"I Bet You Don't Get What We Get": An Intersectional Analysis of Technology-Facilitated Violence Experienced by Racialized Women Anti- Violence Online Activists in Canada

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Abstract

Despite growing attention to violence that women face in online settings, a relatively small proportion of academic work centres on the experiences and perspectives of racialized women in Canada. Informed by an intersectional framework, I draw on semi-structured interviews with nine women across Canada, all of whom are involved in anti-violence online activism, about their experiences of technology-facilitated violence (TFV). Their experiences revealed less prominent narratives, including instances of TFV beyond instances of intimate partner violence (IPV) and beyond sources of anonymous trolling by supposed white men, such as violence perpetrated by peers, white women, and racialized men. In this article, I also include reflections by the interviewees on violence they unexpectedly perpetrated through their online content. These perspectives demonstrate how varied and complex experiences of TFV are beyond instances of IPV and sexual violence. I conclude that when we leave out intersectionality as an approach that centres marginalized groups and broadens our understanding of violence, we are missing out on these more complex experiences of TFV that women face. Thus, I suggest that, to best tackle TFV, policy recommendations and legal remedies need to consider TFV through an intersectional lens.

1. INTRODUCTION

Technology-facilitated violence (TFV) is a global phenomenon that has sparked a plethora of research into the experiences of women[1] facing such violence. However, despite all this research emerging about TFV, little of it focuses specifically on the experience of racialized women, with some exceptions.[2] To fill this gap, in this article, I examine how racialized women in

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[1] Transgender men and gender diverse individuals are also disproportionately targeted by TFV, but this paper focuses on the experiences of the study participants, all of whom identified as women.

Canada have also experienced TFV — more specifically, those who are using a variety of digital media platforms to organize and raise awareness broadly around anti-violence. This project is grounded in an intersectional framework to help interrogate the complexity of power structures and relations that situate racialized women within multiple and overlapping systems of oppressions. Intersectional theories offer an opportunity to place historically marginalized individuals at the centre of the inquiry in a way that acknowledges and embraces the unique experiences of those who sit at the junction of multiple sites of oppression.[3] As such, theories of intersectionality are useful for examining the multi-dimensionality of oppressions that are embedded within technologies, revealing the complexity of the politics at play in online spaces.[4]

The scope of the word violence in this work is also developed from the work of Black feminist authors, in particular bell hooks, who warned against defining violence in ways which ignore the structural oppression that violence allows.[5] This definition will be broader than some of the approaches used by others considering violence against women, whether in the technological context or not. By using it, I hope to invite a careful consideration of how various proposed reforms might actually play out in the technological spaces where my participants operate. Exposing a wider array of harms than might be captured by narrower approaches to violence may be crucial in avoiding either over or underestimating the potential implications of our efforts to restrict or punish various activities online. Exposing the underwater portion of the iceberg, hidden by narrow understandings of what counts as harm, expands our ability to evaluate policy proposals.

In this article, I unravel a variety of TFV experiences of women, more specifically women who use digital media platforms to create awareness about and to challenge or prevent ongoing violence that is often left out of mainstream media coverage, such as violence against racialized women, gender-diverse individuals, those belonging to 2SLGBTQ+ communities, and disabled women.[6]

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[2]   See e.g., Amnesty International, "Toxic Twitter", (2018), online: <www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/>; Kishonna L Gray, "Intersecting Oppressions and Online Communities: Examining the Experiences of Women of Color in Xbox Live" (2012) 15:3 Information, Communication & Society 411; Caitlin E Lawson, "Platform Vulnerabilities: Harassment and Misogynoir in the Digital Attack on Leslie Jones" (2018) 21:6 Information, Communication & Society 818.

[3]   Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1991) 43:6 Stan L Rev 1241 at 1243.

[4]   Andre Brock, "From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation" (2012) J Broadcasting & Electronic Media, online: <www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08838151.2012.732147>; Safiya Umoja Noble & Brendesha M Tynes, *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online* (Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 2016).

[5]   bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (London: Pluto Press, 2000) at 118.

[6]   The acronym "2SLGBTQ+" refers to Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (or questioning), where the plus sign represents other gender and sexual identities and orientations.

As a result of their online activism, most of them have been targeted by TFV in ways that are not fully captured with a framework that focuses exclusively on intimate partner violence [IPV], sexual violence, or anonymous trolling, as the violence they faced was not just based on misogyny, nor did it always necessarily involve attacks by complete strangers. Significantly, in situating these experiences at intersectional margins, this article uncovers new narratives that illustrate the complex nature of the violence that the racialized women I interviewed, many of whom also identified as queer and/or disabled, have experienced online. Therefore, in this article, I provide empirical findings that indicate the importance of expanding our understanding of TFV beyond a focus on sexism and/or interactions between intimate partners or complete strangers. I contend that we need a broader understanding of violence, and therefore of TFV, to avoid reproducing the same policy and legal responses that are typically premised on these partial definitions of violence that ignore so many women's experiences, especially those in multiple intersecting systems of oppression.

This article proceeds in five parts. In the first section, I draw on previous TFV research and outline the key issues that many adult women face when visible online, highlighting how this research has overwhelmingly centred the experiences of white, cisgender women. In the second part, I provide a brief background of intersectionality and the advantages and challenges it provides as an analytical tool for understanding TFV broadly. Third, I present my research design process and introduce the participants of this study. Then, I discuss how I mapped three sources of TFV described by my participants based on my conception of violence: 1) violence from anonymous perpetrators; 2) violence from easily identifiable perpetrators, or people otherwise known to the target; and 3) violence understood as unexpected or otherwise unanticipated. These findings provide us with more insight into experiences of TFV, experiences that warrant our attention and that differ from the research on white, straight, cisgender, able women's experiences. However, in this article, it is not my intention to make universal claims applicable to all racialized women in Canada. Rather, my goal is to parse out some of the varied ways in which the women in my study experienced TFV to trigger further research, interventions, and preventions that take these complexities into account. Finally, I conclude with a call for more dedicated empirical research on the experiences of TFV from those who are situated at multiple sites of marginalization to inform policy recommendations.

2.   RESEARCHING TFV

Being on the receiving end of violence is a prominent and common concern that many women face while occupying online spaces. Such instances of violence targeting women is not a new phenomenon; in fact, research into this issue first appeared in the mid-1990s and identified that women using early online networks were disproportionately experiencing instances of violence compared to men.[7] More recently, there has been a flurry of media and academic attention to cases

of attacks directed at highly visible feminist bloggers,[8] journalists and politicians,[9] and gamers.[10] Many of these instances consisted of multi-year campaigns where women have been threatened with physical violence or forced to flee their homes out of fear of physical violence and death.[11] The prevalence of such attacks experienced as a result of participating online has left many women with few options other than abandoning online participation altogether.[12] The almost ubiquitous nature of Internet-enabled communication technologies, especially those available through mobile smartphones, provides additional avenues for perpetrators to enact violence as digital media platforms enable various ways for perpetrators to monitor, record, and control the actions of others.[13] In this respect, digital media technologies offer perpetrators new forms of inflicting violence including, but not limited to, online harassment, threats of physical violence, online stalking, doxing,[14] and/or image-based sexual exploitation.[15]

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[7] Cherny Lynn & Elizabeth Reba Weise, *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1996); Susan Herring et al, "Searching for Safety Online: Managing 'Trolling' in a Feminist Forum" (2002) 18:5 The Information Society 371; Tamara Shepherd et al, "Histories of Hating" (2015) 1:2 Social Media + Society 1.

[8] Jill Filipovic, "Blogging While Female: How Internet Misogyny Parallels Real-World Harassment Responding to Internet Harassment" (2007) 19:1 Yale JL & Feminism 295; Jessica Valenti, "Battling Feminist Burnout", *The Nation* (1 March 2013), online: <www.thenation.com/article/archive/battling-feminist-burnout/>; Lindy West, "What Happened When I Confronted My Cruellest Troll", *The Guardian* (2 February 2015), online: <www.theguardian.com/society/2015/feb/02/what-happened-confronted-cruellest-troll-lindy-west>.

[9] Amnesty International, *supra* note 2; Becky Gardiner, "'It's a Terrible Way to Go to Work': What 70 Million Readers' Comments on the Guardian Revealed about Hostility to Women and Minorities Online" (2018) 18:4 Feminist Media Studies 592.

[10] Gray, *supra* note 2; Mia Consalvo, "Confronting Toxic Gamer Culture: A Challenge for Feminist Game Studies Scholars", (2012) 1 Ada: A J Gender, New Media, & Technology, online: <adanewmedia.org/2012/11/issue1-consalvo/>; Anita Sarkeesian, "TEDxWomen Talk about Online Harassment and Cyber Mobs" (December 2012), online (video): *Feminist Frequency* <feministfrequency.com/video/tedxwomen-talk-on-sexist-harassment-cyber-mobs/>. Adrienne Massanari, "#Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures" (2017) 19:3 New Media & Society 329.

[11] Emma Jane, "'Back to the Kitchen, Cu*t': Speaking the Unspeakable about Online Misogyny" (2014) 28:4 Continuum 558.

[12] Amnesty International, *supra* note 2; Shepherd, *supra* note 7; Sarah Banet-Weiser & Kate M Miltner, "#MasculinitySoFragile: Culture, Structure, and Networked Misogyny" (2016) 16:1 Feminist Media Studies 171.

[13] Molly Dragiewicz et al, "Technology Facilitated Coercive Control: Domestic Violence and the Competing Roles of Digital Media Platforms" (2018) 18:4 Feminist Media Studies 609.

[14] Doxing refers to the revealing of personal information of a target, like their address, so that anyone online who sees it has the potential to enact offline violence.

[15] Dragiewicz, *supra* note 13.

Explanations for online violence that many marginalized individuals face typically blame poorly designed digital media configurations, highlighting such features as user anonymity, the ease with which users can find and build online communities around a topic of interest, the flattening of different social networks, as well as unclear and poorly enforced policies that reinforce such violent actions, to name a few.[16] However, these researchers have also noted that these features and policies do not cause the violence experienced, but rather facilitate and exacerbate the effects, often when perpetrators find ways to exploit design features and policies to further their violence. Therefore, using the term "technology-facilitated" as an overarching term for the range of violence that occurs online emphasizes that both technology and violence are key in characterizing the experience.[17]

The role of technologies in facilitating violence is an important consideration, as technologies are not neutral artifacts, but rather inherently political.[18] Therefore, through an intricate arrangement of power relationships, technologies are designed — intentionally or unintentionally — to exclude certain users, thereby reproducing established patterns of power relationships.[19] However, in an effort to *not* uphold simplistic explanations of online violence based on technological determinism that neglect the complex and inter-related historical, political, and economic power dynamics, I uphold the view that technologies and society are "mutually constitutive."[20] This means that "the technological, instead of being a sphere separate from society, is part of what makes society possible, in other words is constitutive of society."[21] Significantly, technologies are one major way in which our social world builds order and influences some activities over others. From this mutualistic perspective,

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[16] Dragiewicz, *ibid*; Lawson, *supra* note 2; Banet-Weiser & Miltner, *supra* note 12; Massanari, *supra* note 10; Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández, "Platformed Racism: The Mediation and Circulation of an Australian Race-Based Controversy on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube" (2017) 20:6 Information, Communication & Society 930; Michael Salter, "Publicising Privacy, Weaponising Publicity: The Dialectic of Online Abuse on Social Media" in Amy Shields Dobson, Brady Robards & Nicholas Carah, eds, *Digital Intimate Publics and Social Media* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018) 29.

[17] Dragiewicz, *supra* note 13; Suzie Dunn, "Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Overview" (2020) Supporting a Safer Internet Paper No 1, online (pdf): *Centre for International Governance Innovation* < www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/documents/SaferInternet_Paper%20no%201_Dec7_ABHI_1.pdf > ; Nicola Henry & Anastasia Powell, "Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence: A Literature Review of Empirical Research" (2018) 19:2 Trauma, Violence & Abuse 195.

[18] Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" (1980) 109:1 Daedalus 121.

[19] *Ibid*.

[20] Donald MacKenzie & Judy Wajcman, eds, *The Social Shaping of Technology* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1999) at 41.

[21] *Ibid*. at 42.

decisions made around building order in our social worlds need to be examined and critiqued as part of our interrogation of a given technology.

Despite the significant role and impact of TFV, much of the research and media attention on online violence focuses on one single aspect of domination, namely sexism.[22] As a result, IPV (sometimes also referred to as domestic violence) and sexual violence are the most common frameworks in existing literature aimed at understanding the violence that adult women face. This is evident in the terms used to describe experiences of TFV that focus explicitly on the sexual nature of the enacted violence, or its impact on gender, such as "online misogyny,"[23] "gendered cyberhate,"[24] "networked misogyny,"[25] "technologically-facilitated sexual violence,"[26] and "online sexual harassment,"[27] to name a few. This particular approach to sexist online violence risks framing a generalized and homogenous picture of TFV that is ill-equipped to account for women who are also racialized, queer, disabled, or transgender. These individuals are more likely to be targets of online attacks than their white, straight, cisgender women counterparts, and they face additional layers of oppression and severity in the attacks.[28] This was demonstrated by Gray's study, which showed that the online violence she and other Black women experienced as gamers was indeed sexist, but abruptly turned racist *and* sexist once their voices indicated the possibility that they were Black women.[29]

The online vulnerability of marginalized women is especially significant within the current contemporary moment in North America characterized by a simultaneously intertwined rise in "networked misogyny" with a rise in explicitly

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[22] Katherine Cross, "Online Harassment Isn't Only About Misogyny, Regardless of What 'Gendertrolling' Implies" (27 November 2015), online: *Rewire News Group* <rewir-enewsgroup.com/article/2015/11/27/online-harassment-isnt-misogyny-regardless-gen-dertrolling-implies/>; Lucy Hackworth, "Limitations of 'Just Gender': The Need for an Intersectional Reframing of Online Harassment Discourse and Research" in Jacqueline Ryan Vickery & Tracy Everbach, eds, *Mediating Misogyny: Gender, Technology, and Harassment* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

[23] Emma Jane, "Online Misogyny and Feminist Digilantism" (2016) 30:3 Continuum 284.

[24] Emma Jane, "Feminist Flight and Fight Responses to Gendered Cyberhate" in Marie Segrave & Laura Vitis, eds, *Gender, Technology, and Violence* (London: Routledge, 2017) 45.

[25] Banet-Weiser & Miltner, *supra* note 12.

[26] Henry & Powell *supra* note 17; Nicola Henry & Anastasia Powell, "Embodied Harms: Gender, Shame, and Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence" (2015) 21:6 Violence Against Women 758.

[27] Jessica Megarry, "Online Incivility or Sexual Harassment? Conceptualising Women's Experiences in the Digital Age" (2014) 47 Women's Studies International Forum 46.

[28] Amnesty International, *supra* note 2; Gray, *supra* note 2; Danielle K Citron, *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2014); Oliver L Haimson, "Transgender Experiences with Online Harassment" (2016), online (pdf): <oliverhaimson.com/transOnlineHarassment.pdf>.

[29] Gray *supra* note 2.

racist, homophobic, and transphobic violence that appears particularly evident since Donald Trump's presidency in 2016, which has had global impact.[30] Therefore, there remains a substantial gap in research that focuses on adult, racialized women facing TFV within this increasingly hostile socio-political context, especially in a Canadian context, where much of the aforementioned research has focused on contexts within the US, the UK, and Australia.[31] A framework that centres the experiences of women marginalized by multiple oppressions and their intersections within a Canadian context could help to fill this research gap.

(a)   Intersectionality and Violence

My work is informed by feminist intersectional writers who have broadened the understanding of violence that women face beyond instances of IPV in heteronormative relationships and sexual violence. Intersectionality, coined by Crenshaw[32] in 1989, has been developed by many Black, Brown, and Indigenous feminist scholars and activists to challenge the essentialism of both race and gender identities via social, historical, and political processes.[33] By centring the concerns and experiences of those who are situated at intersections of multiple overlapping systems of oppression, these authors' vision of violence is inclusive of various forms of interpersonal violence and structural violence. Thus, intersectional writers broaden our understanding of violence against women and trans folk by demonstrating that neither the framing of racist violence nor sexist violence alone are adequate in understanding the violence racialized women experience. Feminist and anti-racist theorizing alone often neglects how settler-colonialism[34] has impacted the lives of Indigenous women in Canada.[35]

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[30]   Banet-Weiser & Miltner, *supra* note 12 at 171; Lawson, *supra* note 2.

[31]   Exceptions include Jordan Fairbairn, "Before #MeToo: Violence against Women Social Media Work, Bystander Intervention, and Social Change" (2020) 10:3 Societies 51, online: < www.mdpi.com/2075-4698/10/3/51 >;Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose & Jessalynn Keller, *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back against Rape Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). However, these studies also focus on white women's experiences, albeit with some diversity.

[32]   Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (1989) U Chicago Legal F 139, online: < heinonline.org/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.c-gi?handle = hein.journals/uchclf1989&section = 10 >.

[33]   See Brittney Cooper, *Intersectionality*, ed by Lisa Disch & Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford University Press, 2015); Patricia Hill Collins & Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*, Key Concepts Series (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016).

[34]   Settler-colonialism refers to the invasion of and the continued dispossession of Indigenous people from the land, as well as the coerced dependency between Indigenous communities and the state. Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck & Angie Morrill, "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriar-chy" (2013) 25:1 Feminist Formations 8.

[35]   *Ibid.*

To address these oversights, intersectional theorists proposed an analytical framework that shifts away from gender-only (or race-only) approaches to a multi-axis analysis.[36] In the context of violence that racialized women experience, a single-axis analysis of gender-only or race-only frameworks distorts and further marginalizes the experiences of racialized women because identity markers, such as race and gender, cannot be easily separated from each other.[37] Intersectionality offers a theory that explains how the conditions of people's social and political contexts are not shaped by only one factor of oppression, but rather consist of multiple, overlapping, and interlocking systems of oppressions.[38] These interlocking sites of oppression become more apparent as more varied experiences of interpersonal violence emerge from contexts other than heteronormative relationships and sexual violence.

Intersectionality's uptake across disciplines inside and outside of the academy, however, has led to a "widespread misrepresentation, tokenization, displacement, and disarticulation"[39] of its purposes. Some scholars have argued that intersectionality has been "rhetorically and symbolically collapsed into diversity, and thus taken up as an inclusion project,"[40] deployed as a stand-in to qualify or "to diagnose racial difference"[41] and therefore emptied of its meaning to those who are under the microscope.[42] Some have argued that intersectionality is being neutralized or depoliticized in much contemporary feminist academic scholarship.[43] Hill Collins refers to how intersectionality has been used as a buzzword, devoid of meaning and ineffective as a tool for structural transformation. Consequently, despite being a common term, such "definitional dilemmas"[44] of intersectionality mean there is no consensus about what critical intersectional analysis requires.

As a response to this dilemma, Hill Collins and Bilge offer six core ideas of intersectionality that they contend must be present in critical inquiry.[45] These are: 1) social inequality must be understood as interactions between socially constructed categories; 2) power is mutually constructed by many diverse power

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[36] Crenshaw, *supra* note 3; Patricia Hill Collins, "On Violence, Intersectionality and Transversal Politics" (2017) 40:9 Ethnic & Racial Studies 1460.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] Hill Collins & Bilge, *supra* note 33.

[39] Sirma Bilge, "Intersectionality Undone" (2013) 10:2 Du Bois Rev 405 at 410.

[40] Jennifer C Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (Duke University Press, 2018) at 13.

[41] Jasbir Puar, "'I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess': Intersectionality, Assemblage, and Affective Politics" (2013) 8:2 Meritum at 375.

[42] Jennifer C Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality" (2008) 89:1 Feminist Rev 1.

[43] Bilge, *supra* note 39.

[44] Patricia Hill Collins, "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas" (2015) 41:1 Annual Rev Sociology 1 at 1.

[45] Hill Collins & Bilge, *supra* note 33.

relationships, such as racism and sexism; 3) relationality and connections between race and gender should be prioritized over differences between categories of social identities; 4) there must be an awareness of the social context; 5) there must be a recognition of complexity of analysis; and, 6) critical analysis must contain social justice motivations that challenge the status quo as an outcome.[46] Therefore, what is important includes how intersectional scholars engage with theory and with their citational history, as well as how they advance a social justice agenda.[47] Theoretically, methodologically, and definitionally, I attempted to incorporate intersectionality into this research.

Intersectionality theory informs the way that I define violence broadly in this research. To better account for the experiences of violence that racialized women face, I understand violence to be a social problem that "is shaped by and helps structure intersecting power relations."[48] Violence, as hooks and Hill Collins suggest, is therefore an umbrella term for methods that sustain hierarchical rule and domination.[49] This approach takes our understanding of violence beyond male-perpetrated sexual violence,[50] illustrating how that narrow framework ignores the ways in which, for instance, white women are also perpetrators of violence against racialized women.[51] This widening of interpersonal violence is also inclusive of a variety of speech acts that, especially when repeated over time as discourse, contribute to perpetuating racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic violence.[52] Beyond instances of interpersonal violence, violence can also be less obvious and bureaucratic. Structural violence includes all state-sanctioned violence; policies influenced by capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy, and white supremacy enable and reinforce violence that women experience, especially racialized women in a settler-colonial state.

Throughout this article, then, I use a similar broad, yet context-specific approach to defining what counts as violence, with the perspective that the risk of under-identifying instances of violence outweighs over-identifying cases of

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[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Bilge, *supra* note 39.

[48] Hill Collins, *supra* note 36 at 1461.

[49] hooks, *supra* note 5; Patricia Hill Collins, "The Tie that Binds: Race, Gender and US Violence" (1998) 21:5 Ethnic & Racial Studies 917.

[50] *Ibid.*, Paulina García-Del Moral, "The Murders of Indigenous Women in Canada as Feminicides: Toward a Decolonial Intersectional Reconceptualization of Femicide" (2018) 43:4 Signs: J Women in Culture & Society 929; INCITE!, *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Duke University Press, 2016).

[51] hooks, *supra* note 5.

[52] Hill Collins, *supra* note 49. As an example, Meyer's research has demonstrated that anti-queer violence was experienced differently by racialized and white individuals from the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Black lesbians were confronting forms of violence not experienced by white lesbians or Black gay men. Doug Meyer, "An Intersectional Analysis of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) People's Evaluations of Anti-Queer Violence" (2012) 26:6 Gender & Society 849.

violence. By expanding our understanding of violence beyond sexual violence and IPV, this article reveals instances of violence that racialized women have experienced that are left out of mainstream public narratives about TFV. For example, rather than narrowly limiting violence to physical, emotional, and financial violence, my conceptualization of this issue also encompasses speech acts that express racism, settler colonialism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism. Although the manifestations of violence varied tremendously, the commonality of oppression is present.

(b)   Centring Women at the Margins: A Discussion of Method

Intersectional theories offer an opportunity to place historically marginalized individuals at the centre of the inquiry in a way that acknowledges and embraces the unique contributions of those sitting at the junction of multiple sites of oppression. In the context of TFV research, they help us attend to the complexity of the macro- and micro-politics at play online by helping to highlight the multi-dimensionality of oppressions that are embedded within technologies.[53] But, as shown in the previous section, incorporating intersectionality into research design is challenging as there is no single prescriptive way to do so. In qualitative and quantitative research, incorporating intersectionality requires the researcher to incorporate and analyze multiple social identities that are not fixed, but relative and always changing.[54] Some research has focused on the relationship among groups of multiple social categories.[55] However, this often relies on a comparative approach that reinforces binaries.[56] Significantly, intersectional research must move away from an additive approach to social categories by incorporating an examination of both privilege and oppression.[57] To do so, my research design relies on interview data that centres the voices of those traditionally excluded and marginalized. It draws on my larger dissertation research, where I conducted exploratory, semi-structured interviews with nine racialized women within Canada who were using digital media tools as part of their anti-violence activism from 2018 to 2019.

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling,[58] meaning that much of my recruitment involved sending out emails to anti-

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[53]   Brock, *supra* note 4; Noble and Tynes, *supra* note 4; Safiya Umoja Noble, "A Future for Intersectional Black Feminist Technology Studies" (2016) Scholar & Feminist Online, online: <sfonline.barnard.edu/traversing-technologies/safiya-umoja-noble-a-future-for-intersectional-black-feminist-technology-studies/>.

[54]   Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality" in Emily Grabham et al, eds, *Intersectionality and Beyond* (Routledge-Cavendish, 2008) 65.

[55]   *Ibid.*

[56]   Nikol G Alexander-Floyd, "Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality in the Social Sciences in a Post — Black Feminist Era" (2012) 24:1 Feminist Formations 1.

[57]   Elena Ariel Windsong, "Incorporating Intersectionality into Research Design: An Example Using Qualitative Interviews" (2018) 21:2 Int J Soc Research Methodology 135.

violence organizations and posting recruitment notices on social media platforms. Thus, participants were not a random sample, but this sampling method was appropriate given that this study sought to gain exploratory and deeper understanding of the perspectives of racialized women engaged in anti-violence activism. These interviews aimed to place the perspectives of multiply marginalized individuals at the centre of the research, allowing room to explore the richness of their lived experiences and perspectives.[59] While gender and race are universal threads throughout this research study, the diverse forms of violence discussed are based on a multiplicity of intersecting factors.

To be interviewed, potential participants had to self-identify as racialized women, be involved in the creation of digital campaigns or tools around anti-violence and work primarily in Canada. Interviews were conducted with a cross-section of service providers, volunteers within the anti-violence sector, advocates, public educators, and activists involved in creating digitally enabled tools and campaigns that seek to address violence in Canada. Participants identified as Black, South Asian, Muslim, Arab, half-Chinese, or Indigenous women. Some of the women also identified as being queer, and one identified as being physically and visually disabled. Their ages ranged from early twenties to their fifties. To protect their identities, I use pseudonyms throughout and remain otherwise purposely vague about their specific online projects. Only nine individuals participated in this project; therefore, these research insights are presented as suggestive and urging of further inquiry. However, these interviews still revealed noteworthy experiences of TFV, as outlined below. Furthermore, my positionality as a second-generation South Asian secular Muslim settler Canadian woman may well have shaped the interview data and analysis since participants were likely more comfortable speaking and sharing details with me based on shared racial and gender make-up.

I relied on semi-structured interviews to guide a set of key exploratory questions about their online activism, asking the women to describe the benefits and challenges of their work. Interviews took place in person or digitally and lasted from 43 minutes to 2 hours and 35 minutes. Each interview was recorded, and then coded to identify key themes.

For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the theme of TFV. Although my original set of questions did not specifically ask about violence, when I asked participants to expand on their negative and challenging experiences, the theme of TFV became apparent in almost every response. However, responses reflect varied understandings of what constitutes TFV. In other words, some named a particular kind of experience TFV, while others did not. Thus, my analysis applied my definition of violence, described above. Although three participants

[58]   Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015).

[59]   Hae Yeon Choo & Myra Marx Ferree, "Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities" (2010) 28:2 Sociological Theory 129.

who had experience working as service providers in the broader anti-violence non-profit sector mentioned the role TFV plays in IPV cases that they have observed from their clients,[60] this paper focuses on how I mapped participants' own experiences of TFV connected to their online anti-violence activities. Not all those I interviewed experienced instances of TFV that fell within my broad definition of it. Two out of nine did not mention any such instances. This suggests that TFV is not a universal experience, even for racialized women in Canada who create and share content around anti-violence online.

(c) Experiencing of TFV

In the following section, I outline how participants, all racialized women involved in anti-violence online activism in Canada, experienced various forms of TFV based on my definition of violence. I describe these perspectives, finding that the intersection of sexism with racism, colonialism, ableism, homophobia, and cisheteronormativitiy informed these cases in ways that have not been typically discussed in most other research. In cases of TFV from anonymous sources, experiences varied from *ad hoc* attacks, occurring only when participants posted online about anti-violence, to ongoing collective attacks. In cases of TFV from identifiable sources, multiple and overlapping forms of oppression via racism, colonialism, and sexism were just as apparent. However, additional instances of non-anonymous interpersonal and workplace violence were also reported, which involved perpetrators easily identified as racialized men or white feminists[61] within personal and professional networks. Finally, participants described instances of what I am calling unexpected or unanticipated TFV where they inadvertently caused or received TFV. These experiences and perspectives further complicate any notion that women simply experience misogyny online from anonymous male perpetrators. They also experience transphobia, homophobia, ableism, and racism from perpetrators, including women and other persons known to them, and may inadvertently cause instances of violence.

(i) ''The racism and the homophobia and the sexism I get every day": TFV From Anonymous Sources

Social media platforms' policies and design features, which allow for the creation of easily disposable accounts, has been cited as a key contributing factor to the online violence women experience. Many of my participants voiced this perspective, but they also highlighted the variability of violent attacks as well as the unique experiences of such violence for racialized women and/or transgender

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[60] Their collective observations of such cases were that anti-violence non-profit organizations were ill-equipped to deal with cases of TFV when clients experience them typically in the form of online stalking.

[61] For the purposes of this paper, white feminism refers to a practice and ideology of feminism, not an identity of every feminist with white skin colour. Cate Young, "This Is What I Mean When I Say 'White Feminism'", (January 2014), online: < battymamzelle.blogspot.com/2014/01/This-Is-What-I-Mean-When-I-Say-White-Feminism.html > .

users. Participants indicated experiencing a range of targeted, anonymous backlash to their creation and publicizing of events, campaigns, and content associated with anti-violence. Such experiences varied from *ad hoc* attacks, occurring only when participants posted online about ending violence, to ongoing collective attacks that occurred regularly. Two thirds of these participants experienced TFV from anonymous sources, or sources otherwise difficult for them to identity. Yet, these anonymous perpetrators of violence were perceived, through their profile photos and disposable account usernames, as well as through the content they sent out, to be male. However, the violent attacks were not just based on misogyny. Additional characteristics of these anonymous attacks included the use of racist, homophobic, and/or transphobic messages used to derail conversations and create a climate of fear for the targeted individuals.

For example, three participants described experiences of either one-off attacks or constant barrages of messaging and "trolling" as their work to end violence became more visible online and through media attention. Two participants' experiences were mild compared to those of some other participants. For instance, Nox shared her experience of *ad hoc*, targeted, anonymous TFV during her online promotion of events around anti-violence. In response to her online promotion of awareness-raising campaigns, she reported "the odd one or two men who have created backlash." Some men, she explained, "haven't been sympathetic at all to the cause and don't understand why there's a need for it and are sometimes bitter towards women for whatever reasons of their own." She added "but I'm fortunate that it's been minor." Her description reflects an example of "drive-by harassment" which is a random one-off expression of harm from a perpetrator.[62] The more subdued nature of her experience may be attributable to the fact that the tools and social media profiles used to promote her online campaigns were not easily linked to any identifiable individual who could become the target of backlash. The imagery used on the accounts was generic — a logo designed for the campaign — and, although she was responsible for the creation of the account, multiple people had access to the account and contributed to content creation and message response.

On the other hand, some participants noted an increase in TFV when their personal identity markers, such as their gender, became more visible online. Calla recalled that her attacks occurred:

> either because I'm femme and my photo is femme and it's a lot of sexual
> solicitation. Yeah, it's a lot of like, you know, "I want to lick your feet"
> or stuff like that. Or, the harassment, sometimes it's really graphic.

She was also targeted by an online attack that she believed came from members of a men's rights group that included a constant barrage of emails and phone calls to her workplace, alleging that she was an abuser and giving "extremely graphic and vile details." She told me that these were not taken seriously by her

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[62] Sarah Jeong, *The Internet of Garbage* (Forbes Media, 2018) at 33.

workplace, but they were frustrating and hurtful to her, nonetheless. She assumes that the perpetrators were able to track down her place of work because she was so highly visible on social media platforms, and her profiles detail her location. She experienced anonymous TFV in the form of "sustained orchestration," where abuse is crowdsourced.[63] Her experience was representative of many anecdotes shared via mainstream media and in scholarly research that highlight the networked nature of experiences of TFV.[64] In other words, many individuals organized and targeted their hostility towards one person or social media profile.[65] This has also been called "trolling," which refers to behaviours most often used to extract an explosive reaction from victims.[66]

These examples suggest that speaking publicly about anti-violence online is enough to attract TFV, even with efforts to hide the exact identities of who is involved, such as in Nox's case. These examples further demonstrate the backlash to the presence of women in online spaces, especially racialized women involved in denouncing racism and sexism.[67] Moreover, for those involved in anti-violence in the non-profit sector, either professionally or through volunteer work, social media involvement is increasingly part of public education activities.[68] Thus, in trying to promote campaigns associated with their everyday work online, they are more likely to be targeted with TFV. These instances of TFV are more complicated because they are occurring in the workplace. They are compounded by the fact that the racialized women in my study, like many other racialized women in anti-violence, work in under-resourced and low-paying jobs in the non-profit sector, which has had to deal with austerity for decades.[69]

Anonymous perpetrators also attacked different aspects of Calla's identity regularly. She described feeling as though her experiences were unique from those of white women counterparts:

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[63] *Ibid.* at 33.

[64] Banet-Weiser & Miltner, *supra* note 12; Lawson, *supra* note 2; Alice E Marwick & Robyn Caplan, "Drinking Male Tears: Language, the Manosphere, and Networked Harassment" (2018) 18:4 Feminist Media Studies 543.

[65] Jane, *supra* note 11; Jane, *supra* note 23; Jeong, *supra* note 62.

[66] Shepherd, *supra* note 7; Whitney Phillips, *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship Between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: MIT Press, 2015).

[67] Banet-Weiser & Miltner, *supra* note 12; Lisa Nakamura, "The Unwanted Labour of Social Media: Women of Colour Call Out Culture as Venture Community Management", (2015) 86 New Formations 106, online: <link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A444046234/AONE?sid=lms>.

[68] Fairbairn, *supra* note 31.

[69] Kathleen Rodgers & Melanie Knight, "'You Just Felt the Collective Wind Being Knocked Out of Us': The Deinstitutionalization of Feminism and the Survival of Women's Organizing in Canada" (2011) 34:6 Women's Studies Intl Forum 570.

> when I see white women talking about it, I'm like "I bet you don't get
> what we get." But we don't talk about it. If I talk about the racism and
> the homophobia and the sexism I get every day, that's all I'll talk about.
> Everyday.

These comments echoed the conclusions of a case study that illustrated the differences between the experiences of white and racialized women on Twitter. Racialized women who changed their Twitter profile photos to those of white men noticed a drop in hate speech they received. Indeed, any vitriolic messages they received ceased to be racist and sexist and took on a more benign quality that caused mere annoyance as opposed to genuine fear.[70] In my study, anonymous perpetrators were attacking racialized women disseminating content around anti-violence probably based on their visible identity from their profile, enabling and reinforcing the forced removal of racialized women from public spaces.

Secondly, participants discussed how sexism, transphobia, and homophobia were part of their experience of TFV because they produced content that was queer and trans-positive. Petunia noted that she enjoyed using Facebook because it helped facilitate new connections with others who were also participating in anti-violence work. Such connections were also a way, she hoped, to grow her own followers and build an online community of solidarity and support around ending violence against other racialized, queer women. In fact, she mostly received positive comments and feedback on her work in online spaces. However, despite these positive aspects of social networking, Petunia also experienced anonymous forms of TFV. She noted one instance where a Facebook post on a page she owned attracted violence. This post was about a campaign celebrating transgender lesbian couples, and many of the images and stories shared were of racialized women. "Someone commented on a post I shared," she recalled, "with explicitly transphobic remarks." She continued: "someone must have shared our post in some sort of TERF[71] Facebook group and they were just coming to our page to comment stuff I guess finding the stuff they were upset about to comment on, specifically trans lesbian posts."

Her mention of TERFs references feminists who advocate for the removal of trans individuals from women-only spaces, sometimes based on ideas about biological determinism.[72] Although the term TERF first appeared online in 2008, its sex-essentialist and anti-trans ideas were reported to exist in some feminist spaces as far back as the 1970s in North America.[73] TERF ideology is a white,

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[70] Jeong, *supra* note 62.

[71] TERF stands for trans-exclusionary radical feminists. Some prefer the term "trans women exclusionists" because the values behind their transphobia are anti-feminist and misogynistic and therefore should not be associated with feminism. See Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, 2nd ed (Hachette, 2016); Cristan Williams, "Radical Inclusion: Recounting the Trans Inclusive History of Radical Feminism" (2016) 3:1 Transgender Studies Q 254.

[72] *Ibid.*

Western, feminist discourse that erases the violence that transgender women experience.[74] The policing of gender norms intersects with sexual and racial norms in this instance of TFV, as perpetrators continue to undermine the visibility of racialized, transgender lesbians in online spaces. Moreover, this seemingly purposeful, and strategic infiltration of a once "safe space" to network and share content is in line with other research that shows that social media online spaces are simultaneously positive for some trans and queer individuals while also being a space where homophobic and transphobic violence regularly occurs.[75]

Thirdly, some participants' experiences of anonymous TFV were informed by sexism, racism, and colonialism. Mardella, an Indigenous activist involved in issues specifically around murdered and missing Indigenous women (MMIW), received overwhelming support from within her communities but noted that one of her major challenges was vitriolic abuse she believed came from outside Indigenous communities: "usually every major news article that [does a story on me and the digital tool I created], afterwards, I'll get racist trolls." She added, "I've gotten a lot of weird, implied stuff [. . .] the harassment, sometimes it's really graphic. It's a lot of sexual solicitation." This comment exemplifies "double objectification"[76] in which Indigenous women are objectified for being women *and* for being Indigenous.

In Mardella's example, one perpetrator referred to sexual solicitation, linking Indigenous women with sexual availability and implying that this makes them deserve violence. Although all women can potentially be sex trafficked and enter sex work, sex trafficking has a unique colonial history and legacy.[77] Her anecdote connects to the enduring representation and treatment of Indigenous women as "being marked as racially inferior to white European men and women as well as less worthy of respect than Indigenous men"[78] that has culminated in reproducing and reinforcing violence against Indigenous women. Not only was

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[73] *Ibid.*

[74] Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa, "The 'New' White Feminism: Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism and the Problem of Biological Determinism in Western Feminist Theory" in K Carter & J Brunton, eds, *TransNarratives: Scholarly and Creative Works on Transgender Experience* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2021).

[75] Haimson, *supra* note 28; Alexander Cho, "Default Publicness: Queer Youth of Color, Social Media, and Being Outed by the Machine" (2018) 20:9 New Media & Society 3183; Morgan Klaus Scheuerman, Stacy M Branham & Foad Hamidi, "Safe Spaces and Safe Places: Unpacking Technology-Mediated Experiences of Safety and Harm with Transgender People" (2018) 2:CSCW Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction 1, online: < dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3274424 > .

[76] Emma D LaRocque, *Violence in Aboriginal Communities* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994), online: < www.homelesshub.ca/resource/violence-abori-ginal-communities > .

[77] Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

[78] García-Del Moral *supra* note 50.

forcing Indigenous women into sex work and sex trafficking part of the exploitation of their lands, the colonial legal system often still protects perpetrators of sexual violence against Indigenous women.[79] Furthermore, the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma and chronic poverty created and maintained by settler colonial nations makes Indigenous women more likely to enter into sex work and sex trafficking relationships.[80] The violence Mardella experienced was not just misogynistic, but also deeply embedded in racist tropes and rampant colonialism.

Finally, one participant with physical and visual disabilities noted that she would still attract anonymous targeted TFV even when she created and promoted events about celebrating women more generally. Her experiences of violence included fear for her safety on multiple occasions. "I was getting all of the death threats," she said, "all of the rape threats, it was not, it just wasn't fun, especially when they would say stuff like 'I know where you live' and just really scary shit." This implied violence, as opposed to direct threats, is an example of "colorably threatening harassment."[81] These threats become further disabling to someone who cannot easily leave their immediate physical location, further incapacitating them from participating in online activism because they bear the burdens of compounding and intersecting marginalization. Here, the mere promotion and celebration of women was suppressed by individuals who appeared willing to go to great lengths to silence such perspectives in a way that protected perpetrators' own safety and security. In high-profile cases, such as Anita Sarkeesian and Jessica Valenti, we have seen how these threats have gone so far as to drive outspoken women not just off social media, but also away from their homes and jobs.[82] In this case, the intimidating nature of the threats against the participant was heightened by a physical disability that made it difficult for her to suddenly flee.

Moreover, because of her position as a disabled, racialized woman in a capitalist, white supremacist, sexist, and ableist hierarchical society, this participant may well have less access to health care and other social supports.[83] This problem is compounded by reliance on law enforcement for immediate crisis support. Not only has going to law enforcement for help with TFV not always proved helpful, but law enforcement has been exposed for their

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[79] Deer, *supra* note 77; Sherene H Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder Pamela George" (2000) 15:2 CJLS 91; Pamela Palmater, "Shining Light on the Dark Places: Addressing Police Racism and Sexualized Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls in the National Inquiry" (2016) 28:2 CJWL 253.

[80] Deer, *supra* note 77.

[81] Jeong, *supra* note 62 at 33.

[82] Consalvo, *supra* note 10; Jessica Valenti, "Insults and Rape Threats: Writers Shouldn't Have to Deal with This", *The Guardian* (2016), online: < www.theguardian.com/ commentisfree/2016/apr/14/insults-rape-threats-writers-online-harassment > .

[83] Beth Ribet, "Surfacing Disability Through a Critical Race Theoretical Paradigm" (2010) 2:2 Geo JL & Modern Critical Race Perspectives 209.

complicit enactment of racist and sexist violence that would make racialized women less likely to seek such supports.[84] Overall, racialized, disabled women may not have the same social capital in networks of supports and financial resources as many targeted white celebrities who are often the focus of coverage about TFV.

The online perpetrators described by my participants made deliberate attempts to remain anonymous, suggesting their awareness of the damaging effects of their behaviour and a willingness to invest the significant time and resources it can take to anonymize one's presence on Facebook. For instance, Petunia's description of transphobic violence on her Facebook page was levied via the very same networking features that she initially found exciting. The intended outcome of her activism was to draw the attention of supporters; however, the actual outcome was that the post drew the attention of the very perpetrators of violence she was trying to subvert. These interruptions in the circulation of supportive messaging — and, indeed, the intimidation targeting vocal supporters — have the impact of silencing transgender perspectives and people in online spaces. Although this attack occurred on Facebook, where accounts are meant to be linked to real individuals, Petunia described her difficulty in identifying transgender-exclusionists: "you go on their Facebook profile page and you're like 'hmm.' Because they have these super private pages that just have cartoon characters or something like that and you can't message them." It seems plausible that these profile pages were created by individuals who deliberately anonymized their online footprint to hide their real identity and prevent activists like Petunia from holding them accountable.

Platform policies, affordances, and limitations create a number of barriers that can discourage users from creating anonymized accounts, an outcome consistent with maximizing platform profitability since a lack of personal information relating to accounts can make them less valuable in the market of third-party advertisers.[85] That said, these barriers do not preclude the creation of fake accounts for the purposes of perpetrating violence, suggesting that the perpetrators reported by my participant were committed to spreading their violent acts without consequence.[86] Such perpetrators may also be part of online subcultures that share information about avoiding technical barriers that can impede enactment of online violence.[87] Going to lengths to anonymize one's account can help perpetrators to avoid the consequences of being linked to a perpetrating account, including exposure to legal repercussions.

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[84] Palmater, *supra* note 79; Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2017).

[85] José van Dijck & Thomas Poell, "Understanding Social Media Logic" (2013) 1:1 Media & Communication 2.

[86] Kate Crawford & Tarleton Gillespie, "What is a Flag For? Social Media Reporting Tools and the Vocabulary of Complaint" (2016) 18:3 New Media & Society 410; Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms'" (2010) 12:3 New Media & Society 347.

[87] Massanari, *supra* note 10.

Attempting to eliminate women from speaking out in public spaces is not new; however, creating toxic spaces is more easily facilitated through anonymous accounts. This type of violence is ambiguous, seeking to induce fear in the subject while simultaneously protecting the abuser from consequences by creating conditions of plausible deniability. Such attacks explicitly target marginalized individuals visibly producing and circulating content to end violence. The anonymity of the abuser also introduces more challenges in clearly determining the threat level. For instance, fear of the threat of violence kept Petunia from having a public Twitter account. In fact, she kept all her personal social media profiles private. "I'm able to control my profile," she reasoned, "I'm able to control my Instagram because it's private, my Twitter because it's private, my Facebook because it's private. But as soon as you open it up you don't know what you're opening it up to." For online activists intending to spread messages and online tools for anti-violence activism, having a public social media presence holds many benefits, including the expansion of online networks. These benefits, however, also make them more vulnerable to unwanted attention and violence.

(ii) ''People drag each other so hard'': TFV From Identifiable Sources

Social media platforms undeniably offer advantages for online activism efforts, especially around maintaining and building online relationships with established networks of friends and others within anti-violence communities. However, when I asked participants to elaborate on the challenges they faced in organizing and mobilizing towards anti-violence online, some specified a significant challenge they faced was being violently targeted by those that they otherwise expected to provide support. In some cases, this consisted of white women feminists who were also involved in the anti-violence sector in Canada. Others consisted of racialized men friends and family members. It could be difficult to identify these people with certainty, given the ease with which accounts and fake accounts can be created. However, like those interviewed in Jane's[88] research, participants of this research project indicated that they were able to identify these perpetrators because they were either known personally to participants, or they had encountered them in offline spaces.

First, Calla experienced and witnessed violence on Twitter primarily from those she identified as white women feminists. In expressing her perspective of Canadian feminist Twitter, she urged me to "watch feminists, and who they retweet, who they connect to, what their alliances are" as that "tells you a lot about this movement." She recalled from her own observation that "it's interesting watching this white woman [who self-identified as a feminist] bully a lot of women of colour online." She further mused that this woman "drags a lot of people and organizations."

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[88]   Emma Jane, "'Feminism is Eating Itself': Women's Experiences and Perceptions of Lateral Violence Online" in *The Emerald International Handbook of Technology Facilitated Violence and Abuse* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021) 88.

Calla's comments echo several high-profile incidents in the US, where white feminist backlash was unleashed on racialized women online. Using feminist hashtags and feminist online reports about the state of online feminist activism, some white women feminists have excluded the experiences and perspectives of racialized women, further marginalizing them and their experiences online and around violence.[89] But many racialized women have used social media, specifically hashtags, to publicly draw attention to the exclusion of racialized women in white feminist organizing. In reaction, some white feminists with large online followings blamed those racialized women for ultimately being responsible in making Twitter "toxic" for any feminist progress.[90] Mainstream journalists circulated these discussions, focusing on the role of racialized women in creating the toxic environment with their criticisms of feminism.[91] In many cases, the coverage tended to reinforce racist stereotypes about angry Black women, rather than engaging with and responding to the critiques being raised.[92]

Calla also noted that, apart from what she described as bullying racialized women, Canadian white feminists that she observes and interacts with on Twitter "have to get better at their trans inclusion shit. It's been a fight on Canadian Twitter feminism." For example, three participants made note of witnessing Canadian white feminists circulate transphobic messages within Canadian Twitter feminist communities. Calla's overall response to these transphobic attacks from anti-violence and feminist individuals whom she would otherwise expect to be an ally in the cause was that it "breaks [her] heart." This is to say that, instead of being supported by other feminists online, Calla, like many other racialized and transgender women, experienced violence at their hands.

Such violence is encouraged by online technologies. Calla made note of the logic behind women "dragging" other women on social media, illustrating this point:

> social media is built on dragging people [. . .] So when we drag people, it gains followers sometimes, right? And so it's a tactic, right? So a part of it is: I'm going to attack you and then I'm going to gain more followers [...] I think also, we need to check this hunger to have a platform, like a

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[89] Jessie Daniels, "The Trouble with White Feminism: Whiteness, Digital Feminism and the Intersectional Internet" in *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online* (Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 2016); Susana Loza, "Hashtag Feminism, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and the Other #FemFuture" (2014) 5 Ada: J Gender, New Media, & Technology, online: <dx.doi.org/10.7264/N337770V>; Sarah Jackson & Sonia Banaszczyk, "Digital Standpoints: Debating Gendered Violence and Racial Exclusions in the Feminist Counterpublic" (2016) 40:4 J Communication Inquiry 391.

[90] Michelle Goldberg, "Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars", *The Nation* (29 January 2014), online: <www.thenation.com/article/archive/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars/>; Adele Wilde-Blavatsky, "Stop Bashing White Women in the Name of Beyoncé: We Need Unity Not Division", *Huffington Post* (20 December 2013), online: <www.huffington-post.co.uk/adeletomlin-429/white-feminism_b_4477351.html?guccounter=1>.

[91] Goldberg, *ibid.*

[92] Daniels, *supra* note 89.

> hunger for more followers and how you get more followers because sometimes more followers bringing our attention is taking someone else out.

Here, Calla draws attention to how seeking and gaining popularity is a feature, not a bug — it is inherently embedded into the existential purpose of social platform design.[93] So, if dragging and bullying increase popularity, or if being dragged or bullied does, social media users will act accordingly. A change in platform design away from numeric indicators of popularity could be a very important step in shifting internet architecture away from encouraging violence.

Often, the activists who can align their narratives with mainstream media narratives are ones that get picked up and highlighted with more visibility.[94] While the issue of racialized women calling for more accountability from white women feminists circulated through mainstream media and popular online social media spaces, the daily occurrences of racism, sexism, and transphobia that racialized women face online was frequently ignored by mainstream media journalists and white feminists.[95] Incidents of toxicity on some white feminists' Twitter accounts may be critiqued as reflecting these women's inability to reckon with white supremacy, settler colonialism, and capitalism, and with the relation of these structures to white feminism,[96] but such critiques appear much less likely to make it to mainstream coverage.

The exclusion and vilifying of racialized women by some white women feminists follows a long history of racialized women being pushed out of mainstream feminist anti-violence spaces that are too often pervaded by racism and white supremacy. In the context of TFV, however, these actions are taken in a more visible manner through public Twitter and Facebook posts and comments, with the effect of keeping racialized women outside of feminist networks and online spaces dedicated to ending violence. As noted above, online design features can amplify polarization through likes, shares, and retweets that can bolster one side over another, but not necessarily the side that is most in need of increased visibility.[97] When white feminists are characterized as TFV victims, it is much more difficult to spot TFV targeting racialized women in the anti-violence online space. As Crenshaw[98] pointed out in relation to offline spaces, we

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[93]   van Dijck & Poell, *supra* note 85.

[94]   Pallavi Guha, "Hash Tagging but Not Trending: The Success and Failure of the News Media to Engage with Online Feminist Activism in India" (2015) 15:1 Feminist Media Studies 155; Whitney Philips, "The Oxygen of Amplification: Better Practices for Reporting on Extremists, Antagonists, and Manipulators" (March 2018), online: *Data & Society* .

[95]   Suey Park & David J Leonard, "In Defense of Twitter Feminism", *Model View Culture* (3 February 2014), online: < modelviewculture.com/pieces/in-defense-of-twitter-feminism > .

[96]   See e.g., Park & Leonard, *ibid.*

[97]   Deen Freelon, Alice Marwick & Daniel Kreiss, "False Equivalencies: Online Activism from Left to Right" (2020) 369:6508 Science 1197.

start to see how differences among women can lead to tension within feminist networks in online spaces.

Mardella also disliked Twitter, avoiding the space altogether and referring to it as a "toxic" space for many Indigenous people she knew. Unlike Calla's description of a call out culture between white feminists and non-white feminists, Mardella emphasized how different call out culture is within some Indigenous communities. She explained that:

> the call out culture is gross, and that's in other communities too. But, because we're still living under ongoing colonization and because our families and communities have been traumatized and disempowered in so many ways, we don't know how to relate to each other anymore in a good way and especially around recognizing and honouring each other's differences. So yeah, I just don't participate there.

Although, as Mardella stated, all communities contain some call out culture, she emphasized how calling others out over social media has been particularly harmful for many Indigenous people she knew. Although Indigenous people and communities across Canada are not monolithic and have diverse values, Mardella observed how Indigenous individuals attacking one another has become a survival mechanism in settler colonized spaces. She observed an online call out culture on Twitter that was unproductive in terms of building bridges amongst networks involved in Indigenous activism more broadly.

Such an online call out culture of some Indigenous people oppressing other Indigenous people is a part of a cycle of violence that stems from settler colonialism, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, and the intergenerational trauma caused by the effects of residential schooling, the child welfare system, the *Indian Act*, and ongoing racism Indigenous people face from non-Indigenous individuals and the government.[99] Some of these disputes are further caused by government colonization strategies that have created an environment where Indigenous people need to prove their Indigenous identity, and yet much of Indigenous people's culture has been undermined via residential schooling, and familial ties have been eroded as a consequence of the *Indian Act*.[100] More

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[98] Crenshaw, *supra* note 3.

[99] *Ibid.*

[100] *Ibid.* Under the *Indian Act*, from 1920 to 1948, residential school attendance for Indigenous children was mandatory and had a goal of assimilating Indigenous children and instilling in them Christian European values as a form of cultural genocide. As early as 1991, reports to the federal government indicated the rampant sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and death toll because of Indigenous children being forcibly taken and made to stay in residential schools, the last of which closed in Canada in 1996. However, even as residential schools closed across the country, the abduction of Indigenous children continued through the foster care system starting in the 1970s. When residential schools started closing, the federal government turned to the provinces to provide services to Indigenous communities, resulting in the mass adoption of Indigenous children into child welfare Canada, also known as the "Sixties Scoop," which took place between 1960 and 1990. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "The

specifically, the *Indian Act*, residential school abuse, and the child welfare system in Canada have all been linked directly to negative consequences at the community level.[101] For instance, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identified the lasting cultural impacts of residential schools, including "the loss of language through forced English speaking, the loss of traditional ways of being on the land, the loss of parenting skills through the absence of four or five generations of children from Native communities, and the learned behaviour of despising Native identity."[102] These findings were further confirmed in the report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.[103] Mardella's comment points to a more subtle cultural manifestation of these lasting impacts of settler colonization visible in relationships between Indigenous community members on Twitter.

Violent experiences perpetrated through a call out culture, however, were not unique to Twitter. Calla saw Facebook as more toxic than Twitter because she was constantly under harassment from friends and family. "I find with Facebook," she observed, "people drag each other so hard. I find it less toxic on Twitter actually." Calla noticed more negative judgement on Facebook than from her Twitter networks, even though her Facebook networks consisted of more close friends and family members than Twitter. "There's like a one-upmanship thing," she noted, "where it's all 'I'm more this than you' and, 'oh you said this thing, but did you remember this thing?' It just feels like everybody knows you, it feels really smaller [on Facebook]. Twitter, it feels like there's more anonymity to it. People don't think they know you so you can shape your own story a little bit more." Her comment illuminates how Facebook's design facilitates judgement and critique. As detailed in the previous section, Facebook encourages friends to share personal information and allows others to react and respond via likes and comments.

Facebook's design seemed to further perpetuate Petunia's experience of receiving online attacks through call outs from her close Facebook networks. However, her attacks were directed at her when she posted generally about feminism or anti-violence. She further noted that these attacks were originating

> from men like family members, men from school and stuff. They won't be scary violent but they troll, but that could just be a nuisance, but they do it, and they try to push your buttons [. . .] they do it because

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Survivors Speak: A Report on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada" (2015), online (pdf): <ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Survivors_Speak_English_Web.pdf> [TRCC].

[101] TRCC, *ibid.* See also Cindy Blackstock, "Residential Schools: Did they Really Close or Just Morph into Child Welfare?" (2007) 6:1 Indigenous LJ, online: <jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ilj/article/view/27665>.

[102] Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, "Volume 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back" (1996) at 362, online: <www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/royal-commission-aboriginal-peoples/Pages/final-report.aspx>.

[103] TRCC, *supra* note 100.

> they just like to see women mad, which is very, "dude, do you get off on this?"

Networks of Facebook friends and family differed from her Twitter network of followers where those potentially closest to her and who knew more about her were connected with her on Facebook. Twitter, on the other hand, made her feel more anonymous as her network of followers was primarily made up of acquaintances and strangers.

These anecdotes reflect Cho's[104] findings on why racialized, queer youth avoid platforms like Facebook in favour of others, like Tumblr. Cho revealed how specific design features of Facebook related to its objective to collect and profit from personal user data extraction created an environment that resulted in negative experiences for queer racialized youth, such as being outed to family and friends. These imperatives shaped the design of Facebook to one that is public by default, meaning that users are tied not only to their "real" identities, but where their content is easily networked and made more visible to family members and friends, many of whom do not accept queerness. This further demonstrates how activists trying to build a brand around themselves run into difficulty when relying on their personal Facebook profile to connect to larger networks while simultaneously dealing with interpersonal attacks coming from family members and friends.

Despite the differences in the networks for some of the participants, both Twitter and Facebook were similar in co-constructing a culture of toxicity from known users towards those involved in anti-violence online activism. The participants in this study shared experiences of TFV inflicted by those who were easily identifiable to them, including white women feminists and family members or friends. Significantly, these individuals were otherwise assumed to be a part of their supportive networks. Yet, this group was easily identifiable because they often used their personal accounts to "bully," "call out,"[105] and "drag" other users, and to create an overall "toxic" environment for participants. Thelandersson[106] asserted that Twitter conflicts such as these are just a form of self-reflexivity and a safe space for feminists to learn and engage with intersectionality. Yet, from the perceptions of these participants, such experiences are less individual conflicts and more instances of TFV tied to the larger, contextual role of forms of oppression that take place within feminist anti-violence spaces. In this context, many identifiable online perpetrators act paradoxically as "simultaneously oppressor and oppressed."[107]

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[104] Cho, *supra* note 75.

[105] Refers to being publicly shamed.

[106] Fredrika Thelandersson, "A Less Toxic Feminism: Can the Internet Solve the Age-Old Question of How to Put Intersectional Theory into Practice?" (2014) 14:3 Feminist Media Studies 527.

[107] Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination" in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) at 225.

(iii) ''An unintended kind of result'': Unexpected Sources of TFV

The visibility and amplification of the activists' online work via social media networking, specifically through a "context collapse" of social media networks, brought about what I call unexpected forms of TFV. A context collapse refers to the collapsing of multiple social groups into a singular online networked group of friends or followers.[108] The TFV described in this section arose from the practice of describing violence. Some participants rely on sharing stories of violence on social media as a strategy to raise awareness of violence experienced by racialized women; however, for some women who have been targeted by violence, details about these stories can be retraumatizing.

Participants pointed to some backlash from people who had experienced violence, objecting to some of the content they were sharing, especially graphic details of violence. Initially, Azami assumed that by employing an intersectional and specifically anti-colonial analysis, her podcast about the violence facing Indigenous women would serve as another reminder of the ongoing and persistent violence Indigenous communities face in Canada. She did not expect it to take on a violent quality of its own:

> One thing that I have heard from Indigenous communities or people is that it's difficult to listen [to these stories on the podcast]. Actually some people say they can't listen to it and I understand that, and I told my own family in particular that they shouldn't feel like they have to listen to it because we don't need to be educated in the same way about the trauma that we've experienced and we don't need to understand the history of residential schools or the legacies of colonization because these are realities that we live with and are still living with. It was not backlash but maybe an unintended kind of result that for Indigenous people in particular it could be triggering[109] or traumatizing to listen to.

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[108] Alice E Marwick & danah boyd, "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience" (2011) 13:1 New Media & Society 114, online: < doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313 >.

[109] Being triggered within the context of trauma in the anti-violence community often refers to people who have suffered through a traumatic psychological experience and unexpectedly revisit that experience of trauma. The term ''trigger warnings'' has existed for decades in the anti-violence sector but has recently made its way into mainstream discourses, where its efficacy has been debated in, for instance, academic and social media spaces. Slate online magazine proclaimed 2013 to be the ''year of the trigger warning''. Although this term has also been co-opted by white people who want to remove themselves from participating in anti-racism conversations and interventions, trigger warnings can be useful to mentally prepare those who need them about upcoming graphic details of violence. Roxane Gay, "The Illusion of Safety/The Safety of Illusion", (28 August 2012), online: < therumpus.net/2012/08/the-illusion-of-safetythe-safety-of-illusion/ >; Amanda Marcotte, "The Year of the Trigger Warning", *Slate Magazine* (30 December 2013), online: < slate.com/human-interest/2013/12/trigger-warnings-from-the-feminist-blogosphere-to-shonda-rhimes-in-2013.html >.

Her comment demonstrates that the digital tools and content she created were meant for an audience who had little to no awareness of violence against Indigenous women and their communities. However, because of the lack of control over how such content spreads online, the audience is not guaranteed. As such, although Azami felt that non-Indigenous people needed to hear these stories to understand the realities of such violence, an unexpected outcome of her anti-violence education was that some Indigenous people could endure re-traumatization if they chose to listen to these stories.

Similarly, the ubiquity of trending hashtags such as #MeToo[110] advocating for anti-violence have been picked up by mainstream media, but these developments have left some of the participants in this study with mixed feelings. Nox, for instance, spoke about how #MeToo drew attention to an issue of anti-violence that has gone unnoticed for a long time. "I think it's so phenomenal," she said. She continued to explain

> that through social media you can start movements so easily and it's allowing a safe platform essentially for people to share their stories. So, it's becoming much harder for intimate partner violence to be hidden because there's a space in which to talk about it and there's other people sharing those same experiences and that gives you a lot more courage to share your story and it's being viewed by the general public all over the world.

Her comments are reminiscent of much of the media and research narratives that emphasize the positive potentials of feminist online activism, specifically around hashtag feminism, such as findings that women find solidarity with, and comfort from, other strangers who have experienced similar violence[111] and who contribute to a collective affective response to their shared experiences of violence.[112]

Another participant, on the other hand, found the trending and virality of #MeToo to be overwhelming at times:

> So #MeToo, I remember being at home and seeing it and [the hashtag] would keep popping up, and I was like 'this is a lot.' And especially when you do the [activism], people want to tell me this stuff all the time and guess what? I get to decide when I hear those stories, how I hear those stories, who's going to tell me those stories.

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[110] The MeToo movement originated with the organizing of Black US activist Tarana Burke. The tagline was co-opted and circulated as a hashtag in 2017 when white celebrity Alyssa Milano tweeted the hashtag with a call to action against sexual harassment.

[111] Rosemary Clark, "'Hope in a Hashtag': The Discursive Activism of #WhyIStayed" (2016) 16:5 Feminist Media Studies 788 — 804; Jessalynn Keller, Kaitlynn Mendes & Jessica Ringrose, "Speaking 'Unspeakable Things': Documenting Digital Feminist Responses to Rape Culture" (2018) 27:1 J Gender Studies 22; Carrie A Rentschler, "Rape Culture and the Feminist Politics of Social Media" (2014) 7:1 Girlhood Studies, online: < berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/girlhood-studies/7/1/ghs070106.xml >.

[112] Rentschler, *ibid.*

The violence that occurred following the social media cycle of #MeToo served as a site of re-traumatization for some.[113] For those involved in the front-line of anti-violence work, there was a noticeable increase in calls from women to rape crisis centres following #MeToo[114] landing on an already poorly resourced and understaffed anti-violence community.[115] Some may choose to avoid certain types of media, but social media feeds are unpredictable. Unanticipated exposure to graphic depictions of violence can be a retraumatizing event for those who have experienced violence when it is shared as a constant reminder of the ease with which violence occurs.[116] Additionally, on social media, others may be speaking in support of perpetrators, which can cause further revictimization to those who have experienced similar violence. Many users, including some of my participants, wanted their social media use to be activist but also a form of entertainment and a way of staying connected with family and friends. Yet, a consistent and pervasive context collapse prevented participants from making their own choices about when and how they viewed violent content.

In another instance of unexpected contributions to TFV, one participant was told that she was contributing to the dispersal of violent messages online after she shared images of violent messages she received because of her activism. She shared a screenshot of some of the constant vitriol she received with her online community. Some people within her network were triggered by a screenshot shared detailing explicit and graphic violence she was enduring. Calla told me that her response to those who are triggered by her posts was: "well, yeah, it's really triggering when I get it." Although sharing stories about the experience of violence can be helpful in demonstrating solidarity,[117] not all those who have experienced violence want to be exposed to graphic depictions of violence while they scroll through their social media news feeds. There is a tradeoff between sharing the content and potentially triggering those who see it, but there is also a risk of further silencing those experiencing violence by not sharing them. However, with social media platforms, there is little control over where messages, which contain the potential for both harm and liberation, may land.

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[113] Henry & Powell, *supra* note 17; Gabrielle Noel, "No One Can Escape the Sexual Violence Discourse on Social Media", (11 March 2020), online: *Bitch Media* <www.bitchmedia.org/article/harvey-weinstein-and-triggering-social-media>.

[114] "Rape Crisis Centre Struggling to Keep Up with #MeToo Surge", *CBC News* (3 February 2018), online: <www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/ottawa-rape-crisis-centre-more-calls-me-too-1.4507275>; Rebecca Joseph, "#MeToo, 1 Year Later: Canadian Sexual Assault Crisis Centres Report Record Number of Calls" (5 October 2018), online: *Global News* <globalnews.ca/news/4519574/metoo-1-year-later-canada/>.

[115] Rodgers, *supra* note 69.

[116] Noel, *supra* note 113.

[117] See Clark, *supra* note 111; Tetyana Lokot, "#IAmNotAfraidToSayIt: Stories of Sexual Violence as Everyday Political Speech on Facebook" (2018) 21:6 Information, Communication & Society 802, online: <www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1430161>.

Such unexpected TFV illustrates that participants both experienced violence and caused it. For some people — including some of my participants — who describe experiencing retraumatization from reading descriptions of violence as a form of violence, this creates a significant dilemma about how they can do their work without harming others. Similar problems arise in mainstream media, where news coverage of sexual violence cases becomes sensationalized to attract readers. Instead, activists have urged mainstream media to use a trauma-informed approach when reporting on instances of violence, and it seems as if these approaches could also be applied to those who are using social media to discuss cases of violence.[118] Such instances also complicate the labour of racialized women in purging racist and sexist content from the Internet[119] because, on the one hand, by calling attention to the instance of violence publicly for it to be removed, they could also be contributing to the violence that others face. Therefore, although we could assume that educating the public on racism and sexism benefits everyone, the result is a form of trauma-inducing violence that racialized women disproportionately experience.[120]

Similarly, some of my participants experienced violence from victims of violence in need of support. Calla admitted that her experience of online "harassment sometimes doesn't come from people who were trolls, it comes from survivors who are in a really bad place that are like, 'I need you to help me, you need to fix this.'" She recollected one such experience:

> I've had people even show up to my office that saw me online. One person showed up hysterically crying, telling my staff that I need to meet with her, why haven't I emailed her back, she messaged me on social media. I only work with this [local] community but it seems that because of my online profile that I should meet with her and that I owed it to her to work with her and I should work with everybody [. . .] I can show you the amount of messages I get that are graphic experiences of their own forms of violence which are horrible.

In this example, information about Calla's workplace was easily accessible online on her professional website. Violence from those who have experienced violence demanding help indicates a mirroring of the offline constraints and limited support and resources faced by so many in Canada. But when these women who experienced violence perceived themselves as having been rejected for help, my participants themselves sometimes became the target of further violence in a ripple effect. Those who have experienced violence and need support have become violent towards online activists in ways that include traumatizing

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[118] See The Represent Project, "Sexual Assault Awareness Month — 5 Questions to Ask Yourself About Media Coverage of Sexual Assault" (6 May 2013), online: <represetmedia.wordpress.com/2013/05/06/sexual-assault-awareness-month-5-questions-to-ask-yourself-about-media-coverage-of-sexual-assault/>.

[119] Nakamura, *supra* note 67.

[120] *Ibid.*

strategies like stalking, coming to an individual's place of work to demand support, and providing unsolicited graphic details of violence. However, the survivor's articulation of violence needs to be understood within a larger, systemically violent structure that perpetuates and reinforces the violence that women face, one facet of this structure being that anti-violence support services are consistently defunded and unavailable to those in need of support.

Social support for anti-violence is being harmed by instances of TFV, leading to the abandonment of activism in online spaces or activism altogether by some of the women I interviewed. This does a disservice to their activism and to the larger collective goal of increasing visibility of the anti-violence activism of racialized women. As things stand, white feminists receive more likes and retweets from their networks, as these networks seem more likely to be larger and to include more elite and key actors or influencers than those of racialized women. Within all experiences of TFV described, the violence was facilitated and amplified by the participants' use of Twitter and Facebook to increase the visibility of their messages about anti-violence. Yet, unlike the discourses of online violence primarily focused on white women and their experiences of violence, my study reveals the various ways in which TFV involves more than just sexualized and gendered oppressions, and more than just anonymous raids. Despite the promise that social media provided my participants, many also continued to face oppression facilitated and amplified by social media technologies.

3. CONCLUSION

By taking an intersectional approach, this study centres the experiences of TFV of nine racialized women, some of whom also identify as queer and disabled, involved in online activism around anti-violence in Canada. An intersectional framework was also applied to expand my understanding of violence that women face to a broader category beyond instances of IPV and sexual violence. Such a framework broadens violence to include less obvious structural dimensions that dehumanize and reinforce physical violence against certain marginalized groups. With this understanding of violence, I mapped out the experiences shared with me from participants about the challenges they faced because of their online participation around anti-violence. My results underscore the importance of expanding definitions of TFV beyond a single-axis of analysis (gender or race-only approaches) and of including structural violence that contributes to interpersonal, violent attacks. Otherwise, we are missing out on experiences impacting women from some of the most marginalized communities.

This paper first reveals how my participants' perspectives and experiences of TFV differed in specific ways that were tied not just to their perceived gender, but also to their race, abilities, sexuality, and gender. Violent attacks they experienced were not just based on misogyny. Additional characteristics of these TFV attacks included the use of racist, homophobic, and/or transphobic messages that would otherwise remain hidden under gender-only approaches.

Secondly, this paper reveals that sources of TFV went beyond anonymous trolls or online mobs. Perpetrators of TFV in this study also included other activists, peers, others who have experienced violence, and family members who were known to the participants. On Twitter and Facebook, all connections become friends, even connections who may otherwise be total strangers.[121] This confusion of networked connections may create dangerous exposure for many users.[122] Chun and Friedland asserted that much online violence occurs between those who are connected as friends in online networks and that assumptions about safety and TFV on social media (especially Facebook) are based on stranger-danger myths, where the anonymous troll is assumed to be the only danger to users.[123] My findings build on and further support this argument. A focus on exclusively the experiences of online mobs or anonymous attacks hides the many ways the participants in this study described supposed allies, peers, and family as causing TFV. This echoes key insights on physical violence in interesting ways.

Finally, a few experiences that I mapped as TFV showed that my participants, and other survivors of violence, were also perpetrating some forms of violence, highlighting the complexities and context-specific nature of addressing violence. These experiences of violence and perpetration were, arguably, significantly facilitated by the technological context, which created context collapse and meant that participants could be contacted in real life.

The participants in this study had to weigh the benefits and the challenges of having an online persona. Within all experiences of online violence described, the violence was facilitated and amplified by the participants' use of Twitter and Facebook to increase the visibility of their messages about anti-violence. To be impactful, online activists need to make their posts publicly available. Indeed, it benefits their cause to use the features of social media platforms to expand their networks and their public visibility, but that public visibility is a double-edged sword: in the hands of perpetrators, activists' online presence had the potential to expose them to TFV. Despite the promise of "safe space" that social media policies and terms of conditions provided these participants, they still faced violence facilitated and amplified by social media technologies. Social support for anti-violence is being harmed by TFV, leading to the abandonment of activism in online spaces (or activism altogether) by some of the women I interviewed. This does a disservice to their activism and to the larger collective goal. It may also increase the visibility of white feminists who remain online.

This paper has provided empirical evidence to support the need for continued research on the experiences and perspectives of TFV facing marginalized groups. Future research should ensure a broad approach to

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[121] Marwick & boyd, *supra* note 108.

[122] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun & Sarah Friedland, "Habits of Leaking: Of Sluts and Network Cards" (2015) 26:2 Differences 1.

[123] *Ibid.*

investigating online experiences in order to avoid mapping existing narrow understandings of violence. Broadening our understanding of what is happening online will certainly increase the complexity of the picture but centring the experiences of women at the margins is especially important given the history of feminist reform efforts and their sometimes ''unexpected'' impacts on women who are not in the mainstream. This kind of research will enable a more careful exploration of the risks and benefits of a variety of currently proposed responses.