

Nobody's Version of Dumb

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Editor's Note

This was originally posted to [Sherri Spelic's blog](#) on September 9, 2017.



Shoes by [Vincent Van Gogh](#) CC0

I spend a lot of time on Twitter. I follow more people than I can actually keep up with and miraculously a bunch more follow me and I apologize that I can't just follow right back. I'm overwhelmed. I lose threads and also get lost in reading. I miss a lot and what I catch can probably be attributed to Twitter's algorithmic sorting which keeps the folks I most interact with close to the top of the tweets I will see. It's an imperfect system. My interests and responses are being guided, steered, nudged to achieve the golden data outcome of 'maximum engagement.' As long as I keep clicking around on the platform and rewarding the algorithm that delivers those precious "In case you missed it" messages, I am holding up my end of the user-platform bargain. Twitter stays in business and I cultivate my little networked worlds almost as intricately as my 9 year-old's Minecraft

creations.

Then along comes a short thread like this:

no surprise. I find my twitter network to be homogenous. Tweet something that resonates, RTs happen. Tweet something out of scope. Crickets <https://t.co/SXl5NtSRcL>

— George Siemens (@gsiemens) [September 7, 2017](#)

Social media is a net negative. It has closed us off and created little safe spaces where we talk with people we agree with.

— George Siemens (@gsiemens) [September 7, 2017](#)

Sadly, bright and intelligent people are reduced to RTing pithy statements rather than thinking. Twitter makes smart people dumb.

— George Siemens (@gsiemens) [September 7, 2017](#)

There's more but that's the core.

I know this lamentation. It is familiar and well worn and different figures deploy it at different junctures. Of course, [@gsiemens](#) is not just anybody. He's a public intellectual, well recognized in the tech and higher ed circles I frequent. So I also hesitate to publicly push

back on this particular take. But, alas. I get tired of authority type voices telling me and others that Twitter is making us dumb.

Speak for yourself, I say. Rain on your own parade, not mine.

Look. Not everyone who comes to social media is looking for a fight. We have not arrived here to recreate Greek forms of debate. We are not showing up so that we can rattle our intellectual sabres. We are not turning up to punch each others' academic lights out, argument for carefully crafted argument.

I, for one, came because I was looking for others who could help me grow. I was in the market for good writing and good people and I found them. The longer I stayed and the more I engaged, good people *found me*. Good writing - I mean, strong, critical, robust and also sensitive writing walked right up to me and said, "Hi!" I got involved. I created adjoining spaces and fashioned [a new home](#) to welcome some of that rich writing. And I found art, humor, compassion, support, care, and (*praise hands*) Black Twitter. My life has been tremendously enlivened and broadened through my social media connections. I am a smart person who is more open, more aware, more vocal and more critical due to my connections via social media.

You will rarely find me putting up my verbal dukes on Twitter but I will support those who do it well. When authority type voices trot out these blanket statements about our shared intellectual demise, they offer a point of view that can be as narrow and constrained as those they accuse of the same offense. And often such voices enjoy the comfort and yes, privilege, of established recognition through institutions, publications, speaking invitations and considerable social media reach. These statements seem to come when these, usually male, individuals no longer feel "challenged" - when their membership in the social media 'Gifted and Talented' program is losing clout.

When I first ran across this thread, I wanted to ignore it. Give it the

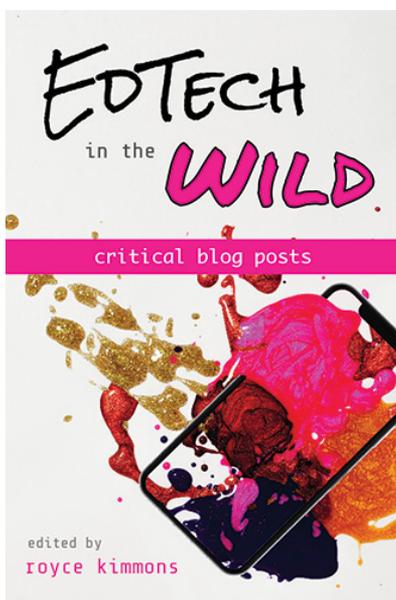
'ho, hum, somebody's bored' non-response. But the annoyance stayed with me because I felt in those few tweets that my experience and the experience of too many others were being denied. And thoughtlessly so.

Some of us are here for community; to gather and confer with the like minded. To remind each other that our presence matters. For someone with a particular kind of status, this aspect might easily be overlooked. Not for me. I come to Twitter to prove to myself again and again that I have a voice and know how to use it. In other circles, my voice, my presence runs the very real risk being inaudible, invisible. But for an authority voice type, this instance may not occur or even register.

Formulating this kind of push back takes energy. It takes energy away from some things I'd rather read and write about. And I don't wish to expend more energy delving into the right-left Twitter divide article which prompted these tweets. When George Siemens claims that his network is fairly homogeneous, that is something that he can fix if it's a priority. But to drag us all down into a space that he [in a later tweet](#) describes as "closed, intolerant, narrow minded, and short sighted" is decidedly unfair and unnecessary and I refuse to be placed there by proclamation from on high.

Maybe this is precisely how and why I persist on social media: Refusing to be placed somewhere by someone who is not me. I place and position myself. I speak my own mind. I pick my own battles. I am nobody's version of dumb.

Note: The image is from the [The Met collection of Public Domain images](#) which is well worth a visit.



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