructed to 'say cheese,' the filmmaker suggests that the woman and her elderly mother, who sat quietly on a mobility scooter, refused to wear face masks. However, the legitimacy of the storyline comes into question when it becomes evident in the recording that the woman is holding two facemasks in her hands. Furthermore, their exchange happens directly in front of the customer service desk at the front of the store, and the employees do not seem to be engaged in the confrontation. The man filming is understood to be a fellow patron, not an employee. This is made evident when we hear him addressing someone out of shot to call their manager. To which we hear another male voice, presumably a shop assistant, expressing unfamiliarity with the situation and a marked tone of confusion, "You want me to call my manager?" The camera, still focused on the woman, shows her nodding in agreement. She explains that the man is taking pictures of her because she has not got around to put her facemask on yet. She simultaneously gesticulates with the visible face masks in her hands.

Of course, there is no way to verify the validity of truth claims posited in the video, given the methods at my disposal. Still, the exchange does raise the question of whether the man is documenting a situation or whether he is producing it. This question is not settled any further with his communicative style, which in a similar vein to the other videos, takes on a narrative style of reporting. He is speaking to the woman filmed simultaneously as he addresses a wide but distant audience. Here too, the ambiguity of the video draws on the characteristics of hybrid forms of news and reality television which, as Steven A. Kohm writes, "(c)ouple emotive and often humiliating displays of social control with a form of television at the margins of fact and fiction, entertainment, and news" (2009, p. 194).

Inflicting feelings of humiliation appears to be the guiding force of the interaction in video 5. The cameraman's tone is derisive, and he often sneers at the woman's responses. The woman states that he is shaming her and that she will put on a mask when she is ready and not because he has instructed her to do so. To which the cameraperson responds, "You should be ashamed... you should be ashamed." His chastening style of reporting is even evident at the beginning of the footage when he spins around to capture the elderly woman on the mobility scooter. He loudly declares, "and here's her mother," to which we see the woman, silent and visibly uncomfortable, hang her head and glance to the floor. Even if she had offered a different reaction or attempted to defend herself, as her daughter did, her efforts most probably would have been futile. In these interactions, it is usually the cameraperson who is in control of the interaction.

#### **5.1.6 The poor image**

The videos tie into Hito Steyerl's (2009) concept of the poor image, wherein amateur productions circulate digital networks and enable active user participation at every stage, from production to distribution. Here, users become producers, editors and, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, critics. However, due to the democratisation of engagement and vastness of reach in digital networks, these images become subject to context collapse and, in their flattening, become subject to perpetual reproduction and re-contextualisation.

In *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (1958), Helen Merrell Lynd wrote that her time in history was marked by alienation, estrangement, and a general distrust of democratic processes. Lynd wrote this during the Cold War, which came with its own set of modern challenges. However, her observations not only hold today but are amplified. On the one hand, on a general level, the widespread implementation of digital technologies over the last twenty years is a significant culprit in these ongoing struggles, and the coronavirus has only served to magnify these issues. Since the pandemic outbreak, the citizenry has experienced explicit forms of isolation and audience fragmentation, demonstrating modern fragility. The production and circulation of audio-visual texts in this paper speak to this distinct feeling of unrest but also to a connection within a dispersed citizenry. Following the poor image, these videos then "(p)resent a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun and distraction" (Steyerl, 2009). Therefore, considering the informal and unaltered presentation and subsequent circulation of

videos in digital networks can provide insight into the contextual temporality of the pandemic and, perhaps more importantly, how screen cultures influence and are influenced.

## 6 Digitally mediated shaming on Twitter

In the previous chapter, I established the formal, aesthetic and narrative properties of the video footage to answer the question:

- What are the central characteristics of these anti-masking videos?

I established that the videos are recorded on camera phones, have a poor visual and audio quality which can support claims to authenticity, features antagonistic exchanges and are located in semi-public, commercial spaces. I positioned the videos within the realm of mediated, visibility culture and offered description and interpretation on the weaponisation of the camera, considering it to be constitutive of a disciplinary interaction and demonstration of power. I also reflected on the fragility of the subject within this sphere and how these events can be understood as a crucial step to how these specific types of digitally mediated shaming's can unfold.

I posit that these media texts are a sum of several parts and that these parts cannot be considered separately if we are to understand the texts in their entirety. In this chapter, I move on to the circulation and user engagement of these audio-visual texts on Twitter and how recorded events are discursively constructed by users on the site. To understand the texts in their entirety, I will, as aforementioned, follow the general principle of the hermeneutic circle (Patterson & Higgs, 2005, p. 345) and move back and forth between the video, original posts (trigger tweets) and subsequent user engagement and commentary. The overarching questions for this chapter are:

- How do Twitter audiences discursively construct recorded events, and how does shaming manifest within these networks?

To answer this, I will conduct textual analysis of user engagement of the recordings and tweets on Twitter and draw on critical discourse analysis (CDA) and social semiotics to inform my findings. As previously outlined, while the videos and interactions are not exclusive to Twitter, the site has been selected because of the specificities of its affordances, its commercial profile and how it organises content and its social network.

All videos in my sample were uploaded to Twitter and embedded in tweets which included supplementary text. Following Roland Barthes concept of anchorage (1977, pp. 38-41), I consider that the texts serve these functions because they can guide interpretations made by



recipients. Furthermore, I believe these tweets to be catalysts for the circulation of shaming rituals because they are the first step in the chain of digital distribution. To avoid confusion with other tweets, I will call these original tweets *trigger tweets* from now on. This is a fitting name for the posts in terms of their effect and within the framework of weaponised visibility. The act of 'pulling the trigger' is done when a video is made available to a wider audience and serves as a catalyst for, the often complete, reputational destruction of a perceived transgressor. In the text, the trigger tweets will be cited as video number and number one. Example: Video 1's trigger tweet is written 1.1.

While it is the recording itself that captures the event, it is the tweet that ensures that the content reaches its audience. The tone of voice, linguistic choices and the application of hashtags all choose or emphasise certain narrative 'truths' over others. These choices can reflect what Jean Burgess and Nancy Baym write constitute the "(t)ensions between the mundane and the spectacular (...)" which are commonplace on Twitter (2020, Location no. 9).

## **6.2 What's happening: trigger tweets and anchorage**

The discourse of digitally mediated shaming is sensational and draws on intertextual features of news media.

In trigger tweet 5.1, "Woman in [geolocation] claiming to be a doctor violates [retail chain] mask policy while the mother blinks "HELP" in morse code" uses assertive words to describe the action. Let us, for a moment, suspend the absurd and jocular construct of the mother blinking morse code and focus exclusively on the actions of the proposed antagonist: the woman who *claims* medical authority and who *violates* public policy. Her transgression is established in applying these potent verbs, which render her (potentially) fraudulent, in addition to being a person who has total disregard to social norms and public health measures. These actions warrant wider interest, however as mentioned in chapter 5, the interaction, as with other texts in my sample, comes across as staged and even provoked. In this way, the texts can reflect Kohm's point of the changing boundaries in post-modern journalism. He writes that the boundaries of news coverage have shifted because the media increasingly presents news events "(b)y actively creating the very stories it claims to cover in

the name of public interest" wherein humiliation is "(a)ctively constructed and exploited for entertainment purposes" (2009, pp. 195-196).

On the one hand, trigger tweets can function as promotional blurbs for media texts which share notable similarities to certain genres of reality television, which "(c)ouple emotive and often humiliating displays of social control with a form of television at the margins of fact and fiction, entertainment and news" (Kohm, 2009, p.194). On the other, the trigger tweets constitute the texts as events and are therefore interdependent on digitally mediated shaming. This results in a similar modality to that of the mediated scandal wherein "(m)ediated visibility was not a retrospective commentary on a scandalous event: rather, it was partly constitutive of the event as a scandal" (Thompson, 2020, pp. 25-26). Trigger tweets create tension in the mundane by staging minor breaches of social conduct as newsworthy.

Much in keeping with Hess & Waller's (2014) writing on legacy media's role in the digital pillory, the texts are also assigned news value because news media outlets determine them to be. In all feeds, large and small media outlets request permission to republish the material: "I'm a journalist with an international news agency @[news outlet], did you record this? We'd like to work with your video if you did. Can you please DM me so we can discuss? Thank you." (8.1). Some more prominent outlets even offer financial reimbursement: "Hello, my name is [name], and I work for [media outlet]. We would like to discuss a paid media opportunity for your video" (1.1). The media interest has the potential to not only be financially lucrative for content creators, but it increases circulation and visibility and adds contextualisation, and, perhaps most importantly, provides credibility and legitimacy.

### **6.2.1 What's happening: interpretation and re-contextualisation**

Trigger tweets set the stage for specific readings and create interest by choice of words and the emphasis or inclusion of certain information above others. Answering the question, "what's happening?" trigger tweet 2.1 states, "[Geolocation] man at [geolocation and retail chain] in "Running the World Since 1776" shirt flips out on an elderly woman who asked him to wear a mask and man who defended her." A binary narrative of good versus evil is constructed by drawing on the historical and cultural context of the man's t-shirt, and his act of aggression towards a (presumably) weaker party. In trigger tweet 4.1, where an "Anti-

masker in [geolocation] gets kicked out of [retail chain] and has a public meltdown," buzz is created in the political association of anti-maskers and in the violence of being *kicked out* and having a *public meltdown*.

These paratextual accompaniments inform viewers of what is going on from a given perspective but communicatively speaking; these messages are simultaneously polysemic. As Papacharissi notes, "(w)hen communicating with networked audiences, Twitter users frequently craft polysemic messages, encoded with meanings that are decoded differently by each potential audience member" (2012, p. 6). The variance of interpretation is made explicit in user commentary and quote tweets, demonstrating how ambiguous and volatile digitally mediated shaming can be.

While trigger tweets are often constructed on informational and topical grounds, quote tweets are often articulated as commentary. In order to demonstrate interpretative variance among users, I have included a selection<sup>3</sup> of quote tweets of trigger tweet 4.1, which demonstrate how judgements on what shameful event has occurred are largely dependent on each user's unique perspective:

Some users focus on the man's anti-mask refusal and draw on creative forms of wordplay and name-calling: "TOXIC MASKULINITY is on full display with this Maskhole. 🤡 #WearADamnMask," and "What a #COVIDIOT moron... Just #WearADamnMask fool." Others loosely advocate physical violence: "This dude needs to get his [sports team]-loving ass kicked" and "I was really hoping this video was going to include the dude getting punched in the throat." Some draw attention to the tweet by voicing political concerns, "We are all at low key war with those we consider "crazy white people" from Walmart to the Whitehouse (sic)" or by assigning a set of political opinions: "I do think it's ironic that Republicans were very okay with businesses' right to refuse service (to not back an LGBTQ couple a cake but are very NOT okay THEMSELVES being denied service because of a

---

<sup>3</sup> Trigger tweet 4.1 prompted 10,000 quote tweets, expressing unique judgements of the recorded interaction and persons featured. Of scale, 10,000 posts may not appear that substantial, but many of these were subsequently retweeted, quote tweeted and commented upon. At time of writing (20.4.2021), the video recording has amassed 11.4 million views. Notably, this is not the same as active user engagement and I cannot gauge interpretations from viewers who have remained silent. I mention it only to illuminate the potential scale and reach of a single trigger tweet.

dress code (sic)," and the user who called for improved working conditions for frontline workers, "Stop telling me that retail workers don't deserve \$15/hour." Others drew on a sense of national shame, "I just know that people from other countries look at clips like this and wonder why we are so stupid" and "I hate being an American, this is beyond embarrassing (sic)." These sentiments express the perception that this sort of behaviour is distinct to the United States. Some users point the finger at others in the recording, like store employees stating things like, "That one girl with the mask not covering her nose is making me anxious," whilst others comment on the unfortunate mundanity of events and claim these interactions are familiar for retail workers, "I deal with situations like this at least 5-6 times a day while I'm at work (...)".

This selection shows that a conflation of discourses shapes feeds and that it is not easy to ascertain a discursive dominance. Furthermore, it is not always easy to distinguish one discursive practice from another, as several themes are often drawn upon in the same tweet. This mirrors the indeterminate, overarching culture of Twitter, which struggles to define itself as a site for specific types of communication and exchange. According to Gwen Bouvier, feeds largely sustain detached ideas as long as these share similar sentiment (2020, p. 2). In my sample, while not all users address precisely the same issues or use the exact same lexical forms, they all provide a similar field of interpretation similar to the strangershot, in which the text proposes "(t)he image as suitable for judgemental reception (...)" (Cagle, 2019, p. 70). With this proposition, the text positions the perceived wrongdoer in binary opposition to the group. In my sample, there is a unification around participating in condemnation, mockery and shaming because the person is perceived to have abused a privilege. In turn, this can equate to an abuse of power. The cultivation of informal and jocular communicative styles on Twitter also correlates with Cagle's comments pertaining to the circulation of strangershots on Reddit, which present the images as sites for "visible consumption as an abject object of mockery" (2019, p. 70).

### **6.3 Activism and political mobilisation**

The discourse of digitally mediated shaming is political. Users often promote or critique issues that are explicitly partisan or pertain to overarching societal issues. Issues of race and class are particularly prevalent, and criticisms often pertain to structural problems rather than commenting upon the transgressor and wrongdoing as isolated incidents.

For some, the texts show the need to recognise workers in a more meaningful way, both in terms of working conditions and financial incentives. Here, what is constructed as shameful is not reduced to entitled customers and their poor behaviour but to the organisation of labour. Store employees are portrayed as hardworking and undervalued, and comments are directed at those who have the legislative power to raise the national minimum wage and, to large, (inter)national conglomerates and their exploitative labour practices.

It's so sad that we live in a country where people are being paid next to nothing to have to deal with people like this. This whole country should just go on a strike and force all the rich people and all the politicians to have to actually get off their ass and make things right. (1.1)

Unlike many other retail spaces, most supermarkets have remained open during the coronavirus pandemic, rendering employees as frontline workers alongside other essential professions, like healthcare providers. "Essential retail & service workers are super over this shit, and we are pretty much unfirable (sic) right now. You are definitely going to see more of us snapping back at these people" (6.1). Another user similarly comments,

Some of us wear face masks 10+ hrs/day with our jobs and people really have the audacity to bitch about wearing a fucking face mask while shopping. Fuck (and I cannot stress this enough) people like the woman in this video. (6.1)

### **6.3.1 Racism and racial privilege**

The topic of adversity and patriotism can be raised in other ways too. As previously touched upon, the lexical choices in trigger tweets are significant. In 2.1, the trigger tweet's author chose to emphasise the man's sartorial choice and that his eruption of rage was directed towards an elderly person. The text provides political significance to an already problematic display of behaviour because the connotative associations construct the interaction as an abuse of power that ties into the wider cultural history of the United States. The t-shirt's printed slogan, "Running the World Since 1776," points to the American Declaration of Independence and the nation's emergence as a sovereign state founded on the premise of liberty and freedom (Britannica, n.d.). However, the patriotic statement is a one-sided rendition of history that wilfully disregards the brutal enslavement of Black bodies and ongoing discriminatory practices and violence against Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC).

Countering racist attitudes is pervasive in feeds, and users are united by a joint, affective disdain for bigotry and racism: "BTW: What kind of asshole wears a t-shirt like that? He's the asshole who thinks nooses and lawn jockeys are appropriate lawn decor" (2.1) and "Couldn't you visualise this guy holding a tiki torch and shouting Jews won't replace us?" (2.1) Others dismiss his claims of feeling threatened and tie his actions to the systemic racism and an ineffective and discriminatory justice system:

White people are weaponizing "I feel threatened". It's been very effectively used to let white men murder black men, or have white women use the police to kill black men. "I feel threatened" is a plausible excuse before a jury. A way you can help is SERVE JURY DUTY. (2.1)

Decent White folks gotta start policing our own. No one else will. Black and brown folks can't. They might get killed by the police. (2.1)

These forms of political appeal and commentary are prevalent in all feeds in the sample and happen even when race is not an explicit issue in the video recording. For many, the antagonism behaviour is instead a symptom of the social organisation that has allowed such behaviour to flourish in the first place. Furthermore, they comment that it serves to demonstrate how certain bodies are permitted to move through space in one way, while others are more restricted: "I would like it noted that when white people are refused entrance (sic) to a store, they immediately become angry. How did PoC do this so humbly for hundreds of years. (sic) It requires great dignity." The transgressor's refusal to wear a mask and subsequent disregard for other people's safety and wellbeing is perceived as possible because of a set of privileges afforded them based on their ethnic and social background.

Sara Ahmed writes that "*(b)y witnessing what is shameful about the past, the nation can 'live up to' the ideals that secure its identity or being present. In other words, our shame means that we mean well, and can work to reproduce the nation as an ideal*" (2004, p. 109). In this way, a person's actions and attitudes cast a light on America's national shame (see Ahmed, 2004, pp. 107-113), which has yet to be resolved. In failing to meet normative expectations of conduct and character, wrongdoers subsequently fail to live up to the present ideal. Signalling those judgments are passed to counter the toxicity of racism, homophobia, or other forms of bigotry bolsters a defence of such digital practices and can elevate marginalised voices against oppressive forces. Such forms of critique and awareness-raising can be motivated by good doing and, to me, fall into the same type of call-out practice that Clark (2020) suggests is a productive and legitimate collective force against inequality and oppression.

At the same time, a failure to meet present ideals can make an individual the target of various forms of judgement and punitive action that are defended on the grounds of deservingness. Often those perceived as wrongdoers are discredited not only for attributes and actions that are perceptible in the recording but also for presumed and imagined qualities. Often, they are rendered as 'types' of people with specific sets of values and beliefs and should subsequently be thwarted (see Goffman, 1963, p. 59ff). These forms of stigmatisation can also undermine the important work of counteracting bigotry because it can group problematic digital behaviours under the same umbrella as legitimate activist causes.

#### **6.4 Us and them – shame as stigma**

The generalisations establish a context in which individuals are depersonalised and othered. The use of pronouns is a powerful tool in establishing social relations wherein in-group and outgroups identities based on the presumption of shared ideologies are created (van Dijk, 1998, p. 203). Perceived wrongdoers are often framed as *types* that are distinctly separate from the rest of the group. While there seems to be a notion of good intent in shaming poor behaviour and problematic attitudes, these actions do not produce cohesion. Rather, such practices can perpetuate alienation among an already polarised public because they offer little possibility of redemption or reintegration for those perceived to be in error.

As previously written, Erving Goffman claims stigma can be divided into three broad categories: abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character (such as morality, problematic beliefs and weak will) and tribal stigma (1963, p. 14). The assumed political meaning of being an anti-masker can create forms of stigmatisation pertaining to 'blemishes of the character,' and spur commentary like, "I've concluded that he's one of those fanatical Christians that think Trump is the second coming of Jesus" (8.1). The symbolic value of lexical choices is important because it can be driven by a range of social purposes and signify certain 'values, identities and sequences' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 30-32). Therefore, perceived wrongdoers can be subject to other forms of stigmatisation, whether perceptible in the recording or not.

These forms of shaming can pertain to physical appearance and/or bodily functions, sexuality, gender and class. Whilst comments are often jocular and colloquial, they are nonetheless deeply discrediting and can create types reminiscent of what Harold Garfinkel

(1956) calls the 'lowly social object.' These social pariahs are consequentially positioned outside the social group. For those positioned on the outside, there is little chance of redemption. Often comments draw on several stigmas to belittle or discredit the wrongdoer and offer deeply dehumanising commentary:

And you just know his breath stinks. It's remarkable that white people doubling down on the belief that the police are necessary to keep "unruly" Black and Brown people in line has just coincided with a pandemic that has put \*their\* vile and repeated animal behaviour on full display... (4.1)

Last I checked, being a sloppy dresser is not a health issue. Hope shitburger gets fired from (sic) his red meat job. Homophobic anti-masker. Maybe someone will show him how to wear a tie then? (1.1)

The shame and stigma can be deeply contradictory, and individuals are prone to being shamed with similar sentiment and tools that they themselves are being criticised for. For example, the abovementioned 'sloppy dresser' who, in part, was shamed for issuing homophobic slurs towards the cameraperson in video 1 was later vilified online when it was made apparent that he himself is a gay man. Screenshots of his social media accounts, including his interest in homoerotic imagery and check-ins at LGBTQ+ bars in his local neighbourhood, were circulated widely in the feed. As were creative forms of homophobic wordplay and name-calling, like "Make America Gay Again" and "Vincent van Gay" (1.1). The latter pointing to the Dutch painter who infamously cut off his own ear. Others criticise individuals for overt displays of aggressive masculinity by drawing on sexual and anatomical shortcomings deemed *less* masculine: "This guy looks like he cries after sex" (8.1) and "Sorry you have a small dick and have never pleased your wife (...)" (2.1). Similarly, women are subjected to misogynistic comments, such as "white women are a disease" (6.1) and "this bitch is so fucking stupid I can't" (6.1).

A pervasive stereotype across all feeds is the typology of 'Karen.' It is used frequently in trigger tweets and drawn heavily upon in subsequent user engagement. In digital spaces, 'Karen' is notably polysemic. On the one hand, she is typified as a very distinct type of middle-aged, white woman who sticks her nose into everyone else's business and who, when presented as a customer in spaces of commerce, exudes entitlement with her unreasonably high expectations and demands. Whilst admittedly a nuisance, this Karen is not entirely menacing.



Rather, she is representative of a type of consumerist, (e-)village idiot with clownish attributes similar to Goffman's in-group deviant (1963, pp. 168-169):

There are people dying, Karen at [retail chain] in [geolocation]. Get you \$55 manuka honey elsewhere and pray hard in your (Zoom) megachurch this Sunday. (6.1)

For others, 'Karen' is emblematic of racial privilege and entitlement (e.g., Goldblatt, 2020; Hunt, 2020; Nagesh, 2020; Lie, 2020). André Brock traces this typification to Black call-out practices and the naming of threatening white women as "Miss Ann" during the time of slavery (Lie, 2020). By demonstrating this lineage, 'Karen' is understood not only as an intrusive meddler but also as a person whose racist attitudes, actions, and ignorance could put Black and Brown bodies at risk. In both incidents, critics claim the practice is deeply misogynistic because there are no real alternatives for men (see Nagesh, 2020). My sample indicates that this argument is only of partial merit. Against the backdrop of Black Lives Matter protests, the political potency of calling out problematic attitudes appears to have somewhat loosened the stereotype. No longer simply reduced to comical, visual signatures (like specific haircuts, see Know Your Meme, 2021), the 'Karen' now encompasses a wider range of people, including men. While less pervasive, there are also male equivalents to 'Karen,' notably 'Chad', 'Kyle' and 'Kevin': "Today at [retail chain and geolocation] this Kevin didn't want to wear a mask (...)" (1.1). It is an effective lexical symbol, but it is nonetheless social contingent: To be a persuasive storyteller, a tweet's author presupposes that his or her audience will comprehend its meaning (van Dijk, 1998, p. 244). Without a conception of shared knowledge, 'Karen' would be rendered nothing more than a girl's name.

In judging individuals as 'types,' wrongdoings are primarily interpreted as personality deficits rooted in widespread societal ills. At the same time, social interactions are being negotiated without a cohesive set of communal guidelines and mutual common sense. This typification happens in all feeds and does not distinguish between recordings that depict milder forms of disagreement and show individuals engage in violent or threatening behaviour. This creates a digital milieu where individuals, regardless of context, are constructed as the embodiment of collective attitudes and behaviours understood to be in opposition to the group. The creation of these typologies can provide actors on Twitter with a sense of legitimacy if they choose to redistribute content or offer scathing quips. The moral justification of doing good can also bolster forms of virtual sanctioning and vigilante actions, resulting in the annihilation of individuals both online and offline, such as calls for their termination of employment and character assassination. These actions are actualised because the targets are not only deemed

in low regard, but it seems that people lose empathy for them (see Baccarella et al., 2018, p. 434 on the intergroup empathy gap).

## **6.5 Twitter do your thing: Identification and punitive action**

The discourse of digitally mediated shaming is punitive and can result in severe consequences for the transgressor. On Twitter, in incidents of wrongdoing, calls for a person's identification are common. While only a few of the trigger tweets in my sample include explicit encouragement in tracking down individuals, such as tweet 1.1, "expose this m'fer to the world," user reactions, both in commentary and quote tweets, often enquire about the identity of the individual considered in breach of social norms or rules. Additionally, many users call upon Twitter as an entity in order to track down perceived wrongdoer. Commenting on a post, one user writes, "Twitter shouldn't take long to solve this little problem" (4.1), whilst a phrase of similar sentiment ", Do your thing Twitter!" (1.1), calls users to action. This phrase, or the paraphrase, 'Twitter, do your thing' is present in all feeds in my collection and even has its own hashtag, #twitterdoyourthing.

These articulations underscore a perception of Twitter as a gate watching cooperative and fosters a coming together of what Henry Jenkins calls a 'collective intelligence' (2006, p. 232) and crowd-sourced surveillance practice. Despite the site's dialogical shortcomings, the sociality of these communal efforts connects users under a common cause. Plural, personal pronouns are often applied, "Have *we* identified this POS?" (1.1, my emphasis) and conveys a perception of group membership among users. This sense of belonging can be persuasive when juxtaposed against the discursive 'othering' of 'wrongdoers', which takes place in the same feeds. Here, by passing judgement, those who consider themselves morally superior can be unified with others through an affective network which is driven by a communal desire to discipline those deemed less favourable. In turn, in taking on a role of disciplinary control, these acts of vocal condemnation can enable and uphold their own sense of righteousness.

Whilst some users call for measured responses and some call for their arrest, one of the most striking courses of punitive action is in the active work of exposing an individual in order to get them fired from their place of employment. Calls for an individual's termination is often conveyed with playful tones and detached attitudes. Commenting on tweet 4.1, a user writes, "does anyone in the Twitterverse know who this clown is and where he works? Let's see if the company for whom he works would like to distance themselves from his toxic presence"

(4.1). Others, in simultaneous exasperation and mockery, casually disperse comments like, "It's like they want to get fired" (8.1).

An important factor in these judgments is that there seems to be little distinction between which actions warrant such punishments. The woman holding two facemasks in video 5 was notably subjected to similar attempts of punitive action as those who exhibited more violent behaviour. A comment reads, "(c)an she be identified and lose her income please?" (5.1). Given the exchange and the very condescending attitude of the cameraperson in video 5, there should be room for pause before going ahead with these forms of punitive action. However, very few seem to make any distinction between behaviours. As long as the person holding the camera, and therefore in control, presents a version of the story, then this story is the one that is considered most factual in the digital network it is circulated in.

When individuals are identified, and when termination has been put into effect, the story is updated, recirculated, and celebrated:

This man has now been fired. I am all about an America where racists can't be employed. It's called consequences, and I say bring 'em. You've been a closet racist and you support Trump and your life will be ruined. (2.1)

This man has been fired, I LOVE TWITTER! (2.1)

The volatility of judgements makes the distribution of these videos concerning and suggests that the mere act of being made visible effectually renders a person a type of public figure and subsequently liable to the same forms of punishment once reserved for those in positions of power. This negates any feasible attempt at nuance and makes any individual vulnerable to scathing virtual judgements, resulting in very real consequences. There is an ease to the ways in which users call upon such damning punishments and a substantial element of schadenfreude when a culprit has been identified and annihilated, "I came to say Twitter do your thang, but I see the thang has already been done. Good job, sir!" (2.1) positing the destruction of a person's livelihood as virtual play.

## **6.6 Absence**

As a collective event, digitally mediated shaming negates nuance and critical reflection among recipients. Requests for more contextual information are rare in feeds, and it seems like most users attach their own interpretations to witnessed events and fill in the blanks by drawing on their own personal MRs. In this way, context and meaning are constructed

through an automatic gap-filling rendered from personal judgements and experiences. According to Norman Fairclough, these interpretations are based on assumptions of what they already know (1989, pp. 81-83). Sense can be made, even when sense-making is built on assumptions not explicitly evident in the texts themselves. This is how refusing to wear a mask can be linked to other pressing issues regarding class, race and sometimes gender and how, whilst they are unified by affect, the shame, humiliation, and contempt of less than favourable others, there is considerable variance in precisely *what* is deemed shameful in the exchange.

When considering discourse, sometimes what is not being said or less commonly uttered is as insightful as what *is* being said (Fairclough, 1989). To me, the failure to critically assess these texts and the ease at which judgements are passed without asking questions reflect the hierarchy of Western, pre-industrial penal structures when the Church (and Crown) had ultimate authority. During the period, it was rare to judge and administer punishment beyond a crime or transgression. This means that if a person did something wrong, the wrongdoing was assessed without a need for more context, like asking questions about a person's background or circumstance. In other words, there were few attempts to see beyond the person's wrongdoing (e.g., Roth, 2014; Jensen, 2020; Litowitz, 1997; Braithwaite, 1993).

While rare, some users attempt to add nuance to the situation. In response to trigger tweet 4.1 and the vitriol of its feed, one user addressed the network, highlighting the limited knowledge at their disposal: "You don't know what happened before the video started." Another asks if it is even real: "Is it possible this is staged? It's hard and sad to believe people can actually be this ridiculous." However, these forms of questioning commentary are not pervasive, and they do not appear to be in demand by other participants. This lack of critical reasoning points to a networked ecology that puts faith in the video recording as an evidentiary document. Because of this seemingly dominant understanding of right or wrong, there appears to be little need to ask questions about context and nuance. This, I posit, is because content continues to circulate widely without it. On Twitter, there is no need to verify truth claims for them to be accepted or ascertain visibility because this 'lack of knowing' does not interfere with how they engage or interact. In other words, there is no incentive for users to critically reflect on such matters in these digitally mediated streams of information. Due to this, and because of the fast-paced and continuous flow of information, where one story replaces the next, there is reasonably only one stance: either for or against. On Twitter, there is little reward in presenting oneself as the diplomat. If they want to keep up, users must, at

least to a degree, surrender their critical autonomy, fire quick judgements, and move on to the next event deemed worthy of Twitter's attention and judgemental efforts.

## 7 Screen cultural and socio-political contexts

In the previous chapters, I asked and answered the following questions:

- What are the central characteristics of these “anti-masking videos”?
- How do Twitter audiences discursively construct recorded events, and how does shaming manifest within these networks?

I posit that visibility is being used to negotiate and leverage power in social interactions and that its use is an aggressive and violent force in shaping social dynamics. At the same time, this new mode of documenting and sharing is anchored in play, scandal, and transgressive sensibilities. In an American context, the unapologetic presence of the camera phone often escalates interactions to highly antagonistic exchanges as those recorded have not given their consent to be on film. Conversely, it is often an individual’s exhibition of aggressive and indignant behaviour which serves as a springboard for the punishments they are subjected to in digital spaces. There are very few users in digital networks who critically assess the videos or ask questions about the unfolded events. Often users cite racial and gendered privilege, entitlement, political persuasion, and other stigmatising features as the main explanations for the person’s poor attitude and actions.

I will now discuss the temporal and situational context that has allowed these texts to flourish, asking and answering my final questions:

- How do Twitter’s affordances facilitate digitally mediated shaming?
- In what way(s) do these digitally mediated shaming’s speak to the current cultural and political climate in the United States?

As outlined in the introduction, the global community has been severely disrupted by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. In a Western context, significant alterations to social arenas were imposed, including national and regional lockdowns, curfews, travel bans and overburdened healthcare facilities. During the early stages of the outbreak, scientific knowledge about the pathogen was still unclear, and public health rhetoric reflected this state of uncertainty. Rules and recommendations were in a state of flux, and consequently, social norms and behavioural expectancies were often subject to change. In addition, some mandates were administered locally, whereas others presided at a national level. In the United States, crisis management was put into the hands of federal governments, so, for the most

part, each state decided their own course of actions pending the number of casualties and transmission rates.

Despite federal autonomy, the CDC held numerous national press conferences and provided the American public with a steady stream of information and recommendations. As written in the introduction, their facemask recommendation on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2020 was significantly undermined by the presiding president of the United States, Donald Trump, as he repeatedly stated that wearing a facemask was voluntary and that he would not be wearing one (Rev, 2020). While it was certainly not the first, nor the last, time that Trump eroded the perception of expert knowledge, Trump and other like-minded, populist pundits have built careers on it. However, his failure to promote a clear and unified message with the leading immunologists in the country contributed to facemasks transforming into a symbol of the ongoing political divide in the US. On the one hand, leading Democrats and followed the CDC's recommendations, promoted facemask use and wore them publicly. On the other, most Republicans chose to follow Trump and were frequently seen without any form of PPE. This was largely replicated among the American public (see, for instance, Aratani, 2020) and fuelled by populist rhetoric that demonised traditional media outlets, pandered to traditional, white working-class audiences and popularised illusions of insubordination and non-conformity. The rise of the populist right, propagated by untraditional, underqualified leaders, has disrupted the public sphere to such a degree that once inconceivable utterances and crass judgements reverberate in mainstream political discourse.

According to Angela Nagle (2016), such transgressive and defiant attitudes were previously contained to the periphery of digital spheres and the ongoing cultures wars being waged in these spaces. However, anti-establishment cynicism has been adopted by many Trumpians, and many of these voices have, much in thanks to digital media, been afforded platforms with broad reach. On the other hand, the progressive left has been burdened with its own set of challenges. The constant push and pull between dominant styles of cultural identity politics versus traditional leftist causes like financial disparity and material inequality, have significantly weakened their political position. This fragmentation is a likely cause of the dissolution of their traditional base of white, working-class voters, many of whom have moved right (Nagle, 2016).

While the coronavirus has undoubtedly amplified socio-political divisions in the West, public discourse led to unstable and divergent grounds before the pandemic outbreak in 2020.

Despite an American, bipartisan interest to combat the virus, the inability to reach a level of unification proved exceedingly difficult. At the same time, and perhaps remarkably, the impetus of solidarity and collective obedience has been a powerful, rhetorical force in the attempt to curb transmission rates. This ethos contributed to a sensitised awareness of personal behaviour and others, which in turn extended the forms of neighbourly, accountability praxis. A simple explanation for this is that the pandemic affected entire communities, and an individual's recklessness could result in very direct forms of harm. At the same time, the nature of the videos and digitally mediated interactions in my sample reveals a significant level of ambiguity. On the one hand, these forms of monitoring demonstrate a substantial sentiment of distrust, which is rhetorically justified in the recordings, which depict subjects who do not want to assimilate to the new social order. On the other hand, because of this, participants who engage in passing judgement and expressing their moral outrage veil their engagement under the guise of the common good.

However, while certainly demonstrating infuriating behaviour, why do these individuals' behaviour and attitudes provoke such levels of collective dismay? Before the pandemic, our period in time has been marked by a general undervaluing of communal interests. Actions that curb an individual's self-interests should, in theory, seem alien to many modern subjects which have long been fed an ideological diet of neoliberalist individualism. Here, capitalist logic has conditioned individuals to focus on perpetual introspection and self-improvement. The goal of neoliberalist discourse is always growth. At an individual and structural level, optimisation is its driving force, and the modern subject has been led to believe an optimised self is achievable. While certainly a persuasive and productive aspiration, this version of the self is a fallacy because, following neoliberalist logic and need, there will always be something in need of improvement or expansion – otherwise, things will stagnate. In other words, the neoliberalist premise of the modern subject as a work in progress is fundamentally incompatible with modern forms of visibility that demand immaculacy. Put another way, for the marketable promise of the optimised self to be both effective and sustainable; a person must remain imperfect. However, this is an issue that is rarely questioned, and the concept of perfection is so culturally ingrained in society that the majority keeps striving towards it.

This introspection also establishes a footing where we not only measure ourselves against our own merits but against each other's, and this competitive structure is an adversary of collectivist thought and action. Western citizens have been subjected to the peddling of false promises regarding individualism, meritocracy and free will for decades. The drastic



overturning of social guidelines brought forth by the pandemic is incompatible with notions of self-indulgence challenges that might take some time to get used to. Consider how pervasive and powerful its conception of modern, individualist thought is: Unregulated, competitive markets have decimated public infrastructures, all but desecrated labour unions and sold the welfare state off in chunks (see, for instance, Lobao, Gray, Cox & Kitson, 2018). In the USA, middle class wealth is decreasing, and national wealth disparities are on the rise (Kochhar, 2018).

These are structural issues, yet – and this is perhaps where neoliberalist discourse has been and continues to be, most successful, the mark of success is still widely accepted as a result of individual talent and character. The upholding and perpetuation of this phantasm suggests that inequality is not circumstantial but rather due to individual failings and moral lack. Neoliberalism's resounding cry through every hardship, despite every circumstance, is that you will eventually be rewarded if you work hard enough. The modern subject has been encouraged to be a free thinker, but only within a marketable and commodifiable framework. The United States, a nation considered the beacon of the free-market economy, sees the strain of a decades-long, ideological structure that has done little to bridge gaps between its citizens. As opposed to countries rooted in social democratic principles, such as in Scandinavia, many sectors, such as healthcare are, for the most part, privately owned and therefore commodifiable resources. I suggest that this high-choice environment, contra countries with more imposing forms of state governance, can partially explain why the US has struggled significantly with establishing common sensical norms and maintaining a semblance of political cohesion. When this outward cynicism is merged with a lack of trust in government institutions, including an ongoing scepticism of law enforcement due to racist practice and police brutality cases (Statista, 2021), it is conceivable that American citizens have become even more susceptible to the notion that they must, again, fend for themselves. This includes policing other people's behaviour. In my sample, individuals have taken it upon themselves to record other people and circulate their personal information to a wider digital audience. Here the content spreads in affective networks that come together in participatory acts of shaming.

The prominent role of the camera is also rendered a distinctly American feature, and this violent imposition transforms the smartphone into a type of weaponisation of visibility that resembles America's gun culture. The complete lack of concealment, the indiscreet positioning of the recording device and the proximity to the recorded subject becomes a

simulation of a person staring into the barrel of a loaded gun. The person becomes immobilised at point-blank to the motivations of the person with their finger on the trigger. This interaction is in sharp contrast to Cagle's strangershot (2019), which is akin to being targeted by a sniper. In such scenarios, a person recorded or photographed is usually unaware of their harrowing circumstance. Of the strangershot Cagle writes, they are "(p)hotographs taken of strangers *without their knowledge* or consent and then shared online, where they become powerful actants in digital networks." (2019, p. 68, my emphasis). Therefore, persons subjected to this type of subjugation will generally be unaware of their degradation until after the potential circulation of material online. This means that if the person discovers that they have been exposed to such harsh treatment, their feelings of shame, distress, anger, or embarrassment will primarily be experienced in private and away from the public's prying eyes.

Although the act of recording holds a threat of ominous destruction, during the spatial-temporal setting of the interaction, the event has not yet reached its apex. After all, the weapon could still be put away. The video could still be deleted. The trigger is pulled when the video is uploaded to social media after the fact (hence my term 'trigger tweet'). When this happens, reputational fatality is usually imminent as content slowly makes its circulatory movement through digital networks. When it does, active participation in these networks is similar to Thompson's observations on the mediated scandal:

Every individual participating in this interactive situation knows that his or her utterances, expressions and communicative outputs are available to a plurality of distant others, and each knows that these distant others can also contribute to the interaction by posting comments or joining the interaction in some way. (2020, p. 15)

Because of this, I posit that every participant in these interactions also understands the potentiality of consequences and that the barrage will contribute to total annihilation. The process and acknowledgement of being made visible in mediated interactions of anti-masking videos thus transform the camera into a coercive weapon that becomes leverage within the spatial-temporal setting of the exchange. In these interactions, the fates of both parties can be acknowledged during the face-to-face, and the threat of mediated visibility is often commented upon and demonstrates how the camera phone's affordances become a type of weaponry to be wielded in the everyday (see Thompson, 2005, p. 31).

While my focus up until now has been digitally mediated shaming within an American context, online shaming during the coronavirus pandemic has been prevalent in other

countries, too, even those which has traditionally been more collectively oriented with strong, social-democratic underpinnings, such as Norway. During the first wave of the pandemic, a distinctly Norwegian example was “hyttefolket,”<sup>4</sup> who dominated public discourse due to a failure to comply with domestic travel restrictions and who refused to travel back to their permanent places of residence (Lohne, 2020). In the UK, supermarket hoarders were similarly shamed (BBC, 2020b). Again, these actions serve as visual documentation of individuals and groups exercising their own forms of self-interest. What differentiates these shamings from the American anti-masking videos in my sample is that the person documenting the event does not tend to insert themselves of the camera into the event. In this way, these texts share more similarities to the strangershot. There is a much more notable tendency to record from a distance conceal the recording device. In other words, the camera is given a much more passive role in these events.

The overall European tendency to conceal the device is also suggestive that these amateur filmmakers understand the action as culturally taboo, even in circumstances where they are documenting a wrongdoing. Returning to the metaphor of firearms, this is not an issue that dominates European political discourse. In the United States, comparatively, this is an acute political issue. The right to bear arms as a constitutional right is so culturally ingrained in the American public that the majority still believe it necessary despite overwhelming statistics pertaining to gun violence (BBC, 2021). As an admittedly sweeping generalisation, guns are culturally alien for Europeans and a political non-issue. Furthermore, there is a consensus that these are dangerous weapons and should be strictly regulated (see, for instance, Müller, 2015). This is in stark contrast to defenders of the bear arms who root these arguments in issues of self-defence and individual autonomy (Feinzig & Zoffer, 2019). This concept of self-defence and individual reliance makes the American context so atypical in the West. I also posit that this is why American amateur filmmakers have much more brazen tactics when recording: they are emboldened by their long, ideological history of self-governance. That does not mean that those recorded do not exhibit grievance for being monitored because, as demonstrated in chapter 5, they most certainly do. However, what is evident, is that the cameraperson appears untethered by ethical dilemmas and self-consciousness.

Returning to the issue of self-interest in an explicitly American context, the perceived inadequacy of the anti-maskers is demonstratively judged a result of Trumpian allegiance

---

<sup>4</sup> Translated “cabin people”

and, with that, an entitlement that is detrimental to everyone else. However, such motives are also applicable to the person taking the photograph or recording the video. The unique circumstance of the pandemic is, after all, embedded in a widespread culture of visibility, which overstates what a person should divulge in digital networks and subsequently rewards them for sharing. This has resulted in a techno-cultural environment in which persons willingly expose everything about themselves and everything about others, as we have seen. These actions are often rewarded on Twitter through detached forms of social recognition like likes, comments and shares. In a very literal sense, users can also be rewarded with financial incentives. If their content attains enough visibility and buzz, it is not uncommon for various news media outlets to purchase the rights to their intellectual property. As demonstrated in subchapter 6.2, there are a significant number of these requests, which monetarily reward content producers and reproduce and recontextualise the story, uphold interest in the story for longer, and contribute to the contents rightsholder increased visibility in digital spaces.

Consequently, the latter can then feed into the loopback of social media's primary reward system: increased likes, shares and follows, and thus the circle of affective networks continues. Achieving visibility is a mark of success in this mediated culture, but exposure becomes a form of entrapment because of marginal tolerance for error, and the site's affordances, such as its character limitations, do not allow for detailed elaboration or cultivate diplomacy. In addition, its social organisation and the tendency for open profiles mean that a flattening of audiences is commonplace, and content is easily retrievable and often reproduced. These are all key affordances in the facilitation of digitally mediated shaming.

To further complicate matters, the amalgamation of public and private, the very essence of this new visibility culture, has also rendered any individual with a digital presence as a type of public figure. On the one hand, this means that a person must pay meticulous attention to their digital representation. However, as my sample has demonstrated, sometimes personal information can be circulated on the internet by someone else, which is impossible to control due to the voracity and speed of circulation. During the paper's data collection and analysis, it is evident that Twitter does very little to moderate these spaces. A consequence of being propelled into the public eye means that every individual is potentially at risk to be scrutinised in ways that were once reserved for people in literal positions of power. Additional information can be shared about an individual and calls for their termination are also commonplace. These forms of punishment share notable similarities with the

aforementioned practices of boycotting and blacklisting (Clark, 2020), but they also indicate a renegotiation of accountability in modern society. Once reserved to keep tabs on the powerful, the practice of gatekeeping has now been redistributed to encompass the community at large. The prevalence of these tendencies suggests that there is now a participatory culture of who gets to define news and events and that democratisation of responsibility has taken place in which everyone can be held accountable for societal ills.

The combination of visibility and accountability makes the modern subject exceptionally vulnerable because it sets the behavioural bar unreasonably high. Perfection is unattainable, yet such pervasive visibility is an inhospitable environment for human error. This is a basic flaw in its logic, yet it is a logic to which modern society has ascribed willingly. For many, the act of collectively shaming a person for their mistakes or wrongdoings is legitimised because there is a consensus that the person should not have been doing whatever they were caught doing in the first place. However, there is little effort to distinguish between malice or ignorance, which means that every person becomes vulnerable in these digital environments.

The issue becomes what metric to use when passing judgement and upholding accountability. My sample on Twitter suggests that a transgressor's wrongdoing is constructed as emblematic of their inherent privilege and entitlement. It is the specificity of this imperfection that is deemed intolerable, and it is what legitimises the punitive action they are subjected to. The general disdain for such moral lack is so persuasive that there are very few comments that enquire any more information about the wrongdoer's personal, social, or even psychological circumstance. It is irrelevant. The demonisation of characters is particularly impressionable when their incivility is juxtaposed against essential workers, who, contrary to many employees in other industries, has not had the luxury to work from the shielded environment of their homes. As shop employees have become frontline workers, their job status was elevated, celebrated and rebranded as heroic, self-sacrificing and patriotic (see, for example, Corkery & Maheshwari, 2020). As with other essential workers, such as medical staff and bus drivers, supermarket employees put themselves in harm's way for the benefit of everyone else. In this way, the texts extend the binary opposition of bad and self-serving versus the good and socially oriented. In other words, it divides people into two groups: those who can adapt to a new collective mindset and those who cannot. However, because these failings are often skewed as emblematic of the transgressor's innate badness and inadequacy, opportunities for redemption or improvement are limited. Rather than serve an educational purpose-oriented at social cohesion, which, as previously written, is the foundation of the

modern justice system in West (Foucault, 1977). These forms of shaming attach certain stigmas on the transgressors that become impossible to detach oneself from (see Braithwaite, 1993; Goffman, 1963). This is mainly due to the longevity of digital archives, which is a key affordance on most digital networks, including Twitter.

Using either hashtags or keywords, a quick search on Twitter makes it easy to retrieve the audio-visual texts, old tweets, and user-generated commentary. Because of this, a shamed individual is always somewhat weighed down by a singular event, and their whole digital persona becomes linked to this display of behaviour. Furthermore, while hashtags are a good way to organise users around shared affect and interests, they can be particularly troublesome in incidents when hashtags that include personal information are created and circulated. One of the most infamous examples of this is the case of Justine Sacco (see Ronson, 2015). Several of the recorded individuals in my sample were similarly targeted with hashtags that include their name. These tags are still active on the site, more than a year later. Thus, Twitter's apparent reluctance or failure to moderate the application of these hashtags means that scrutiny and exposure become a side-effect of the site's organisational structure.

Certainly, some will argue that if you do not want something seen, you should not be doing it in the first place, but this claim erodes every concept we have of privacy and human error. The issue arises because, for the shamed, there will be little incentive to work towards change, improvement, or cohesion if they are tethered to a single incident indefinitely. Furthermore, according to Silvan Tomkins' theory of affect, there must be an anticipation of positive reception or experience prior to the emergence of shameful feelings. So, if it is true that the recorded individual holds a different set of values than those shaming, the communal sanctioning will not induce feelings of inadequacy and remorse; it will induce feelings of resentment, distress, and anger (Sedgwick et al., 1995, p. 138). The result of this could produce a public that is even more fragmented and that spaces for dialogue and compromise become increasingly rare.

Pushing this notion to the extreme, these forms of shaming could, therefore, contribute to a perpetuation of polarised publics. In addition, this ostracisation will not only detach the perceived transgressor from their current social position, but it also denies them the promise of striving towards the optimised self because, in theory, they will never be able to separate themselves from this low point fully. For the digitally tainted transgressor, self-optimisation is moot because redemption is virtually impossible. In this way, a person is not only

disconnected from social arenas and potential employment, but they also become detached from the ideological anchoring of postmodern life. Considering the transgressions of which they are often judged, this seems an unreasonable consequence. While I do not dispute the claim that vigilante forms of shaming may encourage audiences to be more aware of their behaviours (Trottier, 2018, p. 178), no person is exempt from making mistakes. Therefore, the consequences of these errors will be largely dependent on whoever is there to witness (and potentially document them).

Furthermore, these consequences are particularly severe when they result from informational streams interspersed with play and jest. Outrageous forms of mockery and condemnation circulate parallel to legitimate structural issues and vigilante practices that target individuals with an orientation towards personal destruction. At the same time, these practices are marked by a gamified undercurrent and posited as entertainment. The collective agency of amateur sleuths identifies individuals using jocular communicative styles. In incidents where Twitter mobilisation has contributed to the ruination of others, these events are celebrated as successes and gleefully announced in digital networks. This is made possible because of the stigma attached to the person and because the perceived transgressor is interpreted as a threat to the group.

Following Kohm's notion that reality policing programmes allude to a constantly under siege society and that the conscientious citizen should navigate the everyday with vigilance, a logical result of this will be that many perspectives will determine a multitude of behaviours harmful or dangerous. The uncertainty of the coronavirus has further amplified these concerns and inscribed the public with new conceptions of vigilance when conducting previously unceremonious experiences, like grocery shopping. Because the videos often depict antagonistic exchanges which veer on the absurd, they are infused with an element of slapstick comedy wherein errors and takedowns produce a stream of affect driven by schadenfreude and glee, in addition to judgement and shame. As is the way with comedy, there is a delight in seeing the 'idiot' falls flat on their face. However, for the observational party, there will also be a sense of righteousness and relief in knowing that this time around, the person who fell was not themselves.

## 8 Conclusion

The purpose of this analysis has been to gain a better understanding of digitally mediated shaming during the coronavirus pandemic. I have performed a close textual analysis of eight videos and their trigger tweets uploaded and circulated on Twitter between 01.04.2020 and 31.08.2020. All interactions were recorded in the USA. I have also analysed 1647 user-generated comments and quote tweets connected to these recordings. Given the limitations of my research, I cannot speak to the nationality and geographical location of participants on Twitter, but it should be noted that an American vernacular style has dominated feeds and much commentary pertains to socio-political issues in the United States.

In this project, the following research questions have been asked and answered:

- What are the central characteristics of these anti-masking videos?
- How do Twitter audiences discursively construct recorded events, and how does shaming manifest within these networks?
- How do Twitter's affordances facilitate digitally mediated shaming?
- In what way(s) do these digitally mediated shaming's speak to the current cultural and political climate in the United States?

The answer to the first question is that the audio-visual texts have been shot on camera phones. All events have taken place in semi-public, commercial settings such as supermarkets and big-box stores, and all interactions have been filmed in the United States. All interactions pertain to facemask disputes between strangers and depict significantly antagonistic exchanges. The disputes are rooted in one party refusing to wear a mask and the other attempting to enforce store policies or state mandates. While there are some videos that film from the perspective of mask refusal, overwhelmingly, the recordings are filmed from the other sides point of view. In other words, in these recorded disputes, it is usually the one who has refused to wear a mask that is filmed. As the events have been recorded on handheld camera phones, the shots are somewhat shaky and mobile.

Furthermore, the visual quality is grainy, unpolished and appears unaltered. The soundscape is similarly unedited, ranging from the inclusion of notable background noise to the dialogue



being muffled to such degree that it, on occasion, is inaudible. These features emphasise the immediacy of these images and provide them with a level of authenticity. The recordings are to be interpreted as representations of real events.

There is no attempt to conceal the recording device, and those caught on camera have not given their consent to be filmed. The lack of consent is often implemented into the dispute as the camera is acknowledged. Its prominence often contributes to the escalation of events. Often, the cameraperson will announce that the recording will be circulated on the internet. In this way, the threat of being made visible is leveraged in order to manipulate the interaction. In this way, the threat of imminent shame and devastation is recognised and weaponised from the onset, and I have likened the interaction to that of being targeted by a firearm at close range. Because of this imposition, sometimes exchanges can seem provoked, rather than simply reported on and bears similarities to Kohm's reflections on reality television programmes (2009). In addition, the videos have a number of other intertextual features and draw on elements from the strangershot (Cagle, 2019), the callout (Clark, 2020) and the mediated scandal (Thompson, 2020).

Carolyn Miller (2017) writes that new genres emerge in response to societal change (p. 8). The production and circulation of these recordings is an active response to the coronavirus pandemic and the current socio-political climate. I, therefore, posit that these videos are the first stage of a new, vernacular subgenre of online shaming and position the texts within a visual ecology of poor images (see Steyerl, 2009).

At the same time, to determine these texts as a subgenre, it has also been necessary to analyse the circulation and reception of these texts among digital audiences. This is because exposure and communal shaming is fully enacted in these spaces. In chapter 6, I asked the question: how do Twitter audiences discursively construct recorded events, and how does shaming manifest within these networks? In the same way that Thompson claims that commentary surrounding a scandal is what makes a scandal an event (2020, pp. 25-26, 2005, p. 43), on Twitter, user-generated engagement should be understood as similarly productive. The circulation of these texts in affective networks are not retrospectives; instead, they contribute to the production of the text in its entirety. It is in these networks that the threats made during recording move from empty to charged.

For this reason, I coined the term *trigger tweets* for posts that included the video for the first time. By uploading the video and making it accessible for a vast and detached audience, the

tweet becomes the catalyst for communal shaming and destruction. The paratextual accompaniment is both promotional and explanatory. It calls on the attention of wider audiences, but it also anchors the videos by steering the recipients towards certain interpretations. This is done by including additional information or placing emphasis on certain features over others.

Within a framework of shame, the videos would be rendered somewhat meaningless without the action of exposing individuals to a wider audience. Audience reactions and engagement have therefore been an essential component in understanding the phenomenon. Once the trigger has been pulled and the text posted, the bullet is uncontrollable and unstoppable, and the audio-visual texts are subject to endless recontextualisation as it makes its way through digital networks. In this space of destruction, exposed individuals are discredited as certain types of persons and often labelled with stigmatising attributes. The scathing judgements, vigilante actions and personal information shared become a powerful projectile and can potentially ensure total ruination of the target. While not all users express condemnation or outrage for the same features in the text, my analysis has produced similar results to the research of other scholars who have performed discourse analysis on Twitter (e.g., Bouvier, 2020; Papacharissi, 2016): feeds tolerate some variation as long as it connects to a broader feed of affect. In my analysis, it appears that while not all users agree on *what* the actual transgression is, an overwhelming majority of users *do* agree that a form of wrongdoing did take place. This wrongdoing can be due to individual or structural lack. In general terms, user engagement is unified through the affective charge of shame. There seems to be little distinction between shame and guilt in digital networks, which supports Silvan Tomkins theory, wherein shame and guilt are the same affect (Sedgwick et al., 1995, p. 133).

In chapter 7, I discussed the role of Twitter and site affordances. The affordances of Twitter do not allow for nuance or reasoned debate. Due to the character limitation and non-reciprocal mode of social organisation, nuanced conversation is also limited, making it more or less impossible for reasonable debate or for Tweet authors to provide narratives that offer both perspectives. In addition, users do not have to enter into reciprocal relationships on Twitter to see posts or if they wish to share someone else's content. This is an additional affordance that allows for relatively unrestricted modes of circulation.

Furthermore, Twitter is a highly competitive techno-cultural environment users must often compete for visibility among vast amounts of data. This can prompt sensational and jocular

styles of communication to rouse interest among distant others. The trigger tweets anchorage inform recipients on how the video should be interpreted and adds context and information that is not always evident in the recording itself. When users attain visibility, they are rewarded with likes, retweets, and commentary. If content rouses a significant level of interest, traditional news media outlets will often contact users in their feeds and ask for permission to redistribute the text on their sites. This can provide added interest and visibility, and it can also legitimise a video recording and trigger tweet. On occasion, news media outlets pay for the rights to the video content, making the production of these videos financially lucrative. Finally, the longevity of digital archiving on the site makes all information easily discoverable long after the event has taken place. This is done through keyword searches on the site or through the application of hashtags. Twitter does not appear to moderate the application of hashtags or personal information shared in the spaces.

My fourth and final question was: In what way(s) do these digitally mediated shaming's speak to the current cultural and political climate in the United States? This question opened into a broader discussion of the emergence of the subgenres within its specific temporal and geographical context. To place further emphasis on the phenomenon, I also reflected on European shaming cultures, screen practices and public discourses.

The United States, already burdened with a substantially polarised public sphere and divisive leadership, was in a particularly acute state of uncertainty during the early stages of the pandemic. Trump's inability to follow the nation's leading medical experts resulted in crisis management steered by partisan issues. The controversy of facemask use speaks to this political divide. While sufficient handling of the pandemic warranted a collective cohesion and bipartisan collaboration, the combination of confusing rhetoric and the volatility of mandates and guidelines left American citizens in a state of confusion and increasingly polarised. Because of Trump's vocal undermining of medical guidelines, mask refusers in my sample were often constructed as Trumpians or people with a specific set of potentially undesirable values and beliefs.

While the pervasiveness of these texts can be explained due to increasing polarisation and a lack of consensus on who's authority to adhere to, I also posit that the prominence of the camera in the texts is rooted in an ideological underpinning that is distinct to the USA. In terms of law and order, I suggest that Americans are more culturally attuned to concepts of self-governance and self-defence than their European counterparts. This is exemplified

through the constitutional right to bear arms which, while certainly a politically divisive concept, is nonetheless part of the fabric of American culture. This serves as one possible explanation for the unapologetic styles of filming seen in the videos. In addition, these modes of peer-policing should also be considered against the backdrop of national protests against police brutality and systemic racism. For many Americans, law enforcement has repeatedly failed them.

The weaponisation of the visibility is a means for communal social norms to be upheld during a time of great instability. The audio-visual texts in my sample engaged thousands of comments and millions of views. This speaks to the pandemic's significant impact on individuals and communities. Most users engage with the material at surface level and do not request further elaboration. The recorded interactions are skewed in binary terms, good versus bad, and very few comments question the material or offer a critical assessment. The pandemic eroded social arenas, and most communities and individuals have had to make significant sacrifices. Therefore, it should not be surprising that these videos, which depict individuals in blatant defiance of preventative health measures, have roused public outrage and scorn. The subgenre and punitive actions taken are emboldened by a sense that these individuals pose a threat. In this context, even the most extreme punitive actions are provided with a sense of legitimacy due to their orientation towards protecting the community.

Finally, this analysis should not be understood as work-oriented towards absolving poor demonstrations of behaviour. In addition, it is certainly not oriented towards excusing abhorrent attitudes pertaining to race, sex, gender and/or sexuality. However, my aim has been rooted in a desire for pause surrounding the trigger-happiness of circulating visual content of anyone, by anyone, in digital spaces. Because of the democratised nature of production and circulation that has been brought forth by new technologies, and because people largely draw on their own MRs to construct narratives, anyone could be rendered a potential target, whether legitimate or not. Furthermore, it is my position that the modern subject has not been conditioned to think collectively because collective action has not been beneficial for the neoliberalist obsession with wealth accumulation and growth. Because of this, the questionable and undeniably self-oriented behaviour witnessed in the recordings should perhaps also be considered a result of a culture of individualism, where everyone perceives themselves, at least to a degree, detached from everyone else. The issue of stigmatising forms of shaming that judge personhood over behaviour is an issue for the organisational structure of our communities because a society must be modelled in a way

where self-improvement and redemption are possible. If hope is lost, then there is no reason to work towards cohesion, even for those whose behaviour we deem unacceptable. This means that polarisation will only continue to increase. In the United States, we are already witnessing the effects this can have on our democratic processes.

This project is only a small fraction of digitally mediated shaming during the coronavirus pandemic. With increased time and resources, future research would benefit from ascertaining motivations for engagement among audiences. This could include participant interviews and digital surveys. It would also be interesting to analyse other social networking sites to understand how site affordances and other demographics engage in forms of digitally mediated shaming. My analysis is contextually situated in the United States specifically and the West generally. From a screen cultural perspective, social media studies would also benefit from orienting research towards other global communities. In terms of the coronavirus pandemic, which has been, and continues to be, a global crisis, it has disproportionately affected more impoverished communities. Understanding the digitally mediated sociality of these communities is crucial. Finally, while I have touched upon the subject in passing, another avenue for research should be oriented towards the role of internet subcultures in shaping the public sphere. How have fringe movements impacted the digital mediation of social norm enforcement and shaming? How have perspectives that previously would have been rebuffed by mainstream culture become part of public discourse? In terms of the pandemic, this could be applied to other areas of shaming, notably the new vaccination programmes or corona passports, both of which produce their own distinct challenges and ethical dilemmas.

## Bibliography

- Ahmed, S. (2014). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Aratani, L. (2020, 29<sup>th</sup> of June). How did face masks become a political issue in America? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/29/face-masks-us-politics-coronavirus>
- Baccarella, C.V., Wagner, T.F., Kietzmann, J.H., & McCarthy, I.P. (2018). Social media? It's serious! Understanding the dark side of social media. *European Management Journal*, 36, 431-438. DOI: 10.1016/j.emj.2018.07.002
- Bakhtin, M. & Sollner, P. (1983). Rabelais and Gogol: The art of discourse and the popular culture of laughter. *Mississippi Review*, 11(3), 34-50
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image – Music – Text*. (Translated by Stephen Heath). Fontana.
- Basak, R., Sural, S., Ganguly, N. & Ghosh, S.K. (2019). Online public shaming on Twitter: Detection, analysis and mitigation. *IEEE Transactions on computational social systems*, 6(2), 208-220. DOI: 10.1109/TCSS.2019.2895734
- BBC. (2020a, 21<sup>st</sup> of April). Coronavirus lockdown protest: What's behind the US demonstrations. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52359100>
- BBC. (2020b, 15<sup>th</sup> of March). Coronavirus: Supermarkets ask shoppers to be 'considerate' and stop stockpiling. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-51883440>
- BBC. (2021, 8<sup>th</sup> of April). America's gun culture in charts. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41488081>
- Bouvier, G. (2020). Racist call-outs and cancel culture on Twitter: The limitations of the platform's ability to define issues of social justice. *Discourse, Context & Media* 38, 1-11. DOI: 10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100431
- Braithwaite, J. (1993). Shame and modernity. *The British Journal of Criminology* 33(1), 1-18. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjc.a048257
- Brandtzaeg, P.B. & Lüders, M. (2018). Time collapse in social media: Extending the context collapse. *Social Media + Society*, 1-10. DOI: 10.1177/2056305118763349
- Britannica. (n.d). *Declaration of independence*. Accessed on 27/02/2021 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Declaration-of-Independence>
- Burgess, J. & Baym, N.K. (2020). *Twitter: a biography*. [Kindle]. New York University Press. [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Twitter-Biography-Jean-Burgess-ebook/dp/B087H5P896/ref=tmm\\_kin\\_swatch\\_0?\\_encoding=UTF8&qid=1619182732&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Twitter-Biography-Jean-Burgess-ebook/dp/B087H5P896/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1619182732&sr=8-1)
- Cagle, L. (2019). Surveilling Strangers: The disciplinary biopower of digital genre assemblages. *Computers and Composition* 52, 67-78. DOI: 10.1016/j.compcom.2019.01.006 8755-4615
- Cheung, A.S.Y. (2014). Revisiting privacy and dignity: Online shaming in the global e-village. *Laws*, 3, 301-326. DOI: 10.3390/laws3020301

- Clark, M.D. (2020). DRAG THEM: A brief etymology of so-called “cancel culture”. *Communication and the Public*, 5(3-4), 88-92. DOI: 10.1177/2057047320961562
- Corkery, M. & Maheshwari, S. (2020, 19<sup>th</sup> of November). Virus cases rise, but hazard pay for retail workers doesn't. *New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/19/business/retail-workers-hazard-pay.html>
- Danielson, M. (2013). “Shaming the Devil”: Performative shame in investigative TV-journalism. *Nordicom Review*, 34, 61-74. DOI: 10.2478/nor-2013-0104
- Davis, J.L. & Jurgensen, N. (2014). Context collapse: Theorizing context collusions and collisions. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(4), 476-485
- Dean, J. (1998). *Aliens in America: Conspiracy cultures from outerspace to cyberspace*. Cornell University Press
- Dean, J. (2010). Affective networks. *Media Tropes e-journal*, 2(2), 19-44
- DNC. (2020, 18<sup>th</sup> of August). *Democratic National Convention: Day 1* [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQq7ZSgvhtU>
- Ess, C.M. (2019). Intercultural privacy: A nordic perspective. In: H. Behrendt et al. (Eds.), *Privatsphäre 4.0, Eine Neuverortung des Privaten im Zeitalter der Digitalisierung* (pp. 73-88). Springer-Verlag. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-476-04860-8\_5
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and Power*. Longman
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge
- Feinzig, J. & Zoffer, J. (2019, 28<sup>th</sup> of October). A constitutional case for gun control. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/10/constitutional-case-gun-control/600694/>
- Ferraro, V. & Ghatak, S. (2019). Expanding the castle: Explaining stand your ground legislation in American states, 2005-2012. *Sociological Perspectives*, 62(6), 907-928. DOI: 10.1177/0731121419845877
- Fletcher, R. & Nielsen, R.K. (2017). Are news audiences increasingly fragmented? A cross-national comparative analysis of cross-platform news audience fragmentation and duplication. *Journal of Communication*, 67, 476-498. DOI: 10.1111/jcom.12315
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: the birth of a prison*. (A. Sheridan, translation) Allen Lane. (Originally published 1975)
- Garfinkel, H. (1956). Conditions of successful degradation ceremonies. *American Journal of Sociology*, 61(5), 420-424
- Gibson, J.J. (1986). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Psychology Press
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Penguin
- Hawkins, J.M. (2017). Textual Analysis. In: Mike Allen (Ed.) *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Communication Research Methods*. SAGE. DOI: 10.4135/9781483381411
- Henderson, R. (2020). What propels cancel culture? *Psychology today*, 53(2), 36-38

- Hess, K. & Waller, L. (2014). The digital pillory: media shaming of ‘ordinary’ people for minor crimes. *Continuum*, 28(1), 101-111. DOI: 10.1080/10304312.2013.854868
- IMDB. (2021). *Superstore*. Accessed 27.05.2021 from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4477976/>
- Jane, E.A. (2017). ‘Dude... stop the spread’: antagonism, agonism, and #manspreading on social media. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(5), 459-475. DOI: 10.1177/1367877916637151
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press
- Jensen, J. L (2020). *The medieval internet: Power, politics and participation in the digital age*. [Kindle]. Emerald Publishing. [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Medieval-Internet-politics-participation-digital-ebook/dp/B085Y1G6LV/ref=tmm\\_kin\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1600974970&sr=8-1-spons](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Medieval-Internet-politics-participation-digital-ebook/dp/B085Y1G6LV/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1600974970&sr=8-1-spons)
- Kasra, M. (2017). Vigilantism, public shaming, and social media hegemony: The role of digitally-networked images in humiliation and sociopolitical control. *The Communication Review*, 20(3), 172-188. DOI: 10.1080/10714421.2017.1343068
- Know Your Meme. (2021). “Speak to the manager” haircut – Karen’s haircut. *Know Your Meme*. <https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1454055-speak-to-the-manager-haircut> Accessed 12.06.2021
- Kochhar, R. (2018, 6<sup>th</sup> of September). The American middle class is stable in size, but losing ground to financially to upper-income families. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/06/the-american-middle-class-is-stable-in-size-but-losing-ground-financially-to-upper-income-families/>
- Kohm, S.A. (2009). Naming, shaming and criminal justice: Mass-mediated humiliation as entertainment and punishment. *Crime Media Culture*, 5(2), 188-205. DOI: 10.1177/1741659009335724
- Laidlaw, E.B. (2017). Online shaming and the right to privacy. *Laws*, 6(3), 1-26. DOI: 10.3390/laws6010003
- Litowitz, D. (1997). The trouble with scarlet letter punishments. *Judicature*, 81(2), 52-57
- Lobao, L., Gray, M., Cox, K. & Kitson, M. (2018). The shrinking state? Understanding the assault on the public sector. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy & Society*, 11(3), 389-408. DOI: 10.1093/cjres/rsy026
- Lohne, L. (2020, 14<sup>th</sup> of March). Hyttefolket forlater ikke fjellet: - Fryktelig skuffende. *VG*. <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/kJOPJv/hyttefolket-forlater-ikke-fjellet-fryktelig-skuffende>
- Lynd, H.M. (1958). *On shame and the search for identity*. Harcourt, Brace & World
- Machin, D. & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. SAGE.
- Mangan, D. & Wilkie, C. (2020, 28<sup>th</sup> of April). Vice president Mike Pence tours Mayo Clinic without coronavirus mask even though he was told to wear one. *CNBC*.



<https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/28/coronavirus-mike-pence-tours-mayo-clinic-without-mask.html>

- Marwick, A.E. (2013). Ethnographic and qualitative research on Twitter. In: K. Weller, A. Bruns, C. Puschmann, J. Burgess & M. Mahrt (Eds.), *Twitter and Society* (pp. 109-122). Peter Lang.
- Marwick, A.E. & boyd, d. (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New media & Society*, 13(1), 114-133. DOI: 10.1177/1461444810365313
- Marwick, A.E. & boyd, d. (2014). Networked privacy. *New Media & Society*, 16(7), 1051-1067.
- McCay-Peet, L. & Quan-Haase, A. (2016). A model of social media engagement: User profiles, gratifications, and experiences. In: H. O'Brien & P. Cairns (Eds.), *Why engagement matters: Cross-disciplinary perspectives of user engagement in digital media* (pp. 199-217). Springer International Publishing. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-27446-1\_9
- McCay-Peet, L. & Quan-Haase, A. (2017). What is social media and what questions can social media research help us answer? In: L. Sloan & A. Quan-Haase (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*. (pp. 14-26). SAGE.
- Miller, C.R. (1984). Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, 151-167.
- Miller, C.R. (2017). "Where do genres come from?" In: C.R. Miller & A.R. Kelly (Eds.), *Emerging Genres in New Media*. Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-40295-6\_1
- Müller, V.C. (2015). Gun control: A European perspective. *Essays in philosophy*, 16(2), 247-261. DOI: 10.7710/1526-0569.1535
- Nagle, A. (2017). *Kill all normies: Online culture wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the alt-right*. [Kindle]. Zero Books. [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Kill-All-Normies-Culture-Alt-Right-ebook/dp/B0719WYYPR/ref=tmm\\_kin\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1619183594&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Kill-All-Normies-Culture-Alt-Right-ebook/dp/B0719WYYPR/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1619183594&sr=8-1)
- New York Times (2020, 3<sup>rd</sup> of April). C.D.C. recommends wearing masks in public; Trump says, 'I'm choosing not to do it.' *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/03/world/coronavirus-news-updates.html>
- Ng, E. (2020). No grand pronouncements here...: Reflections on cancel culture and digital media participation. *Television & New Media*, 21(6), 621-627. DOI: 10.1177/1527476420918828
- Papacharissi, Z. (2012). Without you, I'm nothing: Performances of the self on Twitter. *International Journal of Communication* 6.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2016). Affective publics and structures of storytelling: Sentiment, events and mediality. *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(3), 307-324. DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109697
- Perez, S. (2018, 30<sup>th</sup> of October). Twitter's doubling of character count from 140 to 280 had little impact on length of tweets. *Techcrunch*.

[https://techcrunch.com/2018/10/30/twitters-doubling-of-character-count-from-140-to-280-had-little-impact-on-length-of-tweets/?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlMnVbS8&gucce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAD5mRhQGwv25\\_m1GyBB4xqTi4IVxKPU2Gzku4VMB6KR256PY8a\\_Z-F75q\\_K6TlqwG75mL3Hrx-HKajSDZmJ6PWs6oTkqN076Hwfd\\_dqgvO50gKObAV4F28OsfCQyiEIRfsBRKSOfLi-HbooEwzF-1BR0pBNwvLe4gMJe9v12WWJO](https://techcrunch.com/2018/10/30/twitters-doubling-of-character-count-from-140-to-280-had-little-impact-on-length-of-tweets/?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlMnVbS8&gucce_referrer_sig=AQAAAD5mRhQGwv25_m1GyBB4xqTi4IVxKPU2Gzku4VMB6KR256PY8a_Z-F75q_K6TlqwG75mL3Hrx-HKajSDZmJ6PWs6oTkqN076Hwfd_dqgvO50gKObAV4F28OsfCQyiEIRfsBRKSOfLi-HbooEwzF-1BR0pBNwvLe4gMJe9v12WWJO)

- Pfeffer, J., Zorbach, T. & Carley, K.M. (2014). Understanding online firestorms: Negative word-of-mouth dynamics in social media networks. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 20(1-2), 117-128. DOI: 10.1080/13527266.2013.797778
- Phillips, L. & Jørgensen, M.W. (2002). *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. SAGE.
- Posner, E. (2015, 9<sup>th</sup> of April) A terrible shame. *Slate*. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/04/internet-shaming-the-legal-history-of-shame-and-its-costs-and-benefits.html> ---- look up how to write this
- Reddit. (n.d.) /r/*PublicFreakout*. Accessed on the 27/02/2021 from <https://www.reddit.com/r/PublicFreakout/>
- Rev. (2020, 3<sup>rd</sup> of April). *Donald Trump coronavirus briefing transcript April 3: New CDC ace mask recommendations*. Rev.com. <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-coronavirus-briefing-transcript-april-3-new-cdc-face-mask-recommendations>
- Ronson, J. (2015). *So you've been publicly shamed*. Pan Macmillan.
- Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). SAGE.
- Rost, K., Stahel, L. & Frey, B. (2016). Digital Social Norm Enforcement: Online Firestorms in Social Media. *PLoS ONE*, 11(6), 1-26. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0155923
- Roth, M.P. (2014). *An eye for an eye: a global history of punishment*. Reaktion Books.
- Sedgwick, E.K., Frank., A. & Alexander, I.E. (1995). *Shame and its sisters: a Silvan Tomkins reader*. Duke University Press.
- Shearer, E. & Mitchell, A. (2021, 11<sup>th</sup> of January). *News use across social media platforms in 2020*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.journalism.org/2021/01/12/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-in-2020/>
- Statista. (2021). *Number of people shot by the police in the United States from 2017-2021, by race*. Accessed on the 27.05.2021 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/585152/people-shot-to-death-by-us-police-by-race/>
- Steyerl, H. (2009). In defense of the poor image. *E-flux*. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/> Accessed: 23.04.2021.
- Stroud, N.J. (2017). Selective exposure theories. In: K. Kenski & K.H. Jamieson, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication* (pp. 1-19). Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.009\_update\_001
- Thompson, J.B. (2005). The new visibility. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 22(6), 31-51. DOI: 10.1177/0263276405059413

- Thompson, J.B. (2011). Shifting boundaries of public and private life. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28(4), 49-70. DOI: 10.1177/0263276411408446
- Thompson, J.B. (2020). Mediated interaction in the digital age. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 37(1): 3-28. DOI:10.1177/0263276418808592
- Trottier, D. (2017). Digital vigilantism as weaponization of visibility. *Philosophy & Technology* 30(1), 55-72. DOI: 10.1007/s13347-016-0216-4
- Trottier, D. (2018). Coming to terms with shame: Exploring mediated visibility against transgressions. *Surveillance & Society* 16(2), 170-182.
- Twitter. (n.d.). *How to share and watch videos on Twitter*. Accessed on the 26/02/2021 from <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/twitter-videos>
- Twitter. (2021). *Glossary*. Accessed on the 27.05.2021 from <https://help.twitter.com/en/glossary>
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. SAGE.
- WHO. (2020). *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 – 5 June 2020*. Accessed 18/08/2020 from <https://www-who-int.ezproxy.uio.no/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---5-june-2020>