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# Digital intrusions: technology, spatiality and violence against women

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Technologies have transformed self-expression, interactions and relationships. Temporal and geographic boundaries have been tested and overcome by instantaneous and borderless contact, communication and monitoring. Unfortunately, this has provided new channels and opportunities to extend and exacerbate gendered violence and other forms of hate. We contend that the unique features of digital harms warrant attention, but ultimately online harms cannot be divorced from those which occur offline. Drawing on what [Kelly \(1987; 1988; 2012\)](#) conceptualised as a 'continuum of violence' (and what [Stanko, 1985](#), refers to as climates of 'unsafety'), digital violence is, we suggest, part of the spectrum of harm to which women are exposed throughout their life-worlds. The industries that create technologies do not exist in a vacuum, and we explore how the workforce, design and management of platforms not only reflects but reinforces 'offline' inequalities and facilitates violence. There are challenges in harnessing technology but, in closing, we explore ways that women can claim and create digital spaces to resist violence and seek 'justice'.

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Technologies have, over centuries, wrought changes in the speed and forms of our self-expression, interactions and relationships. More recently social and geographic boundaries have been permeated and tested by digital media and devices. While machines exist in the 'real' world their applications are 'spaceless'; not bound to fixed locations and infiltrating many spaces of our lives. Information communication technologies bring temporal shifts too. Communications can be sent and received instantly. Movements and activities can be constantly and remotely projected, monitored and recorded. There is great potential in technologies, affording connection and contact as well as civic, professional and community engagement. Yet, conversely, these mechanisms have exacerbated gendered violence, providing opportunities for harassment, intrusion and surveillance.

In this article, we first consider an intersectional frame of digital violence. Drawing on what Kelly (1987; 1988; 2012) conceptualised as a ‘continuum of violence’ (and what Stanko, 1985 refers to as climates of ‘unsafety’), digital violence is, we suggest, part of the spectrum of harm to which women are exposed throughout their life-worlds and can intersect with other forms of discrimination and hate. These harms are by no means static. New products and platforms emerge as do new practices and patterns of perpetration. However, we contend that spaceless violence cannot be divorced from that which occurs in ‘real world’ spaces. Online inequalities reflect and reinforce offline inequalities and are built into the design, architecture and governance of various technologies. We then discuss how these conditions of ‘spacelessness’ shape the execution of digital violence by actors who are unknown, may be known and, known, across both public and private channels. While we examine digital spaces as sites of danger, we also recognise that they offer avenues to respond to gender-based violence. As such, we close by discussing the forms, potentials and problems of digital sites of resistance and justice.

## Intersectional framing of digital violence

The terms we select to describe violence highlight the method (digital/technological) used to perform harm. We emphasise that this is gendered violence and men, when targeting women, seek to uphold and enforce male domination and gender inequality. Some behaviours may be viewed as typical and normalised, others problematised or criminalised, but all have the potential to have an impact on women’s wellbeing, sense of safety, rights and freedoms. There can be intersection with other forms of discrimination and hate, where a person’s gender identity, sexuality, religious identity, ethnicity or disability (for example) is also targeted. The United Nations reports that such violence is ‘increasingly common’ (Šimonović, 2018: 4) and, as other civil societies and scholars have noted, this is a gendered phenomenon (Citron, 2009; Segrave and Vitis, 2017). Women are disproportionately victimised, their sex and gender are targeted in attacks, and men are overrepresented as perpetrators (Mantilla, 2015). Digital media and devices have unique features yet ‘real world’ behaviours are not divorced from digital behaviours (Reed, 2018; Vickery and Everbach, 2018). Harms (whether enacted ‘online’ or ‘offline’) both reflect and reinforce sexism and gender inequality in communities (Easter, 2018). Thus, while there are individual experiences of digital violence, rather than representing ‘a problem a particular man has with a particular woman’ (Jane, 2014: 566), these are actions evoked by men, collectively, when ‘deprived of patriarchal privileges they feel they deserve, or feel their cultural superiority is under threat’ (Hayes and Dragiewicz, 2018: 115). In this vein, Ging (2019: 638) argues that, by design, digital media are ‘especially well suited to the amplification of new articulations of aggrieved manhood’. Given the ideologies and mechanisms which underscore digital violence there are commonalities and similarities in women’s accounts. However, gender relations are dynamic cultural processes and so these are by no means static and unchanging. Women’s conditions and uptake of technologies are neither uniform nor universal (Gurumurthy, 2004).

To understand the interrelationship of discrimination and different self or assumed identities (such as class, sex, gender diversity, ethnicity, sexuality and disability) an ‘intersectional’ approach is key in studies of digital violence (Crenshaw, 1989; see also Gurumurthy, 2004; Harris, 2020; Harmer and Lumsden, 2019; Kelly, 2012). Thus far,

the accounts of 'specific women', namely 'white, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gender, able-bodied' women have been foregrounded in the literature (Hackworth, 2018: 58, 63; see also Farrell et al, 2019; Fox and Tang, 2017; Ionescu, 2012). Harmer and Lumsden (2019: 2) propose the intersectional concept of 'online othering' be used, to encapsulate 'the myriad power contestations and abusive behaviours' exhibited through technology and 'the rules and norms concerning which individuals are endowed with status and legitimate to participate in these spaces, and those which are not'. Existing scholarship indicates that marginalised women are attacked on multiple elements of their actual or perceived traits and 'difference'. Bisexual, lesbian and transgender women have reported threats of sexualised violence. These communications are presented as 'corrective' to perceived transgression from traditional gender roles and heteronormative sexuality (Jane, 2014). Black women, Indigenous women, and women of colour have received abuse and harassment which is both racialised and sexualised (Gray, 2012; Madden et al, 2018). Those who practice a religion (especially religions other than Christianity) may find their faith is attacked, alongside their sex or gender (Awan and Zempi, 2015). Women with cognitive, intellectual or physical disabilities or mental illnesses have spoken of being sent aggressive messages where their bodies, perceived capabilities and femininity is critiqued (Hackworth, 2018).

### Framing digital violence

In their pioneering works on violence against women Kelly (1987; 1988, writing on a 'continuum of violence') and Stanko (1985; 1990, on 'intimate intrusions') have emphasised that violence is not confined to one phase or domain. In essence, they suggest that women are exposed to violence throughout the course of their private, professional and public life by men who seek to reinforce their power and status (Kelly, 1987; 1988; Stanko, 1985; 1990). Harm is enacted in various zones and, as we discuss in this article, in digital spaces. Technology may be used for different roles and purposes, such as education, employment, leisure and socialising and these fields are not easily separated. Social media and other information communication technologies have contributed to a 'flattening of multiple audiences into a single context' (Brandtzaeg and Lüders 2018: 1). This 'context collapse' brings multiple social groups into one space, complicating dynamics and notions of privacy (boyd, 2008; boyd, 2011; Davis and Jurgenson, 2014; Harris, 2020). By design, platforms enable data sharing and their privacy settings make it difficult to manage and restrict information sharing (Marwick and boyd, 2014). Additionally, the speed and ease with which digital violence (such as threats, harassment, image-based sexual abuse) can be located, shared and broadcast, seemingly with permanence, weakens the already tenuous private/public divide (Lucero et al, 2014; Vickery and Everbach, 2018). Compounding the issue, the spacelessness of technology ensures that women can be exposed to violence anywhere and any time they use digital media or a device (Harris, 2016). Channels accessed by perpetrators could be public, private or professional. Women have, for instance, reported being abused through online career profiles.

Stanko (1985: 1,9) suggests that 'intimate intrusions' are not exceptional or uncommon and disruptions 'take on an illusion of normality, ordinariness'. Kelly (1988: 76) likewise maintains that discrete phases of 'violence' and 'non-violence' are not easily located; rather, there is 'a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and which cannot be easily distinguished'. More recently,

researchers have applied such frameworks to their studies on technology-facilitated violence (see [Gillett, 2019](#); [Henry and Powell, 2015](#); [Lewis et al, 2017](#); [McGlynn et al, 2017](#); [Vera-Gray, 2017](#)). These applications are useful because it is not unusual for those women seek assistance from (platforms, tech companies and justice agents) to view online violence as separate from or 'less serious' than offline violence ([Citron, 2009](#); [Harris, 2020](#)). [Kelly \(1988\)](#) objects to such hierarchies of violence which limit acknowledgement, understanding of and responses to these behaviours. The models proposed by [Kelly \(1987; 1988\)](#) and [Stanko \(1985; 1990\)](#) provide a means for us to focus not only on acts which are seen as 'aberrant' and highly visible (and perhaps criminalised), but those which are common, frequent, minimised and perhaps tolerated. This is important because while some behaviours are socially and or legally problematised and regulated, all have clear impacts on women's wellbeing, ability to exercise rights, self-expression and their sense of security.

## The architecture of intrusion

Framing technology-facilitated violence as an intimate intrusion or existing on a continuum of violence means understanding that these harms are underscored by sex and gender inequalities. Thus, the cause, intent and effect of online harms mirror offline harms. However, there are unique temporal and geographic features of digital violence which warrant attention. Information communication technology enables instantaneous contact, shifting temporal boundaries ([Harris and Woodlock, 2019](#)). Some scholars and civil societies have wondered if the absence of face-to-face contact, anonymity or pseudo-anonymity and the ease and immediacy of messaging might reduce a sender's sense of empathy and amplify aggression, such as misogyny and racism ([Amnesty International, 2018](#); [Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016](#); [Gray, 2012](#)). Physical distance, then, might contribute to perpetration; certainly, it can erode distance and provide new opportunities for perpetration. Technologies are borderless – not bound to any particular location – and thus women can be exposed to violence anywhere these channels exist or are accessed ([Harris, 2016; 2018](#)). The surveillance and monitoring afforded by and the functions of various apps can make potential targets visible. Additionally, clandestine programs and identify-shielding capabilities may hide perpetrators ([Harris, 2020](#)). These elements and the adoption of technology in all areas of our lives can make digital violence feel inescapable ([Mason and Magnate, 2012](#)).

Spaceless violence does not exist in a vacuum; it is a product of industries that white men have long dominated and been a source of their power ([Cockburn, 1985](#); [Hacker, 1989](#); [Harris, 2020](#); [Wajcman, 2004](#)). The manufacture and management of technology is absolutely male dominated and masculinised. There have been some jobs (such as computer programming) which were, in the earliest days, seen as 'women's work'. Yet as these fields grew, they were heavily populated by men ([Abbate, 2012](#)). Indeed, the internet evolved from the military and academic fields, which have long been male led, producing what has been referred to as a 'gendered net' ([Carstensen, 2009](#); [Chang, 2018](#)). Throughout the tech realm, male control of development and design persists ([Wajcman, 1991](#)). Women continue to mainly occupy low-level roles (such as in call centres and retail positions), whereas higher-level (decision-making) positions are occupied by men. In part, these differences can be explained by smaller numbers of female as compared to male (hardware and software) engineers and programmers,

but gendered norms, inequalities and prejudice also fuel this divide (Marwick, 2013). Senior roles are generally filled by white, English-speaking, middle-class men (Gurumurthy, 2004). At the largest and most influential companies, workplace heterogeneity is minimal. Women represent around 30 per cent of the workforce and non-Anglo, culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous women constitute less than 1 to 2 per cent of all employees (Facebook, 2019; Ionescu, 2012).

Many digital environments have been characterised as hostile to women (Herring, 2004). This is unsurprising, as men benefit from and so endeavour to maintain their control of technology (Herring, 1999). Cockburn and Ormrod (1993: 15) contend that the 'gender-technology relation' is, in essence, a 'production and reproduction of a hierarchy between women and men, the masculine and the feminine'. Creators of technologies (primarily white men) create products for themselves and to protect their interests (Marwick, 2013). Chang (2018) calls key players at telecommunications agencies and platform giants a 'brotopia': a culture that contributes to the functions and values built into technologies. Inequalities and systematic biases are embedded into the internet, information communication technologies, databases and search engines (Jemielniak, 2016; Suzor et al, 2019). Thus, even where women are higher users of technologies (like some social media platforms), scholars argue that they are less able to influence use and regulation of harms enacted in these zones (Megarry, 2014). The '[g]ender-incongruent', masculinised 'competitive and aggressive behaviour' norms restrict women's engagement (Bear and Collier, 2016: 255). In fact, algorithms, architecture, administration and cultures of digital media can not only facilitate but foster violence (see Massanari, 2015, on reddit). In order to understand the ways in which gender is embedded within online spaces, Bivens (2015: 717) suggests that feminist media scholars pay more attention to the ways in which 'normalizing logics' embedded within platforms and software shape the digital media landscape (see also Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández, 2016) and create spaces where gendered violence and harassment are not simply tolerated but amplified and celebrated.

These materialities are central to entrenching hierarchies and are further scaffolded by discursive patterns which flow from misogynistic networked collectives and suffuse online culture (Moloney and Love, 2018). This is particularly evident in the rise of the 'manosphere', a selection of male dominated interest groups<sup>[1]</sup> unified by anti-feminist sentiments. Gendered invective has been observed since the advent of the internet but the rise of this 'franken-movement' (Jane, 2018: 665) has been contiguous to the normalisation of aggrieved entitlement and violent misogyny online (Ging, 2019; Jane, 2018). Sexist and racist humour proliferates in such homosocial spaces as a lingua franca (Moloney and Love, 2018; Topinka, 2018; Massanari, 2015). Jane (2018) argues that in this context, 'Rapeglish' or misogynistic speech acts directed at women and shared between men, online, have become commonplace. These actions are fundamentally communicative as they act as resources for policing the boundaries of acceptable masculinity (Moloney and Love, 2018) and visibilising attacks on women's participation in online spaces (Ging, 2019: 653). Moreover, they show how networks of male peers are instructive and supportive resources in sustaining digital harassment and violence, for instance in the creation and sharing of image-based sexual abuse (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2016; Henry and Flynn, 2019).

## Spaceless violence

It is within this confluence of material, cultural, structural and industrial factors that women are exposed to an array of violent behaviours when using technology. Identifying these can aid in recognition and the development of responses to harm. However, the danger is that, when naming and categorising practices, some are foregrounded while others are overlooked. Additionally, technologies and also patterns of perpetration will evolve, and so attempts to define and problematise digital violence can become dated (Harris, 2020). Here, we offer a way to view online intrusions which is not intended to be complete or unchanging. We emphasise that there are other forms of violence (for instance technology-facilitated trafficking) which are not discussed here. Overwhelmingly, studies have focused on specific types of harm (for instance image-based sexual abuse) or specific offenders (such as intimate partners). We propose instead considering a raft of actors who might perform these acts (unknown persons, those who ‘may’ be known and, known persons, see also Harris, 2020). We also acknowledge that networks of perpetrators (whether organised or unorganised, online or offline) can work in concert (see Harris, 2018). The ‘congenious qualities’ of aggression and threats can seemingly morph voices into what appears to be a unified collective (Jane, 2014: 566), a faceless, powerful army (Fascendini and Fialová, 2011; Megarry, 2014). As the review discussed later in the article indicates, digital violence is not confined to one area of a woman’s life, but infiltrates the public, private and professional spheres, and can carry over to or extend offline violence.

### *Unknown persons and those who ‘may’ be known*

There are a variety of harms that can be enacted by unknown persons, such as threats of sexual, physical and fatal violence and doxing (the release of personal and identifying information) or threats to dox (Aghil et al, 2013). Jane (2014: 558) claims that, predominately, digital violence enacted by unknown persons takes the form of ‘ebile’, ‘venom and vulgarity’ with ‘expletives, profanity and explicit images of sexual violence’. Whereas it is men’s ideas or behaviours that are targeted, it is the very presence of women online which is seen as problematic and, their sex, sexuality and gender is attacked through ‘ebile’ (Citron, 2009; Fox and Tang, 2017; Megarry, 2014). Sexualised aggression, such as ordering women to strip ‘[show] Tits or GTFO [Get the Fuck Out]’ of digital sites, (like web forum, 4chan), show men’s sense of entitlement to women’s bodies which is utilised and fostered online (Marwick, 2013). As Herring et al (1995: 68) explain, men have other strategies to silence and exclude women: dismissing or trivialising their contributions; ‘intellectualizing the discussion away from its original focus’; erupting ‘into anger and accusations’; or co-opting discourse.

Women are also sexualised and victimised through audio and visual channels. Acts of digital voyeurism (‘upskirting’ and ‘downblousing’; surreptitiously viewing, photographing or filming up woman’s skirt or pants or down her shirt, McGlynn et al, 2017), ‘cyber-flashing’ (like the distribution of unsolicited ‘dick pics’, Hayes and Dragiewicz, 2018) are usually (though not exclusively) performed by unknown persons and generally, those captured will never know of the violation. Image-based sexual abuse (the unauthorised creation, distribution/threats to distribute or theft of intimate images, whether real or digitally manipulated) and sexual extortion, may be performed by persons known or unknown to an individual (Powell and Henry,

2017). As well as individualised attacks and forums where men ‘partner swap’ images, there have been campaigns to acquire and exchange images of famous women (such as what has been referred to ‘The Fapping’ in 2015; [Massanari, 2015](#)).

The distinction between known and unknown perpetrators of digital violence and their roles in our lives is not necessarily easy to discern. Technology facilitates a context collapse and merging of associates in the public, private and professional spheres ([boyd, 2008](#)). Accounts of women being contacted and solicited via professional network sites and apps (such as ‘LinkedIn’) abound, although, to date, this issue has not been investigated by academics. Intrusions are not confined to professional sites – other online profiles may be targeted – and in fact attacks are not confined to the online world. Stalkers can use a woman’s name, image and workplace information on an online site to aid ‘real world’ stalking (see also [Fraser et al, 2010](#)). Dating apps too, provide opportunities to enact violence both through technology and ‘in real life’. Platforms generally show users candidates in their geographic area (and information about place) and, as [Gillett’s \(2019\)](#) thesis on Tinder documented, GPS in the app assists in-person stalking. Violence enacted through sites and apps is more likely to be experienced by women than men and is littered with references to and attacks on a person’s appearance, body and sexuality ([Gillett, 2019](#); [Smith and Duggan, 2013](#)).

Developers and managers of information communication technologies often assume that, by design and artificial intelligence, an individual’s network can be neutrally or positively expanded ([Bivens, 2015](#); [Harris, 2020](#)). This assumption is premised on their (male, usually white, cisgender) experiences of digital spaces. However, this is often not women’s experience. And women who are discriminated against and further marginalised online – black women, Indigenous women, women of colour, women with diverse gender or sexual identities, women with a disability – are even less likely to find solace in the extension of mainstream digital zones ([Awan and Zempi, 2015](#); [Gray, 2012](#); [Hackworth, 2018](#); [Madden et al, 2018](#)). Facebook’s suggestions of ‘people you may know’, Twitter’s ‘who to follow’ list and Instagram’s ‘suggested for you’ users, based on mutual ‘friends’, are not necessarily ‘friendly’ contacts. This is certainly true when platforms suggest perpetrators of violence (or abuser allies) to a victim/survivor because of shared social networks. In proposing that someone *may be known* there is the assumption that they are *not already known* persons, offline and, platforms discount that the user may not want to connect with the nominated profile. It has been well established that sexual violence is largely enacted by persons who *are known* (an acquaintance, friend, current or former intimate partner) yet [Bivens \(2015\)](#) reports that platforms have, albeit unintentionally, proposed matching victim/survivors of sexual violence to perpetrators. These same functions also have tried to connect domestic violence victim/survivors to persons in an abuser’s networks, some of whom have previously participated in offline or online attacks ([Harris and Woodlock, forthcoming](#)).

### *Perpetration by known persons*

Overwhelmingly, the literature on known perpetrators of digital violence explores online violence (intrusion, harassment, aggression, abuse and stalking) in dating relationships in teenage (school) or university/college cohorts (see, for instance, [Lucero et al, 2014](#); [Wolford-Clevenger et al, 2016](#)). Some scholars have reported intersections with offline violence ([Barter et al, 2017](#); [Marganski and Melander, 2018](#)). However, not all studies are restricted to intimate partners; friends and



acquaintances may be included (Bennett et al, 2011) and, by extension, other behaviours, such as cyberbullying (Cutbush and Williams, 2016). Additionally, in the literature more broadly, some measurement scales may include ‘false positives’ for violence and, the distinction between situational couple violence and the patterns and dynamics of coercive and control in abusive relationships is often overlooked (Harris and Woodlock, forthcoming; Dragiewicz et al, 2009). Across the field there have been some mixed results and debate about the sex symmetry or asymmetry of such harms. We contend that there are sex differences in regard to rates and types of perpetration and the impact and effects of victimisation (Harris and Woodlock 2019; Dragiewicz et al, 2018).

Shifting focus to technology in the context of domestic and family violence (see also Dimond et al, 2011), we note that it has become another tool for intimate partners to enact other forms of abuse (such as economic or sexual abuse) and to enable in-person stalking. Smartphones, tablets, computers, GPS trackers, spyware, the IoT (the Internet of Things) and information communication technologies may also be used to harass, defame or send threatening communications; monitor actions, movements or communications; dox; engage in identity theft or deception. Abusers can impair an authorised technological function, activate an unauthorised function or access a victim/survivor’s ‘real world’ or digital property through stealth, coercion or force (Dragiewicz et al, 2019; Harris and Woodlock, forthcoming).

Some of the behaviours that evoke fear for a victim/survivor may be innocuous outside of an abuse relationship. Frequently texting a partner or texting at certain times, for instance, can be harmless or harmful, depending on the history of the relationship and meaning of the behaviour (for both parties). Children might be asked to turn on a video phone function to provide connection to a parent, but this can have worrying implications where family members have relocated for their protection (Dragiewicz et al, 2019; Harris and Woodlock, forthcoming). It is not uncommon for violence to continue (and escalate), post-separation, yet technology further weakens the notion that violence can be easily ‘escaped’ (Mason and Magnate 2012). In controlling and restricting access to technologies, abusers can extend a victim/survivor’s geographic and social isolation and access to resources needed to exit a relationship (Harris and Woodlock 2019).

## **New spaces of justice and resistance**

The place and genesis of resistance has been a key question in feminist theorising on the relationship between men’s power and men’s violence. Kelly (1988: 23) suggests that men’s violence is architected on power yet can proliferate in sites of women’s resistance. Additionally, she maintains that men’s violence in women’s lives can mobilise individual and collective resistance. While justice-seeking is never solely located within the ambit of the state, late modern digital spaces have increasingly visibilised attempts to seek justice and resist violence which involve several forms of context collapse (boyd, 2008; boyd, 2011). Specifically, these entail bringing private experiences into the public sphere and – at the same time – increasing control (to a degree) over modes and patterns of individual and collective mediated justice-seeking. While such attempts have been well documented, the potential for these spaces to produce transformative outcomes has been a site of contention.

## Seeking justice

Women and girls have increasingly harnessed the techno-social affordances of networked publics to visibilise the cultural, political and social conditions which underscore violence against women, by engaging in justice-seeking practices such as naming and shaming, hashtag activism and memorialisation (Fileborn, 2014; Vitis and Gilmore 2017; Mendes et al, 2018). In the following section, we question how the qualities of these digital spaces both enable and constrain patterns of justice-seeking. It is important to emphasise these practices are a culmination of historical patterns of feminist activism (Serisier, 2018). Since the second wave feminist movement, the wider ‘canon’ of rape testimony has made ‘speaking’ out about sexual violence in mediated publics a ‘widely accepted and even ‘common sense’ response’ (pp 13–14). Clarke (2016) argues that hashtag feminism continues patterns of discursive political action in feminist activism (which Serisier, 2018 refers to as ‘narrative politics’). Therefore, while we explore the techno-social scaffolding of online justice-seeking, we recognise that they rely on historical conditions of possibility which have integrated testimony and activism. Additionally, while avenues for digital justice are of great import, to assert that these practices simply emerge from within the online sphere is to ignore the institutional failures which necessitate their usage (Fileborn, 2014; Jane, 2017; Salter, 2013; Vitis and Gilmore, 2017).

## Naming and shaming

Digilantism and efforts to punish or hold perpetrators of digital violence to account are prominent forms of justice-seeking within digital spaces (particularly on networked platforms like Twitter and Instagram, see Jane, 2017). Such practices involve, for example, using technology to: expose the names and deeds of perpetrators of rape and sexual assault (Salter, 2013; Vitis and Naegler, 2019), recording and broadcasting men’s entitlement to real world spaces (Jane, 2017), showcasing men’s harassment in private communications (Vitis and Gilmore, 2017; Gillett, 2019), and using hashtags to shame and criticise rape myths and victim-blaming prevention responses (Rentschler, 2015). Here, women and girls draw upon the polymediated features of networked spaces to move beyond testifying about violence and harassment, and towards visibilising it. When publicising online abuse on dating apps (Vitis and Gilmore, 2017) or recording and sharing ‘offline’ abuse via platforms in real time (Fileborn, 2014), they harness these channels to make the everyday violence which shapes women’s life-worlds – yet has been historically denied and trivialised – visible to peers and public (Vitis and Gilmore, 2017; Thrift, 2014).

Feminist actors demonstrate a sensitivity to and awareness of the cultural affordances of online spaces; drawing on discursive patterns to expose misogyny. By using memes, visual humour and satire in naming and shaming men’s violence, women and girls take ‘feminist delight in exposing misogyny’ (Rentschler, 2015: 354). In so doing, they harness the social rewards for humour and wit to their advantage (Jane, 2017), potentially gaining allies as they reclaim and repurpose men’s actions. Moreover, digital spaces enable women and girls to produce counter-publics where their interventions into violence and its scaffoldings can be circulated and received by supportive communities in ways that collectivise feminist responses to violence and harassment (Salter, 2013). However, because they are reliant upon community

support to visibilise and circulate these messages, recognition can be challenging. This is especially true for those seeking justice who fall outside the boundaries of 'ideal' victimhood (Rentschler, 2015; Salter, 2013).

## Hashtag activism

Narrative politics has proliferated through hashtag activism, where community members share their personal testimony of violence and harassment within popular social media hashtags. While #MeToo has become emblematic of this (Serisier, 2018), hashtag activism has been a longstanding strategy in allowing users to politicise their experiences and intervene in myths surrounding violence (Clark, 2016). These practices often centre on their ability to collate shared experiences of violence and build networked responses to violence (Mendes et al, 2018). Hashtags are also sites where communities can come to humanise and grieve those targeted and de-humanised by violence. They allow users to participate in an 'outpouring of grief' for victims and provide sites for shared emotion (Powell et al, 2018).

While some contend that hashtag activism constitutes lazy and ineffective advocacy, contributors reflect deeply on participation and use these sites to foster networks of solidarity (Mendes et al, 2018). Thus, they can produce new resources and frames for understanding and responding to violence against women outside online spaces (Clark, 2016: 14). Yet by harnessing networked publics for the purposes of feminist activism, women and girls place themselves in vulnerable positions (Vera-Gray, 2017; Vickery and Everbach, 2018). Such activism requires 'carefully produced testimonials' and so, emotional, personal and political investment and risk (Mendes et al, 2018: 2237). Despite reports of feminist activists encountering negativity, hostility and trolling, hashtag activism has been described as beneficial and positive in generating alliances, connection, support and solidarity, for women more broadly and those who may experience 'online othering' (Harmer and Lumsden, 2019; Lawson, 2018; Mendes et al, 2018). This exemplifies Serisier's (2018: 11) argument that survivors who speak out have historically been placed in an 'ambivalent position' between empowerment and danger.

## Space and strategy

While techno-social affordances have been used as resources to shape and grow resistance and justice-seeking, there are open questions as to whether this constitutes transformative, productive or ethical practice. Certainly, speaking out against violence results in women being targeted for further harassment by a network of anti-feminist actors. Moreover, Jane (2016; 2017) criticises the wider celebration of digitalism as the 'best' feminist response. She questions how it may individualise misogyny, encourage scapegoating and downplay forms of collective action which are required to properly address violence as a structural problem. Therefore, while naming and shaming can provide online communities with entertainment and 'feminist delight' (Rentschler, 2015: 354), punitive and collective attacks have also been described as incoherent with a broader feminist ethics and as potentially antagonistic and counter-productive (Jane, 2016; 2017). This raises questions about how the discursive and cultural architecture of space comes to define the parameters, practice and meaning of justice. Digital realms are not simply providing an avenue through which actors can re-imagine justice.

Caution is also needed because patterns of online justice-seeking have reproduced the exclusions embedded within the wider feminist movement. This was evidenced in #MeToo which was both celebrated as a historical moment of consciousness raising and problematised as continuing the feminist movement's prioritisation of cis-gender, white middle-class women and exclusion of black women, Indigenous women and women of colour (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019). Ryan (2019: 118) highlights how #MeToo centred on limited terms which prioritised white women's experiences and continued the exclusions of Aboriginal women's perspectives and voices, showcasing 'multiple layers of power and oppression'. Exclusion in these contemporary forms of narrative politics persists. Thus it is imperative that we are alert to the tendency to celebrate how networked spaces *can* facilitate justice-seeking without considering how or whether they *do* (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 2019: 13).

## Conclusion

Technology-facilitated violence does not occur in a vacuum, rather, technology extends and exacerbates the 'continuum of violence' (Kelly, 1987; 1988) and 'intimate intrusions' (Stanko, 1985) which women experience throughout their lives, online and offline. Digital harms occur in all domains (private, public, professional) and are enacted by unknown persons, persons who may be known, and intimate partners. Sex and gender inequalities underscore this violence and the design, use and management (or lack thereof) of technologies. As such, these are industries of intrusion, which both foster and facilitate violence and also exacerbate discrimination and marginalisation of 'other' groups. Technologies can create spaces of violence but also spaces to resist violence. Resistive practices demonstrate how (some) victims/survivors and feminist actors are able to use contemporary spaces to enliven the core beliefs of anti-violence politics that centre the transformative political potential of sharing testimony. While these strategies have been received optimistically, an intersectional analysis is necessary.

We must be alert to how online spaces can reproduce conceptualisations of justice which favour narrow understandings of violence and oppression. Moreover, as increasing connections are made between mediated testimony and 'justice', feminist scholars need to question whose justice needs are being served via these mechanisms and whether they offer opportunities for transformative change or simply absorb community dissatisfaction while sustaining 'feminist delight' (Rentschler, 2015: 354; Vitis and Naegler, 2019). There are other questions and issues that require further investigation. Technologies have been used by advocates (with limited resources) to transcend geographic and social boundaries (Harris et al, forthcoming). States too, are exploring how technology might be used to better engage with victims/survivors and, to regulate violence against women (Harris, 2018). These initiatives are not without challenges, but we are hopeful that activists, advocates and academics can advance our understanding and claiming of technologies for resistance, 'justice' and empowerment.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ging (2019) identifies the following interest groups as central within the ‘manosphere’: MRAs, men going their own way (MGTOW), pick up artists (PUAs), Traditional Christian Conservatives and gamer/geek culture.
- <sup>2</sup> The targeted release of private images of white, heterosexual celebrities stolen images from password protected accounts and personal devices under the tag ‘The Fappening’.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests

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