

# CAMmer in the Spotlight

## Sun Sun Lim, PhD

Associate Professor and Assistant Dean (Research), Department of Communications and New Media,  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore  
Contact: [sunlim@nus.edu.sg](mailto:sunlim@nus.edu.sg) / [personal website](#)

### Getting to know... Sun Sun Lim

**What are you currently working on?** I am currently finalizing an edited volume that features work by emerging scholars on technology domestication by families in Asia. This volume showcases work on families across Asia, at different life stages, in rural and urban areas, of a diversity of family types and socio-economic profiles, investigating how such technologies are being incorporated into Asian families' daily routines for work, education, entertainment and household coordination, while being appropriated for communication and the nurturance of family bonds. There are chapters on Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam.

Together with my graduate student, I am studying the media use of migrant students and find that even as social media provide them a rich platform for adjusting to an alien environment by connecting to their left behind families and newfound friends, social media encourages the "virtual walled garden" phenomenon and creates cultural silos that impede their integration with their host country. I am also

extending my study of media use by at-risk youths to capture emerging opportunities and issues arising from youths' increasingly avid use of image-based social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram.

**What has been your most memorable project, and why?** It would have to be my study of media use by juvenile offenders and delinquents that explored how the unique circumstances of these youths' peer interactions amplified the risks of social media use. I also found that social media presented valuable opportunities for youth workers to understand and reach out to these young people. When I interviewed the youths during their incarceration, I was struck by how they were just like the typical teenager, but had the wisdom and resolve to move on from their adverse experiences. I knew I had to respectfully tell their story in a way that would benefit other youths. So besides publishing my work in academic journals, I distilled the key findings into The Social Media Resource Kit for At-Risk Youths that offers teachers, social

workers and counsellors a comprehensive guide for advising youths and their families on the benefits and risks of social media use. It contains fact sheets, conversation guides, activity sheets, reflection exercises, and PowerPoint slides, and has been distributed to



schools and youth sector organizations throughout Singapore. The key content of the kit has since been adapted into a competence quiz (in English, German and Spanish) for youth workers in Europe to assess whether they are ready to operate in a social media-infused youth landscape.

**Which achievement are you most proud of, and why?** It would be my efforts to work at both academic research and involvement in policy shaping and public education. I have not always found it easy to balance the two, and have had to calibrate and recalibrate the balance at different junctures of my academic life, while also learning how to operate in realms that are altogether very different from academia. But it has certainly been rewarding to be able to translate my work into initiatives that directly impact young people and families. I also had the opportunity to involve my students in these efforts and could imbue in them a sense of the relevance and value of academic research in a way I could not do in the classroom.

**What would be your work motto?** To make the most of every opportunity.

**Which of your publications is your favorite, and why?** The first would be my book chapter on media domestication by middle-class Chinese fami-

lies in Beijing and Shanghai. This publication marked the beginning of my research on media use by families and actively highlighted the influence of social and cultural factors on families' technology domestication including the predominance of one-child families, societal valorization of education and hierarchical communication within the family. I compared the Chinese context with the Korean one in a later publication, noting interesting parallels and contrasts. A more recent publication that I am fond of is my article in the Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media on the media use of juvenile offenders and at-risk youths where I noted the salience of giving, saving, and losing face in their social media interactions, underscored by issues of posturing, power aggrandizement, reputation management and gang loyalty.

**If you had unlimited resources, what kind of project would you want to do and why?** It would be a multi-country study that tracks the changeable nature and intensity of the mobile media environ-

ment that young people experience daily, collecting all of the multi-media messages that they send and receive via their myriad communication apps, and how these messages are lobbed back and forth both within and beyond their social networks. It should seek to capture how young people capture their experiences, represent themselves and how these are perceived and responded to by people in their social networks. As well, how these communications are interwoven with their offline interactions as they move through different physical environments and activities, both routine and unplanned. It would involve apps that can capture and store all of these communicative and corporeal actions, but also a team of ethnographers accompanying and observing them to understand young people's thought processes and motivations. Perhaps with such efforts, we can capture a glimpse of the lively and rambunctious mediated environment that young people inhabit today, the opportunities that are thrust upon them, the risks they must negotiate, their sense of identity, and the shaping of their world views.

**If you had to give one piece of advice to young CAM scholars, what would it be?** It would be to actively tap into one's extended professional networks, far beyond one's immediate community of media scholars because research on children covers such a rich and expansive multi-disciplinary terrain. Besides other academics, speaking to practitioners such as teachers, counsellors, and

child psychologists can also yield useful inputs for entering the field. I elaborate on this in a recent commentary I wrote in the Journal of Children and Media.

**Who would you like to put in the spotlight next, and why?** I would like to nominate Lynn Schofield Clark. Her work has been greatly inspiring to me, especially her latest book The Parent App. When I began my research on media use by families, I found her book Media, Home, and Family to be a wellspring of insights. I admire Lynn's ability to combine her perspectives as scholar, advocate and parent into one consistent and lucid voice, and I think she would have much to share with fellow CAMmers.