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Cyberhate against academics

Abstract: Hate speech is endemic in digital space, and it does not spare academia. Especially scholars working in fields prone to political debate – from migration to climate change, from gender to refugee integration, and many more topics – find themselves increasingly attacked. With this chapter, we hope to raise awareness for the increasingly prevalent phenomenon of cyberhate targeting academics. Our intention is to shed light on some of its harmful effects, and, by providing some conceptual analysis, to contribute to individual and organisational prevention and coping strategies. We conclude that guarding against cyberhate is now part of academics' and their institutions' responsibility.

1. Introduction

Hate speech is endemic in digital space, and it does not spare academia. Especially scholars working in fields prone to political debate – from migration to climate change, from human rights to social inequality, from bioethics to vaccines, from sexualities to gender, and many more topics – find themselves increasingly attacked.[1] Some scholars and academic organisations have realised that cyberhate against academics is becoming a significant problem and are beginning to develop helpful defence strategies (e.g., AAUP 2017; Dutt-Ballerstadt 2018; Ferber 2018; Flaherty 2017; Grollman 2015; Wray et al. 2016).

With this chapter we hope to raise awareness of the increasingly prevalent phenomenon of cyberhate targeting academics.[2] Our intention is to shed light on some of its harmful effects, and, by providing some conceptual analysis, to contribute to individual and organisational coping strategies.

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1 See for example Campbell (2017), who describes her experiences as an attacked ethnographer. Further semi-systematic accounts of recent attacks, such as 'cyberbullying' of academics especially in the USA, are discussed in Flaherty (2017).

2 A rather detailed analysis of the situation in the USA can be found in Ferber (2018). We are writing from the perspective of academics in a European democratic society. We are aware that cyberhate happens in many other places too, but we are not well-equipped to describe or evaluate the effects there.

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Cyberhate against academics and accompanying practices such as cyberbullying or trolling are intimately linked to broader social developments and phenomena such as the general dynamics of online hate speech and new authoritarian movements, anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, anti-genderism, and anti-intellectualism (Hark/Villa 2015; Assimakopoulos et al. 2017; Stanley 2018b; Kuhar/Paternotte 2017). The further fact of universities falling under increasing economic and entrepreneurial pressures compounds the issue (Slaughter/Rhodes 2004; Jessop 2018). Even if this chapter can only briefly gesture towards this complex interplay, we would want to stress that the 'corporate university' model carries the risk of transforming scholars into output-oriented service-providers who are evaluated according to other than academic standards. The ethos of the marketplace includes, or maybe only reinforces, into academia the logic of popular demand, which is closely linked to populist media dynamics.

Matters are further complicated by the very limited specific conceptual or empirical research on cyberhate against academics presently available. The topic is often presented in narrative forms, field reports, in blog posts, or in journalism. In a similar vein, some parts of this chapter are also motivated by personal experiences. We think that these experiences – that unwillingly made some of us 'knowers' – helped us to better understand the phenomenon and its destructive and dangerous dimensions. Being knowers, and sharing knowledge and experiences, can have an empowering effect in building connections to others; it can also help build bridges to those who want or may need to understand without having had these experiences. Furthermore, as knowers we hope we are equipped to identify, promote, or develop constructive ways forward. We want this chapter to be instrumental in understanding the situation we live and work in and in preparing ourselves better for the matter of facts.

We begin this chapter by explaining the concept of cyberhate and arguing why it has to be taken seriously. We shall then explore cyberhate as a practice attacking academics and look at the more specific harm both to the individual scholar, as well as to universities and society at large. Finally, we introduce a few preliminary ideas on how academics and academic institutions should deal with cyberhate attacks.

2. The emerging phenomenon of cyberhate

The emergence of web 2.0 technology gave rise to a comprehensive and complex phenomenon of 'mass self-communication' (Castells 2007), most notably an increase of opportunities for individuals and groups to produce, access, and communicate information as private individuals. For most people, the advantages of

this step in human history seem undeniable. Yet, as Nan Lin (1999) anticipated nearly two decades ago, despite the Internet's potential for facilitating the utilisation and accumulation of social capital, new 'tensions, conflicts, violence, competition, and coordination issues' (ibid., 237) arise. Today we see that web-based communication – specifically communication in social media – is often not characterised by respectful conduct, or even a spirit of mutual inclusion, but rather manifests strong and collective tendencies towards social exclusion and morally problematic conflict behaviour, including abusive commentary, and punctual or systematic spreading of misinformation about individuals and certain social groups (Jane 2014 and 2015; Whittaker/Kowalski 2014; Perry/Olsson 2009; Näsi et al. 2015).

In this chapter, we focus on one particularly regrettable problem also affecting academics: *cyberhate*. Cyberhate refers to a tendency of groups and individuals to express hateful sentiments and convictions targeting other groups and individuals, by way of using any textual, video-, or photographic means of communication available on the Internet.[3] Activities of cyberhate can be pursued through websites, social networks, dating sites, blogs, online games, messengers, and e-mail (cf. Anti-Defamation League 2010). Cyberhate is morally problematic for a number of reasons: it can establish forms of discrimination, abuse, intimidation, marginalizing, othering, dehumanisation, and humiliation.

Typically, haters have the *intention* of harming the other group or person and of exhibiting them as a viable object for further attacks, including physical attacks in the 'non-virtual' world. Yet we allow for the possibility of people *unintentionally* engaging in cyberhate, by communicating carelessly in ways that use expressions that are inherently abusive and exhibit others as a viable target of further attacks.

Cyberhate can be pursued by single individuals. More typically, however, cyberhate has a *movement character*. The phenomenon of hating publicly, thereby exhibiting one's target, simultaneously calls on other haters' attention, *encouraging* them to become active against the same or similar targets as well. Moreover, the collective activity of hating *together* can intensify the force of hate and the decisiveness of haters to cause damage to their targets. To a large extent, cyberhate is also a phenomenon of *mutual intoxication*.

3 Cyberhate is, as we see it, a specific form of the more general phenomenon of hate speech and related crimes. These have been extensively studied in a range of disciplines, e.g., legal studies, sociology, history, and philosophy. Cyberhate is, as we understand it, a mediawise specific variation of harmful articulations of hatred against groups or individuals, mainly along lines of social differences such as gender, sexuality, 'race', age, etc. Cf. Chakraborti and Garland 2015.

The tendencies of exhibition, mutual intoxication, and reflective attenuation, are irreducibly social phenomena. The same observation holds regarding the provision of *target selection criteria* and *semantic content* of cyberhate: typically, *whom* to hate and *what* to hate the target *for* are ideologically informed and constrained. Membership in some social groups constituted by ethnicity, 'race', religion, gender, political or sexual orientation, etc., whether perceived or self-identified, significantly increases the risk of becoming a target.[4] This strongly suggests that target selection criteria cannot be random or reduced to individual preferences, but are provided by ideologies of wider social significance. In other words, what guides cyberhaters (individuals or groups) in selecting their targets, are social practices, including properly institutionalised practices, but also ideologies, patterns of emotions, biases, and prejudices that are constituted historically. Various forms of sexism and racism, anti-Semitism, Orientalism, classism, anti-intellectualism, anti-communism, etc. are intersecting kinds of such ideologies. As to the semantic content of expressions of cyberhate, social practices, too, figure as the main resource of cyberhaters. Hate expressed against certain religious groups, for instance, frequently makes use of stereotypes that are not spontaneously invented, but are inextricably linked to historically established imaginaries that enjoy broader social acceptance in many, specifically Western, societies.

Finally, the wider social context in which cyberhate takes place is relevant also to the question of what, given the general ideological background conditions, *initiates* incidences or movements of cyberhate – that is, other than another instance of cyberhate. As it turns out, initiating causes are often linked to certain ideologically received social events in 'the real world'. So for instance, in times of increased refugee arrival being predominantly perceived and publicly represented from a distinctively ideological perspective, through discourse and pictures that come with racist and sexist assumptions, certain groups are rendered even more vulnerable to cyberhate than they already are. It seems as if the event and its ideological mode of presentation in many places, including parts of the mainstream media, encourages groups and individuals to come forward with their own hate online. This can take strategic, even organised forms. Reports from several NGOs (cf. Anti-Defamation League 2018; Kreißel et al. 2018) confirm this impression.

4 There is much evidence for this regarding (homo-)sexuality, gender (women), migrational status, 'race' (non-white), etc. Cf. the online library at the International Network for Hate Studies, http://www.internationalhatestudies.com/publications/.

In the light of these preliminary reflections, it comes as no surprise that most established institutions dealing with cyberhate today avoid unnecessary general accounts of the phenomenon. Rather, they attempt to capture more directly the social embeddedness of cyberhate by pointing at certain groups that are currently the most vulnerable in becoming targets of cyberhate. The International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH), for instance, takes cyberhate to consist in discriminatory or defamatory statements aimed at people because of their (perceived) "race, ethnicity, language, nationality, skin colour, religious beliefs or lack thereof, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, political beliefs, social status, property, birth, age, mental health, disability, disease" (INACH 2018). While INACH's list is rather extensive, the Anti-Defamation League applies a slightly more narrow focus, describing online hate in relation to "anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim bigotry, racism, homophobia, misogyny, xenophobia", but also mentions "other forms of hate, prejudice and bigotry" (Anti-Defamation League 2018).

Linking cyberhate to specific groups is supported by our initial reflections on the relation between source ideologies and particular incidences of cyberhate. We believe, however, that lists should be kept open and be subject to possible augmentation. This chapter can be read as a plea for augmentation, as it focuses on the case of cyberhate *against academics* in an age of increased anti-intellectualism, minding of course that this field covers many intersections, as female academics, black academics and academics of colour, academics with working-class backgrounds, leftist academics, etc., can face different kinds and dimensions of cyberhate.

3. Cyberhate in society

The aggressive and active nature of cyberhate has the potential to inflict drastic social damages.[5] The movement character of cyberhate illuminates the manner in which it may come to *infect* societal interaction writ large. Broadly speaking, the spread of cyberhate risks eroding, altering, or destroying social norms regarding public behaviour, attitudes of democratic culture, and the value of reason and scientific inquiry.[6] What is at stake is a specific form of society which promotes and displays particular kinds of values and norms that have been

5 The harms to the individual, specifically individual academics, will be discussed below.

6 We suggest that the phenomenon of cyberhate should itself be understood as an effect of specific forms of social erosion – or what Buchanan and Powell (2018, ch.7) call 'moral regression' – that can increasingly be witnessed in democratic societies.

the hallmark of liberal democracies (e.g., inclusion, tolerance, equality, and public reason).

The frequency and the effects of cyberhate contribute to its spread and normalisation. It is often either picked up by others and imitated, applauded, or ignored rather than challenged. People are quick to collectively adopt behaviours they believe are accepted by others, giving cyberhate what was noted above as a *movement character.* Subsequently, communities tied together by hateful and oppressive convictions may develop and possibly have a snowball effect on other social groups. For example, reports following the election of leading political figures who openly vilified particular social groups and incited hatred towards them in their campaigns, as well as those following the "Brexit" vote where its proponents employed hate rhetoric against immigrants leading up to the vote, show how these incidents produced a 'new normal' that has led to further increases in hate speech and hate crimes (Crandall et al. 2018; Okeowo 2016; Kenyon 2016; Mindock 2017).

Ishani Maitra and Mary Kate McGowan (2012, 6) identify four ways in which 'consequential harms' can follow from hate speech: (1) it helps persuade witnesses to believe negative stereotypes that lead them to engage in other harmful conduct; (2) it shapes, over time, the preferences of witnesses so that negative stereotypes become more persuasive to them; (3) it conditions and alters the social environment in a way that normalises (often unconsciously) the expression of negative stereotypes and subsequent discrimination of those persons; (4) it ultimately can lead to witnesses imitating the hateful behaviour. Consequently, cyberhate can, over time, incite a social climate of boundaries and exclusion, fearmongering, intolerance, and the increasingly accepted use of hate rhetoric. Such a climate filled with distrust and animosity is, therefore, unstable and prone to violence (Brown et al. 2018).

The *mutual intoxication* may breed situations whereby many members of society are brought into the folds of hate. Even those firmly against hateful action may find themselves drawn into inciting hate themselves against the original haters merely to defend themselves and, as such, become entangled in spirals of hate that stem from the first instance. In fact, this is one of the aims of cyberhate which follows from the tactic of utilising emotional bait to evoke the anger of targets, enabling them to argue that the original hate was justified. This tactic can undermine the debate culture by misdirecting the focus of disagreement, by simplifying or by distorting the facts of the debate to discredit the target.[7]

7 The 'poisoning of debate culture' whereby force comes to prevail over reason is a population-

The culture of hate runs contrary to that of enlightened liberal democratic culture (Baer 2018). Jeremy Waldron emphasises this and argues that hate and discrimination undermines the 'assurance that every community member is entitled to; namely, that they may go about their business unimpeded by assaults on their social standing, their entitlement to be treated as equals, and their dignity' (2012, 5). Consequently, the social harms of cyberhate can ultimately lead to the realisation of unenlightenment and, as such, the destruction of civilised society, as Waldron puts it. It is for this reason that the concern over the harms of hate speech is not stymied merely by protecting victims of hate from sporadic wounds but, rather, by 'securing, in a systematic fashion, a particular aspect of social peace and civic order under justice' (ibid., 103–104).

4. Cyberhate against academics: anti-intellectualism

Quantitative data on cyberhate against academics is scarce. As stated above, our considerations on cyberhate in academia are based mostly on individual reflections found in blog posts. Some of the individual cases testify to the detrimental effect of cyberhate on the lives of the scholars (Ferber 2018). One exemplary experience is described in a 2018 blog post, written by a professor of cognitive and education psychology from a university in the United States (Cuevas 2018). His story began with an online discussion of an article about the role of the Electoral College after the 2016 presidential election. He referenced some right-wing comments in these discussions and was verbally attacked by a reader for his views. After a brief exchange and the decision to block the reader, the professor experienced several orchestrated hate waves against him. A dreadful litany of attacks then followed on social media, through e-mail and phone calls, and via the website ratemyprofessors.com from an invisible mob on the web involving students and their parents. This created a major issue for the university administration and for some politicians. He writes:

> Their stated goal was to see that I was fired. This, apparently, was the type of opportunity they relished: find a person to harass, maybe by drawing him or her into a political argument, locate any information they could find online, and then coordinate attacks in an attempt to damage the person as much as possible. (ibid., 26)

level harm that cannot be overstated and is one of the primary reasons for focusing on the impacts of cyberhate on academics.

He also points out that

> among many on the right there is a palpable hostility toward the basic concept of higher education, as if college attendance made one part of a liberal conspiracy, and professors have come to be viewed as the embodiment of what many resent in American culture: political correctness, diversity, willingness to look to science for answers, secularism, feminism, intellectualism, socialism, and a host of other 'isms'. (ibid., 24–25)

Other academics have written about similar experiences and note a general tendency in some parts of the population to view education and research in negative terms (Pew Research Center 2017). The American Association of University Professors has acknowledged that attacks on academics are a serious problem and has issued a statement (AAUP 2017). Other academic associations, including the American Philosophical Association (APA 2016), have also issued statements regarding bullying of and hate speech against scholars. At some universities in Europe similar discussions are taking place.[8]

While general anti-academic and anti-intellectual stances have a long history in all sorts of populisms, and are also core to well-established mainstream conservatism (cf. Blakely 2017 for the US case), it seems that those who are more active and more visible in presenting their research do expose themselves to a higher degree of vulnerability (Kaakinen et al. 2018). Incidences of cyberhate can be more prevalent among academics who also belong to one or more excluded groups, for example in relation to ethnicity, gender, or religious minorities. Those working in politically charged disciplines or on politically contested topics are more vulnerable to attacks (Ferber 2018). Views that were until recently considered rather uncontroversial, such as those defending human rights or calling for higher environmental standards, are increasingly targeted by hate speech. While disagreement and dissent are unavoidable and, in fact, essential in the pursuit of knowledge about matters not yet settled, and while science is always also about debate regarding concepts, methods, normative perspectives, etc.,

8 The recent case of the Hungarian government undermining the constitutional right of academic freedom by removing the two master's degrees in Gender Studies from the list of accredited subjects – without any professional or academic review – is a rather extreme example of institutional anti-intellectualism paired with authoritarian and illiberal policies. The meagre explanation given to the measure was that Gender Studies did not seem to generate employability and were a danger for traditional family and moral values. Besides this being wrong in an objective sense, such reasoning shows a clear anti-intellectual and anti-academic stance. University degrees and curricula are seen as market-driven assets, not as knowledge- and research-related forms. Cf. from the many protest notes and media comments http://hungarianspectrum.org/2018/11/14/information-strike-at-elte-for-gender-studies/.

there are acceptable and established methods for doing so. The public waves of hate and personal attacks towards those whose research might question ideological common sense or specific political views have nothing to do with legitimate disagreement and debate. On the contrary, they subvert and undermine them, and multiple harms can follow, not only for the individual but also for the population more broadly.

Now, above we have argued that target selection criteria employed by cyberhaters are unlikely to be random, but tend to be provided by ideologies of wider social significance. An interesting hypothesis about why academics are attacked *as academics* is that anti-intellectualism as an ideology is on the rise again. Anti-intellectualism can be understood to be a general disregard or willingness to attack those "who seek to show the truth in its full complexity" (Stanley 2018b). Jason Stanley (2018a, 64 f.) looks at anti-intellectualism as essential to fascist politics which, as he reminds us, 'seeks to undermine public discourse by attacking and devaluing education, expertise, and language.'

Actually, anti-intellectualism is part of all sorts of illiberal, fundamentalist, or populist political dynamics. As Peters (2018) works out in a research overview, there are right- and left-wing anti-intellectual positions, there are those motivated by religion or, on the contrary, by dogmatic positivists, etc. Furthermore, the production of so-called 'alternative facts' is a growing problem because where alternative facts are taken seriously, earnest academics, with their efforts to identify the truth about complex issues, will be presented as naive, ignorant, or even ideologically biased.

> The particular character of anti-intellectualism in the era of post-truth politics is associated with 'strongman politics', anti-immigration sentiments, anti-globalization and local protectionism, anti-women, anti-environment and a kind of national populism that swings on emotion and belief rather than fact, reason or argument. (Peters 2018, 6)

Stanley (2018a, 85 ff.) cites various cases of state and non-state actors currently pursuing anti-intellectual agendas, from the influential American right-wing radio host Rush Limbaugh's frequent condemnations of academia and science to the Hungarian president Viktor Orbán's drastic measures against schools and universities in an attempt to redefine the purpose of education. During the writing of this paper, for example, the Orbán regime has abolished Gender Studies as an academic discipline in Hungarian universities.[9] The discipline has been criticised by government members as undermining 'the foundations

9 For the relation between anti-genderism, right-wing populism, and cyberhate see Hark/Villa (2015) for the German case, and Harsin (2018) for the French case.

of the Christian family' and not being relevant for the labour market (ZEIT Online 2018). Such acts of state repression come with an additional top-down pressure on ordinary citizens to follow. Cyberspace provides an easy outlet for those who endorse such views – for whatever reasons.

While it is important and timely to look at anti-intellectualism as an element of populist politics, we also believe that anti-intellectualism starts to emerge before it becomes part of such politics. Most importantly, the populist ideology can confine itself to cultivating disregard for the necessity of seeking to explore the complexities of facts and norms. Naika Foroutan (Dernbach 2018) has studied German political contexts that would think of themselves as liberal and clearly distance themselves from the far-right hate against intellectuals and academics. She describes anti-intellectualism as an anti-elitist attitude currently cultivated in social contexts that reaches clearly beyond far-right politics,[10] which includes disregard for intelligence and usage of academic language. While it may be used to convince people of how 'down to earth' they are, it actually serves to smother the kind of critical reflection needed to deliver societal progress. In general, all sorts of populisms and illiberal political articulations can adhere and promote anti-intellectual positions since the latter work especially well within antagonist political dynamics, that is, such operating in dualistic us/them, we/they, people/elite, common sense/counter-intuitive, reasonable/radical, etc.

In light of the Hungarian case regarding Gender Studies, but also beyond it, it seems sound to suggest that the anti-intellectualism coming with the academic capitalism is an additional force in rendering academics vulnerable to cyberhate. By way of powerful voices publicly moralizing about individuals' failure to care for their own, the latter are exposed as a potential target of social disdain, which, again, can be expressed through cyberhate with the lowest possible costs. Academics and intellectuals whose projects are hardly commodifiable and require public funding and support are therefore at greater risk of being targeted or silenced. Moreover, it is no surprise, therefore, that those academics working in the humanities or social sciences, areas often deemed 'useless' or a pure luxury, are vulnerable when they come to the defence of groups such as refugees.

10 In fact, the social scientist Naika Foroutan describes this anti-intellectual attitude in terms of a social tendency that she accuses the moderate-left German Social Democratic Party (SPD) to be too welcoming of (Dernbach 2018).

5. Harmful effects for the individual scholar

Besides possibly eroding, altering, and destroying the accepted norms of liberal democracies in defence of individuals' dignity and equal status, cyberhate can have a detrimental impact on the lives of individual scholars.[11] We focus on two dimensions regarding the impact of cyberhate on individual academics: first, how it affects their lives *as private persons*; and second, the way in which it undermines their lives *as scholars* pursuing academic projects.[12]

Consider how cyberhate can make its targets experience a wide range of negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, distress, isolation, self-alienation, and shame (see e.g., Campbell 2017). These effects are often immediate and emerge as a result of a bombardment of insults and threats of violence against themselves or people close to them (Williams/Pearson 2016). The initial reaction can alter and is likely to translate into long-term consequences. Targeted individuals may become progressively aware of their own vulnerability: they may not solely feel threatened in the acute moment when receiving attacks, but also start to identify themselves in a generalised and lasting way as targets of possible harm. This may shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and make them question and/or regret the choices and behaviours that exposed them to harm, such as sharing information, pictures of themselves, or work in progress online. They may feel that they themselves and not their aggressors bear responsibility for what is happening to their life. Such feelings of guilt and regret can compromise the victims' self-esteem, which may already be weakened by virtual insults endured, insults that have taken aim also on physical appearance, ethnic origin, religious beliefs, linguistic proficiency, etc. This may compromise someone's capacity to interact with others without fear and mistrust.

Beyond the private is the professional life, and cyberhate against academics threatens to undermine their reputation both in society and in academia. By collecting, distorting, and spreading information on their targets with the intent to undermine, ridicule, and embarrass them publicly, cyberhaters undermine academics' *social and professional standing* (Waldron 2012, 5). As Waldron empha-

11 Here, the idea that hate speech harms the individuals who perpetuate it is not explored. Cf. Matsuda et al. (1993, 92–93) who argue that 'bigotry harms the individuals who harbor it by reinforcing rigid thinking, thereby dulling their moral and social senses and possibly leading to a "mildly ... paranoid" mentality.'

12 Although this distinction might be helpful to understand the different types of harm cyberhate might cause to persons, it is not clear-cut, as academics indivisibly are private persons and professionals.

sises, cyberhaters 'besmirch' the basics of academics' reputation 'by associating ascriptive characteristics like ethnicity, or race, or religion with conduct or attributes that should disqualify someone from being treated as a member of society in good standing' (ibid., 5).

These harms are not limited to academics – they can affect other targeted individuals as well. Perhaps a more distinctive harm in relation to academic work is the way in which the attacks threaten the continuation of academic research as an endeavour connected with one's identity and giving meaning and purpose to one's life (cf. Betzler 2013, 112). By threatening them because of their research, cyberhate may have the effect of forcing academics to question their approaches, withdraw from public and private debates, and to stop researching, publishing, and commenting on topics that could expose them to further hate.[13]

Additionally, silencing can be a harm for academics when accompanied by victim blaming. When cyberhate stops academics from expressing themselves as scholars, some become exposed to unjustified (self) blame for 'having let themselves being silenced' or 'being weak', as if the targets of hate, as opposed to the haters, should be blamed.

6. Undermining academia

The previous sections have raised the general problem of silencing and the harmful effects of cyberhate on academics as individuals. The harms against academia and academic research that result from silencing require further exploration, as well. Ideally, science and academic research can be understood as being a collective pursuit for truth and knowledge through questions that directly or indirectly matter to human lives (Kitcher 2001). We recognise that this is the ideal and not always the reality, but this is precisely why we need to keep asking which practices support or damage the endeavour.

If certain views defended by scholars are systematically attacked by waves of cyberhate, the possibly resulting silencing of these views can lead to a significant epistemic distortion that must be considered problematic: As raised above in the mentioning of anti-intellectualism, cyberhate against academics can be an instance of 'bullying away' intellectual thinking and results of re-

13 In a study of 5050 participants in Norway researchers found that 7.2 per cent had received hate messages on social media (more immigrants than national citizens). A quarter of those who received hate speech also experienced the feeling of having been 'silenced', with women three times more likely than men to be silenced (Fladmoe/Nadim 2017).

search. It can create a hostile environment which dissuades further such academic research, but also undermines rational debate and methodological, systematic inquiry generally. Such damage goes well beyond the university as such.

In no way should our focus on academia here be misunderstood as diminishing the gravity of the harms or impact of silencing on other individuals and groups. Generally speaking, the social harms of silencing are the same whether an individual is an academic or not – the problems of a population which is too fearful to resist oppression or raise their voices in the name of humanity are clear. However, given the topic of this paper, we explore in somewhat more detail the specific nature of academics in relation to society.

Academics – especially those working on social issues – often play an important social and civic role.[14] Martin (1984, 19) calls their work 'social action', and it fundamentally involves informing social debates and policy making.[15] Downs and Manion (2004) go further in highlighting the manner in which much academic work serves as either social critic or social informer. Specifically, they explain that the kind of work in which some academics engage, what they label 'sites of activism', produces knowledge that 'informs progressive social change.'[16] This is one of the main arguments for the protection of academic freedom and tenure (Blessinger/de Wit 2018).

Researchers might act as social *critics*: They often do so since research is exactly a form of questioning common sense or political ideologies in a methodologically controlled manner. Thus, academics have the tools for informing policies or debates aimed at improving social conditions. When targeting

14 Obviously, the role academics should or should not play in modern, highly differentiated democratic societies is much disputed. While some may argue, that since doing research is invariably social practice and since such practices are invariably constituted by normative textures and frames impregnated by political dynamics such as inequality or dominance, others defend the genuinely modern differentiation between distinct subsystems such as economy, politics, research, arts, etc. In our view, there is no simple and unambiguous position on this issue. Rather, we consider both ethics and critical reflexivity crucial aspects of any academic activity. At the same time, we consider academic activities and political activism to be actually distinct. They may be related and mutually informed, but we do see a risk in collapsing both logics (cf. Couture 2017; Flood/Martin/Dreher 2013).

15 Such capacity derives from academics' being 'trained and experienced in [cutting] to the root of problems.' Further, academic freedom should enable 'unfettered creative thinking and bold experimentation towards the solution of social problems'. Finally, they are supposed to be 'self-reflective, and hence able to critically examine their own ideas and actions' (Martin 1984, 19).

16 Several valuable publications exist for those who seek to heighten the social impact of their work or are interested in how academic work can instigate change (cf. Collins 2013; Badgett 2015).

academics, cyberhate threatens the ability for teachers and researchers to carry out this intellectual endeavour.

The Professors Watchlist is a particularly striking example of a tool utilised for publically targeting academics. These kinds of sites support the normalisation of shaming, defaming, and persecuting certain scholars. In this particular case, it targets mostly academics who are critical of conservative thinking and, to quote their mission statement, 'advance leftist propaganda in the classroom' (Professor Watchlist 2018), but defamation against academics holding other views is, of course, equally problematic. George Yancy, whose powerful *New York Times* essay was a response to him being placed on the list, argues that such tools of oppression can 'have the impact of the philosopher Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon – a theoretical prison designed to create a form of self-censorship among those imprisoned.' In line with our description of silencing, this list and other similar methods can 'install forms of psychological self-policing to eliminate thoughts, pedagogical approaches and theoretical orientations that it defines as subversive' (Yancy 2016).

7. Responding to cyberhate against academics

The growing prevalence of cyberhate against academics is worrying. We want to end this chapter with a brief, more practical and constructive outlook about possible individual and institutional responses to cyberhate and ways of preventing it or limiting the damage it causes. We leave untackled the broader, moral and political question as to whether hate speech itself should be sanctioned by the state, or whether the state should also be able to sanction Internet companies – especially social media companies – if they do not effectively prevent hate speech on their platforms. By focusing on cyberhate against academics, we look at what those scholars could do in response whose primary institutional context is the university. There are, we believe, in fact various ways for scholars to prevent harmful effects of cyberhate.

In the event of an attack there are ways to support targeted colleagues or oneself. One of the most detailed overviews of advice is included in Eric Anthony Grollman's essay 'Scholars under Attack' (2015). Grollman distinguishes three levels: 1) Individual Level strategies: Here he gives detailed advice what to say and do if a colleague comes under attack, e. g., asking what kind of help is needed, instead of praising the person 'for doing something right' or telling the person 'to just turn off the computer and ignore it'. 2) Department and University Level strategies: Here it is emphasised to demand for university guidelines and standard procedures in case of an attack, for university funds for lawyers, and

also how and what to teach students in relation to using social media. 3) Discipline and Professional Level Strategies: This level covers, for instance, the role and potential of professional associations, the possibility to organise conferences on the use of social media or the link to political action. Further strategies, such as those outlined in the 'No Hate' movements, which are not primarily related to the scholarly context, can also be useful. For example, the No Hate Speech campaign which was initiated by the European Council,[17] now has many branches worldwide. It provides readers with knowledge about hate speech, shows ways to counter hate speech online, for example with gifs, memes, and messages, and it provides creative ideas on how to network, support dissemination of knowledge, raise awareness, and activate communities. Similar initiatives are increasing in number in response to cyberbullying and hate.[18]

All these strategies are based on an obvious, but often overseen first step: communicating the issue. In order to act, and when evaluating coping and response strategies, communication with others is crucial. Strategies need networks, even if only to assess the dimension and nature of the problems that are dealt with. For others to be supportive and for the organisation to be able to react, those others need to know that a colleague, a student, a co-researcher, etc., is under attack. But since, due to a variety of reasons, such as shame, naivety, trauma, academic pressure, many of those affected do not mention their experiences, strategies fail to even be addressed. As with sexual harassment, cyberhate – which, as we pointed out above often contains racial slurs, obscenity, violent threats, anti-Semitism, etc. – is frequently kept private and confined to the intimate, private sphere by those attacked. In light of this problem, and following all relevant studies so far, we encourage affected scholars to share their experiences with others in their field. This could be through social media, for example, in Facebook groups to be trusted, or in personal and direct contact. It might be in more formal settings, such as departmental meetings, or in a less formal way, such as lunch or coffee with colleagues. Second, we suggest that all academic institutions create sustainable protocols for allowing such sharing of experiences. Protocols should include safe and trustworthy paths of reporting, routines for the recording of such communications, the instalment and funding of trained and specialised experts, especially regarding legal matters.

For the prevention of harm, raising awareness of it as an issue might be crucial. Knowing that an attack can happen, and that individual attacks are part of

17 See https://no-hate-speech.de/en/.

18 Very detailed further advice can also be found here https://othersociologist.com/sociology-public-harassment-prevention-policies/.

a wider phenomenon, is extremely helpful, but this needs to be accompanied by the development of response strategies. Implementing protocols, organisational routines, and proven strategies increase the ability to react against cyberhate, and to stay in control. This, again, reduces helplessness, isolation, and vulnerability.[19] Such foresight and collegial solidarity may even result in some academics feeling more capable of speaking about and working on the kind of topics which triggered an attack. It may stimulate a sense of meaning, strength, and self-empowerment, and help to uphold the values of truth, facts, and knowledge, while advocating respectful, constructive, and non-discriminatory engagement.

Another, potentially very powerful way of counteracting cyberhate is to build peer groups within universities. This can help reduce trauma in acute situations of attack. The attacked person will know who to speak to in confidence and can receive immediate emotional support and relief. Such support groups can also work on developing infrastructures that can be activated on demand. This can be a list of confidants who answer social media, telephone, and e-mail for a while for the attacked person, a list of lawyers and therapists who can be contacted, and funding mechanisms to pay these professionals for their support. In building such support systems, the people involved will exchange ideas, experiences, and thoughts. Thus, peer groups can even create an increased sense of belonging and trust among individuals, possibly promoting structural change within universities and the wider society that may mitigate further attacks.

The university as an academic institution must also play a role because it has 'top-down' responsibilities when it comes to protecting staff from cyberhate. Earlier it was argued that the ideal function of research institutions was to inquire after truth, to explore and test accepted standards, and to push on our social intuitions. In order to fulfil this function, such institutions have to act in different ways. As employers, they must work to prevent the occurrence of cyberhate against academics and then offer appropriate and public support for those targeted by it. They need to see their role as having two functions: 1) to protect employees from individual harm, and 2) to preserve the institution of academic research as a whole and push against anti-intellectualism. In other words, the university has a vested interest to take a stand against cyberhate in order to maintain its own validity.

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19 If the minimal impact of this chapter is to make those working in this field aware of the possibility that their work might make them targets, this may prove to make a world of difference. It would then, in the very least, have helped prevent them from being caught off guard and allow for preemptive preparation on their part, and hopefully more open dialogue about the issue with their own institutions.

Another ground which motivates action on behalf of the university is related to the practicalities of being an academic in these digital times, where academic success is often measured in the publicity of academics.[20] Apart from the 'impact factor', which grades the size of the audience a publication reaches and the influence it has over them, it has also become increasingly necessary for academics to maintain public professional profiles. They are expected to be involved in interviews and give public talks which are often recorded for sharing on the internet. Sara Perry explains that

> higher education professionals increasingly work at the interface of the academic and the public worlds, invested in research impact, community engagement and public intellectualism; this means that our workspace is expanding. Digital technology makes our workspace more accessible and more immediate, creating a perfect environment for cybercreeps. (Perry 2014)

Given the growing pressure to have a public online presence,[21] and the fact that this greatly increases the likelihood of being targeted for cyberhate, the university is responsible for managing the fallout in the event of a cyberhate attack and protecting its researchers.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have begun to analyse the phenomenon of cyberhate and its harmful effects for society in general and for scholars and academic work more specifically. When studying a socially contested issue such as the integration of newcomers into society, there is a risk of becoming a target of cyberhate. The increasing phenomenon of such attacks calls for various responses. As part of a general social trend, addressing the origins of cyberhate more broadly would require measures beyond the scope of this paper. The individual, collective, and institutional strategies briefly noted in the previous section underscore our conviction that increased *awareness* and *knowledge* about the phenomenon of cyberhate, as well as the existence of some institutional and collective *support structures* in the context of academia can lessen significantly the negative impact of cyberhate on academics. The sad reality is that guarding against cyberhate is now part of the responsibility for academics.

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20 For interesting literature on the increasingly digitised nature of academia cf. Daniels/Thistlethwaite (2016), Stein/Daniels (2017), and Carrigan (2016).

21 Cf. Mitchell (2013) and Parr (2013).

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