

# Toward a Goal of Inclusive Academic Publishing

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Thinking about the concept of what media studies can do, and how that is manifested through my own research and pedagogy, I am reminded that the more inclusive we can make this field of study (in its many manifestations, subfields, and modes of inquiry), the better we may be able to do the most good within an increasingly media-saturated world, inclusive both in terms of access for scholars at all levels of their career, as well as for students and others who may read our works.

I will share an anecdote from my dissertation defense that I think gets to the heart of this media studies philosophy as it pertains to the inclusiveness (or potential lack thereof) that might sometimes exist within scholarly endeavors. As my defense wrapped up, and just as the euphoria I felt from its being a success was setting in, my dissertation advisor, Dr. Matthew Jordan, said he had one more question (paraphrased here). He asked how I would present these materials to students, or more pointedly to anyone, keeping in mind the goal of increasing their media literacy. I stumbled through an answer that I do not recall, but I never forgot the question because it speaks to the opacity of scholarly works, not just for students but for fellow scholars.

We as media studies scholars, or any scholar for that matter, are rightly told to stand on the shoulders of giants to advance our respective fields. This tenet is reinforced and reified at countless junctures of our academic careers, from graduate studies events like defenses to journal reviews that ensure scholarly continuity and depth. Where this important element of scholarly work can become daunting, and media studies is no exception, is in the cumulative influence over a hundred years of scholarship can have on a beginning researcher, especially when coupled with unequal institution resources and information access.

Some fields and subfields have such a rich history that the list of “must cites” outpaces the ability for the work itself to stand on its own. This ever growing list becomes a veritable minefield for burgeoning scholars as they begin submitting their work to conferences and journals. One never quite knows if the scholar on the other end of a review agrees with your particular constellation of inclusions and exclusions. This concept has been popularized by the “Reviewer #2” Internet meme in which the titular critic inevitably wishes the submitting writer would have written something more closely to what they value in scholarship, regardless of the intent of the actual research. Not only do I think this has the potential to be a moment of exclusion, but it also has the potential to water down the actual research being produced (which is the opposite of the intent to enrich the work through rigorous historical scholarly engagement). There is absolutely no doubt that new research must engage deeply with important connected works that came before it, especially as it pertains to building a stronger foundation to advance a given field, but too often a given citation or line of thought within an article seems placed to serve a specific scholar and not a whole field.

A reciprocal, and equally problematic, dynamic occurs when a scholarly work engages sufficiently with historically important research as a foundation, but lacks in the citation of the

newest works in a given field or subfield. There are many innocent factors that can contribute to this lack of recent scholarly engagement, most notably the sometimes extended publishing timeline that leads to omissions of work released contemporaneously, as well as unequal resource access at various institutions which leads to the omission of newer articles and books that have not yet passed their paywall timetables. In either case, the issue may not lie with the scholarly work itself as much as with structural concerns in academic publishing.

Perhaps, much of this line of thought has to do with my specific chronological positioning within the academic field of media studies, where the predominant feeling at various stages of an article or chapter or even a full manuscript is one of inevitably falling short of capturing the entirety (or even the most relevant) historical research on a given topic. This feeling especially grows when attempting to engage with a topic from interdisciplinary perspectives that compound the concern.

None of this is to say that we should be ahistorical scholars, or that we should be forgiving of works that either refuse to engage with important precursors that directly connect to the topic at hand or that do a poor job of due scholarly diligence. Instead, I think a concerted effort should be made on the part of senior scholars and gatekeepers to recognize the difference between a lack of citations and scholarly engagement that is actually detrimental to the argument being made by the submitting author(s), and a perceived lack of perfunctory citations that do not significantly advance the argument and topic at hand. Many journals (and their constellation of editors and reviewers) do a fantastic job at making this distinction, and I have no doubt that *MAST* will be among those that will do just that. I look forward to helping in my capacity as an advisory board member, and I am excited to see the fascinating issues that will follow.