Susanna Paasonen, Kylie Jarrett, and Ben Light, *NSFW: Sex, Humor, and Risk in Social Media*
Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019.

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The titular hashtag *#NSFW* grabs attention while warning users to proceed with caution, suggesting what we will encounter is simultaneously tempting and perilous (you will want to see this - but not in front of your colleagues!). In *#NSFW: Sex, Humor, and Risk in Social Media,* authors Susanna Paasonen, Kylie Jarrett and Ben Light parse the implications lumped together under the taboo label and reveal what sort of troubling behaviours evade this categorization. Their work spotlights respectability and safety as tools for social control when associating sex with risk carries consequences for both creators and audiences online. Recently massive platforms as diverse as Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, OnlyFans and Pornhub have dramatically altered their terms of service with little notice to users. This selective and sudden moderation damages communities and livelihoods with little recourse, and shapes what kind of sexual content is made available according to the platform's economic strategies. This governance trend has been explored elsewhere in Katrin Tiidenberg and Emily van der Nagel's informative *Sex and Social Media*, also released in 2020. Both books compellingly make the case that platforms are de-sexing our social experience. Of the two, *#NSFW* utilizes its case-analysis more broadly to ask questions about sex, risk, and identity off-platform as well as in situations bounded by these moderation norms online. Suitable to the theme of this special issue on "Porn and its Uses", the book convincingly shows an internet riddled with gatekeepers that have refused normalizing sex or pornography as ordinary social and economic interactions. Instead, the logics of #NSFW tags have served to further exile sexual content to limited and commodified spaces. This refusal to naturalize a sanitized social media landscape contributes to the field of platform studies by providing an in-depth look at a popular cross-platform affordance, and to porn studies by questioning logics that render sex risky and continuously barred from normal circulation in our interactions online.

The hashtag itself cuts a wide swath, encompassing porn, nudity and dick pics, gore and violence, and shocking pranks or gross-out humour in a rush of context collapse around what kind of content is deemed troubling. "Not safe for work" establishes norms and expectations around what is deemed permissible online, and when we ought to consume or avoid it. Content bundled under #NSFW is wildly heterogenous, and compresses the horrifying, humorous, and horny

into a flat generalized category of risky browsing. The authors make clear that the #hashtag signifier is not a passive one. Instead, the context of its deployment reflects and even generates social meaning through networks. #NSFW is identified as a permeable apparatus: in turns a straightening-out tool enforcing heteronormativity, a node around which publics assemble, a marketing tool for porn performers and other sex workers, a technique of engagement for clickbait, and a practical means of content moderation on platforms, all in one. The simultaneous promise and threat contained in the hashtag reveal content that is at turns forbidden, sexy, playful, and vulgar—but always compelling, especially when we are supposed to be occupied by the serious business of work.

This monograph brings together in collaboration experienced scholars working in porn studies, media studies, affect theory, feminist political economy and digital methods. Ben Light's body of work is grounded in digital methods with a particular eye for sexual subcultures and dating platforms. Kylie Jarrett's research examines social reproduction, labour, and digital economies through a Marxist-Feminist framework. Susanna Paasonen's research has been influential in exploring humour and affect alongside pornography, an excellent basis from which to launch the research entanglements of #NSFW. Paasonen further develops many of these research themes in another 2020 release: *Who's Laughing Now* with Jenny Sunden, which looks to feminist resilience tactics in navigating risk through humour on social media. Ideas explored in the book are rooted in decades of honing respective research methods. The three authors' diversity of expertise shows in deft—but rarely dense—engagements with all of the above in the span of an economical 176 pages. Methodologically, this alliance sets up a mixed approach, where social science and humanities meet data and business studies. Content analysis emerges from an initial quantitative study conducted using digital methods. Scraping Twitter for a large data set makes clear the associations between tags, revealing #NSFW material to be predominantly sexual in nature, and featuring women squarely in heterosexual contexts. From this foundation, a prismatic analysis follows that engages with the hashtag's taxonomies, community assemblages, and pragmatic functions as porn marketing. The genesis of the book was through discussions at the *Association of Internet Researchers* annual conferences and the collaborative work was workshopped in subsequent years of AoIR conferences, so it is fitting that the authors were recognized with the 2020 *AoIR* Nancy Baym book award. Careful attention to platform specificity and nascent internet scholarship throughout avoids generalizations that could otherwise dilute the resulting analysis. Paasonen, Jarrett, and Light's multimodal approach is remarkably accessible given this methodological complexity.

The book opens by identifying "NSFW as Warning and Invitation" to potential viewers. To click these links is vaguely, but alarmingly, agreed to be moving beyond the bounds of workplace safety and towards the lure of troubling content. Respectable internet browsing and the implied safety

that comes with it is cast as mundane in comparison, tempting audiences to click, browse and divert their attention towards the risky posts. The resulting conflation of all things sexual with risky behaviour has affective and material consequences, and the book aims to make clear some of the paradoxical associations between risk, sex, humour and labour. The authors situate their close reading of the tag within Jodi Dean's framework of communicative capitalism (2010) which accounts for the management and monetization of data by grabbing user attention to drive traffic across sites. Consequently, themes of classification and metadata, engagement and applications, and governance and labour respond to provocations from platform studies, critical algorithm studies and data studies throughout.

In Chapter 2, the authors ask "What's with the Tag?", zooming in on the metadata of the tagging function itself to explore the communal, managerial, and ideological implications of #NSFW. Tags are identified as technological affordances that are not neutral but performative, encompassing human and nonhuman actors, including corporations and algorithms. The tag generates meaning through associations, codifying what is (in)appropriate to each community. The logic of NSFW is shown to equate sexuality as "objectionable content" across Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr, among other platforms. By reproducing and reinforcing this cultural logic, user interactions and imposed platform affordances ensure a status quo of banishing sex under the pretense of risk. The chapter asserts that flows of internet traffic is mirrored by

the flow of discourse under the terms of Dean's (2010) communicative capitalism.

Chapter 3 zooms in on the culprit identified to be quintessentially #NSFW in the previous section. "Peekaboo Pornography" considers not only the products of porn, but the labour of making it, in relation to safety and risk. For efficacy, this segment focuses on MindGeek, the monopolistic company that operates the largest free porn aggregator sites. The ubiquity of porn makes its near universal ban on social media all the more absurd when considering what it is equated with. Female nipples, genitals, and sexual pleasure are lumped in with cannibalism, extreme graphic violence, and hate speech on most popular platforms. To circumvent this porn ban, MindGeek uses PR stunts, charity campaigns and neatly packaged statistics and infographics to circulate their brand respectably on social media. Mainstreaming of the pornographic has been a race to the bottom that devalues the labour of porn workers through both the oversaturation of the freemium model and the PR disavowal of queer, femme, amateur porn performers in favour of masculine IT expertise and a newfound PR respectability (Rodeschini 2020). As a result, porn work carries very material risks, not just of harassment and assault, but of banal economic exploitation under the precarious terms of the gig economy. The authors echo labour scholar Brooke Erin Duffy's (2017) reminder that, despite carefully crafted appearances of authentic pleasure, these precarious labourers are (not) getting paid to do what they love. This compels porn workers to seek out alternative

income streams, frequently turning to social media to market themselves while being discriminated against by the very platforms they rely upon. Paradoxically, heightened visibility of porn and sex workers in the mainstream also necessitates their management of perceived risk on social media through personal content moderation.

The fourth chapter is concerned with "The Ambiguity of Dick Pics", a user-generated iteration of #NSFW content. Context is, once again, key to making sense of the dick pic, a hybrid of selfie culture and porn that can either function to arouse or harass recipients. Using viral examples of #NSFW links, the authors show the male body, and specifically the homoerotic, are routinely coded as disgusting in internet visual culture. Not all identities and acts are weighted equally in regard to desirability and grossness. Where nude female bodies are coded #NSFW under the connotation of sexuality and objectification, male bodies are met as hilarious, unfortunate and yucky. Despite this, shame and online harassment is disproportionately levied at women, racialized and queer folks, granting online nakedness markedly different levels of agency according to identity. While women's nudes are routinely the target of revenge porn and circulated without consent, dick pics can be used variably as tools of intimacy or harassment. Taking examples of popular feminist activists and networks, the authors show the latter is increasingly being met with public shaming. The former, desired in the visual economy of Tumblr and gay dating apps, allow for a showcase of sexuality while protecting personal privacy. This analysis of the ambiguity

and mutability of naked genitals by gender show how #NSFW images can unequally facilitate or disrupt the flow of communication across networks, but that as long as the flow of traffic continues, platforms will benefit from their circulation and avoid intervening.

A focus on "Negotiating Sex and Safety at Work" in Chapter 5 latches on to changing parameters of work under the digital economy and interrogates how sex and sexuality are normatively deployed in the workplace. Personal and social relations do not evaporate under the umbrella of work, and it follows that the "dynamics of bullying, discrimination and harassment at work follow the familiar fault lines of identity categories" (112). This means that sex and humour deployed at work are means of articulating control and power hierarchies. Some jokes at work act as bonding exercises or reduce friction, and some sexual scenarios are advantageous to stable social formations. However, these are only permissible insofar as they increase worker productivity. Further, under conditions of increasing surveillance and precarity, labourers are facing intense scrutiny for informal and leisure activities, calling for a sanitized and well-managed public presence on social media and discipline in using it at work. This is complicated by increasing contract, gig, and mobile work environments, which disproportionately harm marginalized groups. However, Just as porn scholar Mireille Miller-Young has identified resistance and pleasure in the work of Black porn performers who were normally portrayed as victims (2014), Paasonen, Jarrett, and Light suggest that sharing and viewing

#NSFW content at work can be coded as an act of resistance among labourers, reclaiming time back from the optimization demanded of the neoliberal work ethic.

Finally, Chapter 6 turns to the material considerations around sex work, the gig economy, the attention economy, and the evaporating divide between labour and leisure to examine "The Political Economy of Unsafe Work". The designation of what is, and is not, considered "safe" reflects the frequently troubled offline relations between gender, sexuality, race, and labour. By mapping the political economy of abuse and harassment online, the authors reveal precisely who and what is really at risk in relation to #NSFW content. This chapter relies on case studies of high-profile harassment and an analysis of "toxic geek masculinity" (147) to show that racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic behaviour creates demonstrably unsafe work environments impacting many. Yet, while sex and sexuality are not inherently risky, they are named #NSFW while hateful and damaging "e-bile" (147) is routinely normalized. This analysis really takes flight when the authors move to consider the economic dimensions of platform capitalism, which reify structures of power that deny the systemic nature of harassment and deputize the individual to be responsible for their personal safety. The juxtaposition of perpetual workplace surveillance and ongoing refusal to moderate harassment make a mockery of the designations "safe" and "unsafe" for work.

The book makes a compelling case for the disciplinary functions of the #NSFW designation, a tag frequently dismissed as unserious or distasteful. The association of sex with risk plays into an "economy of peekaboo" (170) where sex is sanitized, straightened out, and made safe for consumption only to realize an economic logic of centralization and accumulation. Simultaneously, objectionable content is teased as a means to leverage user attention and drive traffic around the web. The logic of "platform capitalism" (Srnicek 2016) is revealed to be unconcerned with safety or harm as long as the flow of attention produces favourable material and economic outcomes in line with the status quo. This observation does not exclude academia as unique in this tendency and the researchers conclude by delineating the unique struggles in research and knowledge sharing surrounding a project which is constitutively #NSFW. Central to the analysis are questions of consent, levied at exploitative labour practices as much as they are sexual agency. Throughout, the authors refuse the taxonomic tendency of attaching sex to risk, and explicitly name the human and nonhuman agents that normalize giving violence, harassment, and labour exploitation a free pass. In its best moments, the book's tone matches its twin topics of humour and risk, showing remarkable levity even as it raises crucial questions about what is considered legitimate content or work, and what kinds of bodies are deemed worthy of safety. Always a provocation, *#NSFW* is essential reading for porn scholars, platform scholars and for those looking to better understand the attention economy.

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