

**Online Communication in the Digital Age**  
**Prof. Rashmi Gaur**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology**  
**Lecture – 53**  
**Digital Feminist Interventions**

Good morning dear friends and welcome to this module. In the previous module, we had continued our discussion on digital sexualities and had also explored concepts pertaining to sexual citizenship. Today we will talk about the formations of feminism as well as diverse feminist communities that exist and are being expanded through digital media and technologies in the current cultural movement. We will also examine online gender performances through hashtag activism and gender-based violence mediated in online communication. New formations of feminism and diverse feminist communities do exist in today's feminist zeitgeist. They are reimagined and expanded through the use of new media.

Participatory digital media has become an activist tool to dialogue, network and challenge contemporary sexism, misogyny and rape culture.

## Digital Feminist Interventions

- Digital Feminism encompasses the ways in which digital platforms and technologies are used to advance feminist goals, advocate for gender equality, and challenge patriarchal norms.
- Key aspects of Digital Feminism include online activism, cyberfeminism, online communities, media representations, hashtag activism, feminist blogging etc.
- Digital feminism cannot be merely understood via digital artifacts, but through social and cultural processes and their entanglement with technologies.
  - In the digital sphere, sexual violence is heavily gendered, with those occupying 'feminized' bodies bearing the brunt of sexism as well as homophobic, transphobic and other forms of hate.



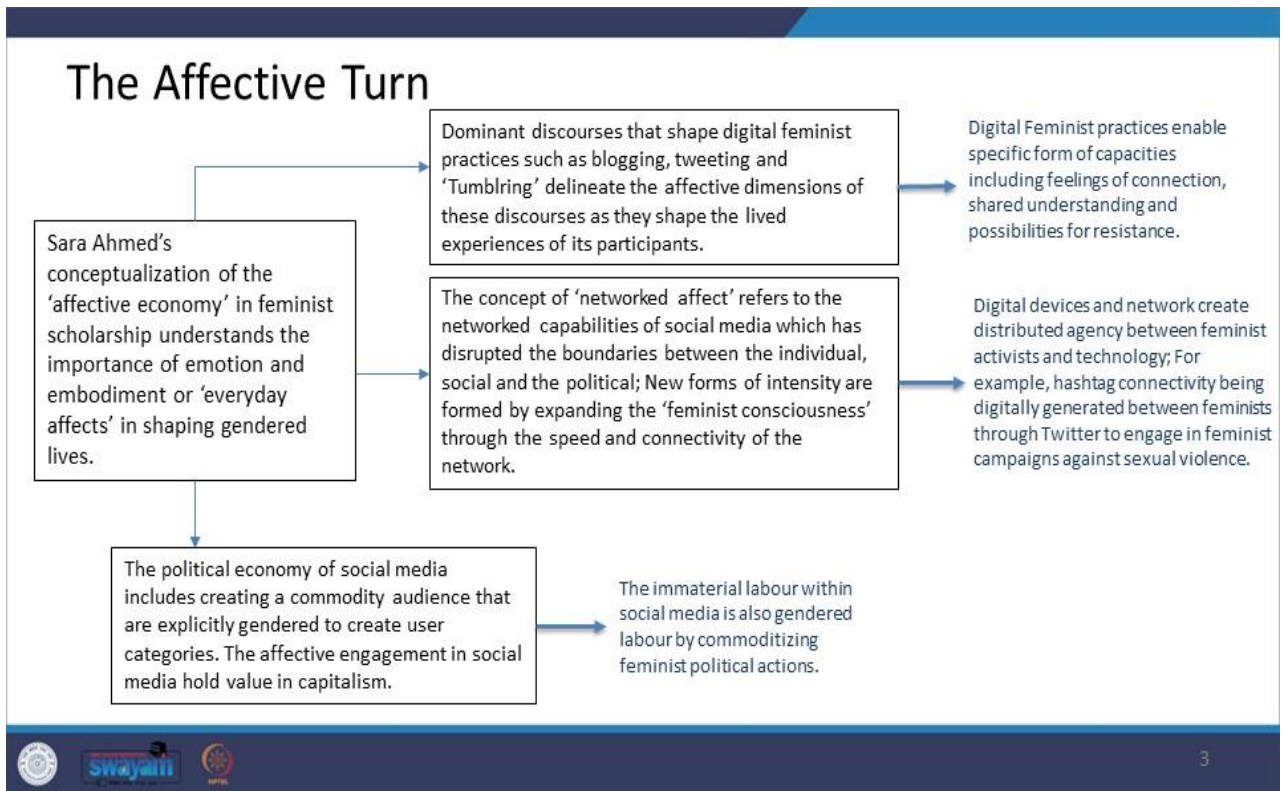
Examples of online communities and hashtags that represent digital feminism

Sources: montrealgazette.com, whoneedfeminism.tumblr.com, www.tstcompany.com



Digital feminism encompasses the ways in which digital platforms and technologies are used to advance feminist goals, advocate for gender equality and challenge conventional patriarchal norms. Key aspects of digital feminism include online activism, cyber feminism, online communities, media representations, hashtag activism, feminist blogging, etc. Digital feminism should not be merely understood via digital artefacts but it has to be understood also through social and cultural processes and their entanglement with contemporary digital technologies.

In the digital sphere, sexual violence is heavily gendered with those occupying feminized bodies bearing the brunt of sexism as well as homophobic, transphobic and different other forms of hate and isolation. The changing media landscape and rise of digital technologies have enabled a mediated misogyny that disseminates and perpetuates gendered abuse. Digital platforms such as blogs, Twitter and Tumblr offer platforms to resist this through community support. They also disrupt the male gaze and challenge it through discursive cultural and political activism. Let us look at the political economy of social media to understand the 'networked affect' that underpins the analysis of digital feminism and the marginalized voices in digital spaces.



We would refer to the work of Sara Ahmed. Her conceptualization of the affective economy of the feminist scholarship understands the importance of emotion and embodiment or everyday affects in shaping gendered lives. Dominant discourses that shape digital feminist practices such as blogging, etc. delineate the affective dimensions of these discourses as they shape the lived experiences of its participants. The concept of networked affect refers to the networked capabilities of social media which has disrupted the boundaries between the individual, social and the political.

New forms of intensity are formed by expanding the feminist consciousness through the speed and connectivity of the internet. Digital feminist practices enable specific form of capacities including feelings of connection, shared understandings and also possibilities for resistance. Digital devices and network create distributed agency between feminist activists and technology. For example, hashtag connectivity being digitally generated between feminists through Twitter to engage in feminist campaigns against sexual violence is an example. The political economy of social media includes creating a commodity audience that are explicitly gendered to create user categories.


The affective engagement in social media also holds value in capitalism. The immaterial labor within social media is also gendered labor by commoditizing feminist

political actions. Sara Ahmed's idea of affective economies describes among other things how emotions bind subjects together into collectivities, taking on a life of their own through circulation and exchange. Her conceptualization of affect is discussed across all her major works. For example, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, *KillJoy*, etc.


It draws on the ways in which feminism is experienced, circulated and responded to. For example, there is an affective intensity generated by clicking the like button on a Facebook or Instagram post. These are rewards that provide a legitimacy for continued engagement with the site and its neoliberal policies. One of the ways in which we see the affective intensities in digital platforms is through digital feminist activism. It aims to challenge patriarchal norms and advocates gender equality.

Hashtag feminism is a specific form of digital feminist activism. It involves using hashtags on social media platforms to raise awareness, to mobilize support and also to amplify feminist messages.

- ***Hashtag feminism***, through the use of hashtags, creates a virtual space where victims of inequality can coexist together in a space that acknowledges their pain, narration and isolation.
  - This disrupts how society views misogynistic violence and perpetuates a counter-narrative that condones gender oppression and normalization of sexual entitlement.

<p><b>Hashtag feminism as creating 'Intimate Publics'</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lauren Berlant's 'Intimate Publics' is defined as the "affect of feeling political together" that people may experience as they rally around a hashtag.</li> <li>• Hashtags create a collective digital space and visibility for virtual feminist communities by developing a shared language of emotion and meaning.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Embracing Intersectionality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hashtags have larger potentials to offer alternative depictions of minorities and to be a place where marginalizing and stereotypical racial portrayals can be contested and refined.</li> <li>• They offer safe spaces for intersectional representation as hashtags are <i>self-defined</i> and not produced by white men or mainstream media gatekeepers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Hashtag Slacktivism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The technology fetish can foster an illusion of solidarity through the internet, such as posting a hashtag.</li> <li>• This follows the concept of 'slacktivism', combination of slacker and activism, which is engaging in a cheap and low-risk activism.</li> </ul>	
---	--	--	---

Source: papaelele.wordpress.com



4

Hashtag feminism through the use of hashtags creates a virtual space where victims of inequality can coexist together in a space that acknowledges their pain, narration and

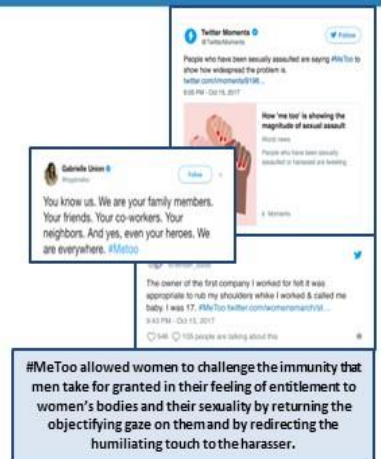
isolation. Hashtags create a collective digital space and visibility for virtual feminist communities by developing a shared language of emotion and meaning. This disrupts how society views misogynistic violence and perpetuates a counter narrative that condones gender oppression and normalization of sexual entitlement.

Hashtags have larger potentials to offer alternative depictions of minorities and to be a place where marginalizing and stereotypical racial portrayals can be contested and refined. They also offer safe spaces for intersectional representations as hashtags are self-defined and not produced by white men or mainstream media gatekeepers. Hashtag slacktivism, the technology fetish which can foster an illusion of solidarity through the internet such as posting a hashtag is important for the feminist cause. This follows the concept of slacktivism that is a combination of slacker and activism which is engaging in a cheap and low risk activism. Hashtag feminism is also creating intimate publics.

Lauren Berlant's idea of intimate publics is defined as the affect of feeling political together that people may experience as they rally around a hashtag. Despite the fact that hashtags foster a specific agency by allowing women to define and articulate their feminism and to define their space online, this computer mediated tool also has some limitations. Anti-feminist hashtags like *HowToSpotAFeminist* may again form a disciplinary rhetoric around women. Most activists have long sought to challenge sexual violence and harassment perpetrated against the women and the marginalized groups. The flood of participation in MeToo movement reaffirmed publicly just how widespread sexual assaults are that most victim survivors know the offender and significantly these experiences are taken as routine and normalized confirming many feminist arguments about rape culture.

## #MeToo Case Study

- #MeToo is an exemplary use of hashtag feminism for the purpose of consciousness-raising against sexual assault and to create a space for survivors to come together and build a community of healing and trust.
- The question of whether #MeToo could go beyond white neoliberal feminism was put into the forefront.
  - It was said to replicate the essential tendencies of neoliberal feminism by making it the responsibility of the victim to come forward with the trauma of sexual violence as opposed to drawing it back to the patriarchal social structures and systemic inequality.
  - However, #MeToo was able to create a transnational social movement by demonstrating collective experiences of inequality and highlighting the interplay of the individual and the collective.
- It forged a community of women globally across the world.



Sources: medium.com, marshallparthenon.com, hrdag.org



Swajati



We can take the MeToo hashtag as an exemplary use of hashtag feminism for the purpose of consciousness raising against sexual assault and to create a space for survivors to come together and build a community of healing and trust. The question of whether this movement could go beyond white neoliberal feminism was also put into the forefront. It was said to replicate the essential tendencies of neoliberal feminism by making it the responsibility of the victim to come forward with the trauma of sexual violence as opposed to drawing it back to the patriarchal social structures and systematic inequalities built within every society. However, the MeToo movement was able to create a transnational social movement by demonstrating collective experiences of inequality and highlighting the interplay of the individual and the collective. It therefore forged a community of women globally across the world and across different cultures.

Let us look at a video put forth by the economist about how the hashtag MeToo movement has sparked a defining chapter in gender relations across the world. In this video, we look at women from Pretoria, South Africa protesting about the country's high rates of rape as well as femicide that is the deliberate murder of women inspired by the global impact of MeToo.

The Economist

@ALYSSA\_MILANO • 15 OCTOBER 2017

IF YOU'VE BEEN SEXUALLY HARASSED OR ASSAULTED  
WRITE "ME TOO" AS A REPLY TO THIS TWEET.

TWEET

#Me Too: The Global Impact

Source:  
[https://youtu.be/ATYK2svJ5eM?si=wZl3GaeqBw\\_a89lna](https://youtu.be/ATYK2svJ5eM?si=wZl3GaeqBw_a89lna)

swajani SAPTA

6

We are at a historic tipping point for women. In October 2017, the hashtag MeToo spread across the globe. What began as a Hollywood sexual assault scandal sparked a public reckoning around the world.

Thousands of women are using two words on social media to identify themselves as survivors of sexual harassment and assault. A watershed moment. New laws have been passed and powerful men have been forced to step down, face arrest and conviction. But now, MeToo is igniting wider debates. About the ability of legal systems to deliver justice.

About how men should behave around women. And about the battle for gender equality. First you had MeToo and now you have Now What. Pretoria, South Africa. Inspired by the global MeToo movement, these women are protesting about the country's high rates of rape and femicide, the deliberate murder of women.

In South Africa, the number of women killed by a partner or family member is five times higher than the global average. Avella Faye is one of the organisers. Like many of the protesters, Avella has been personally affected by femicide. At the age of 13, I lost my mother to femicide. She was brutally murdered in her own home and the perpetrators

are free, they're roaming the streets.

So not only was I failed by someone we knew as a family, but we were failed by the justice system. Nevertheless, MeToo movement has also been criticised for its lack of intersectional awareness. Its exclusion of LGBTQI plus community and its struggle in reaching the point of global feminism have also been criticised. The hashtag movement of BeenRapedNeverReported is another hashtag that highlights how Twitter and hashtag feminism create new possibilities for feminist identification, experience, organising and resistance. This hashtag functions as both a discursive and affective intervention into dominant public discourse about rape culture and sexual violence in the digital space.

## #BeenRapedNeverReported and Rape Culture

- #BeenRapedNeverReported is an instance of discursive activism because it contextualizes rape culture within wider systems of power inequalities and oppression.

Feminist intersectional critique mobilized in relation to the hashtag pointed out the politics of inclusivity within online feminist communities.

Users also highlighted gender and sexual identities, particularly trans identities, as reasons for not reporting the assaults.

The tweets also locate their critiques within the violence of colonialism as a context for the ongoing violence against indigenous girls and women, signified by the #MMIW (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women).

The hashtag brought about the clear connection between racist discursive constructions about black women's sexuality and contemporary rape culture, and points out the distinctiveness about black women's experience with rape.

"I still worry about how many other trans women he's preyed upon because I didn't report #BeenRapedNeverReported"

"Black women rarely report rape because this nation has been taught that we are UnRapeable #BeenRapedNeverReported"

"Settler colonialism equals state violence against indigenous women #MMIW #BeenRapedNeverReported"

The infographic features a central bullet point and several callout boxes connected by red lines. The callout boxes contain text and quotes related to the hashtag movement. The bottom of the infographic includes logos for Swajanti and other organizations, and the number 7.

This hashtag movement can be seen as an instance of discursive activism because it contextualises rape culture within wider systems of power inequalities and oppression. Feminist intersectional critique mobilised in relation to the hashtag pointed out the politics of inclusivity within online feminist communities. Users also highlighted gender and sexual identities, particularly trans identities as reasons for not reporting the assault. The tweets also locate their critiques within the violence of colonialism as a context for the ongoing violence against indigenous girls and women signified by the MMIW, that is missing and murdered indigenous women. The hashtag brought about the clear




connection between racist discursive constructions about black women's sexuality and contemporary rape culture.


It also points out the distinctiveness about black women's experiences with rape. The hashtags evoked a range of emotions among women worldwide that forged an affective solidarity. We should also keep in mind that while the mainstream media provides much needed publicity for sexual violence, it also opens the hashtags to those who are hostile to feminist politics leading to a digitally mediated misogyny. There are also feminist political projects which use the corporeal bodies as sites of resistance. Unlike their digital counterparts, they fall short in their attempt to re-appropriate patriarchal signifiers despite their attempt to show the ways in which power contestations are played out via the gendered body.

The translational debates regarding the two movements, femem and slutwalk, are the central tensions that underpin contemporary feminism and which have largely been played out within contemporary digital spaces.

## SlutWalk and Femen



- SlutWalk's agenda was to challenge the word 'slut' and the mainstream use of degrading words around sexuality and sexual assault and to re-appropriate it to use it in an empowering way.
- Online commentary against SlutWalk as a posterchild of 'feminism' (in its mix of feminist language and rejection of the feminist label) emerged.
- The webpages have talked for and against the movement; Slutwalk had a problematic normalization of sexual expression that was at once exclusive for cis-gendered, white women and offered little space for women of colour in their performative or corporeal politics. They were also criticized for embodying heterosexual male fantasies of women's sexuality and attracting the male gaze.
- However, websites like 'The Guardian' documented the development and the subsequent debates of the movement with contributions from well-established feminists.



- FEMEN protested the predominance of sex tourism, trafficking and gender subordination in Ukraine.
- It's global offshoots faced backlash mainly through online platforms because of its 'sextremism' that emphasized female nudity as a strategy of liberation.
- It has been criticized for reproducing hegemonic femininity that foregrounds naked white female bodies that conform to heteronormative beauty ideals.

Sources: [www.trendhunter.com](http://www.trendhunter.com), [www.rfi.fr](http://www.rfi.fr)

8

The agenda of the slut walk was to challenge the word slut and the mainstream use of degrading words about sexuality and sexual assault and to re-appropriate it to use in an empowering way. However, online commentary against slutwalk as poster child of

feminism in a derogatory manner also emerged soon and the web pages have talked in favour as well as in against the movement. Websites like The Guardian documented the development and the subsequent debates of the movement with contributions from well-established feminists. Femen protested the predominance of sex tourism, trafficking and gender subordination in Ukraine.

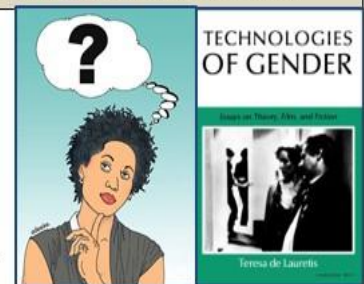
Its global offshoots faced backlash mainly through online platforms because of its 'sextremism' that emphasised female nudity as a strategy of liberation. Femen's nudity as performance also functions through the inclusion of only the quote unquote desirable female body. We have to keep in mind that women have always been associated with the consumption of media rather than its production. Self-representation in these social media sites is deeply intertextual. It re-appropriates varied images and conventions that are commonly seen in women's magazines and the fashion and beauty industries.

It continues to reproduce and reinforce hegemonic notions of gender and an idealised femininity that focuses on narrow conceptions of attractiveness and sexiness often moving into a discourse of sexiness as empowerment. Social networking sites interestingly can also be treated as technologies of gender.

## Social Networking Sites as Technologies of Gender

Teresa de Lauretis's work *Technologies of Gender* (1987) draws on the idea that gender is 'constructed' and is enacted through a series of performances, repeated stylizations of the body that is operating within a specific cultural frame.

- Gender is the product of representation and self-representation; It is seen as the outcome of various social technologies like cinema as well as social networking sites.
  - Self-representations on social networking sites can be seen as gendered performances; The use of a series of 'filters' reproduce socially and culturally accepted gendered conventions, such as the idea of women as essentially constructed as 'to-be-looked-at'.
- The process of constructing gender is related to the notion of power.
  - The visibility of women's self-representations also implies personal agency as an embodied subject and becomes a kind of 'activism' to seek control and to take pleasure in their own images.
  - It creates a double consciousness of being a subject and an object.



Sources: perlego.com, tribuneonline.com



swajani

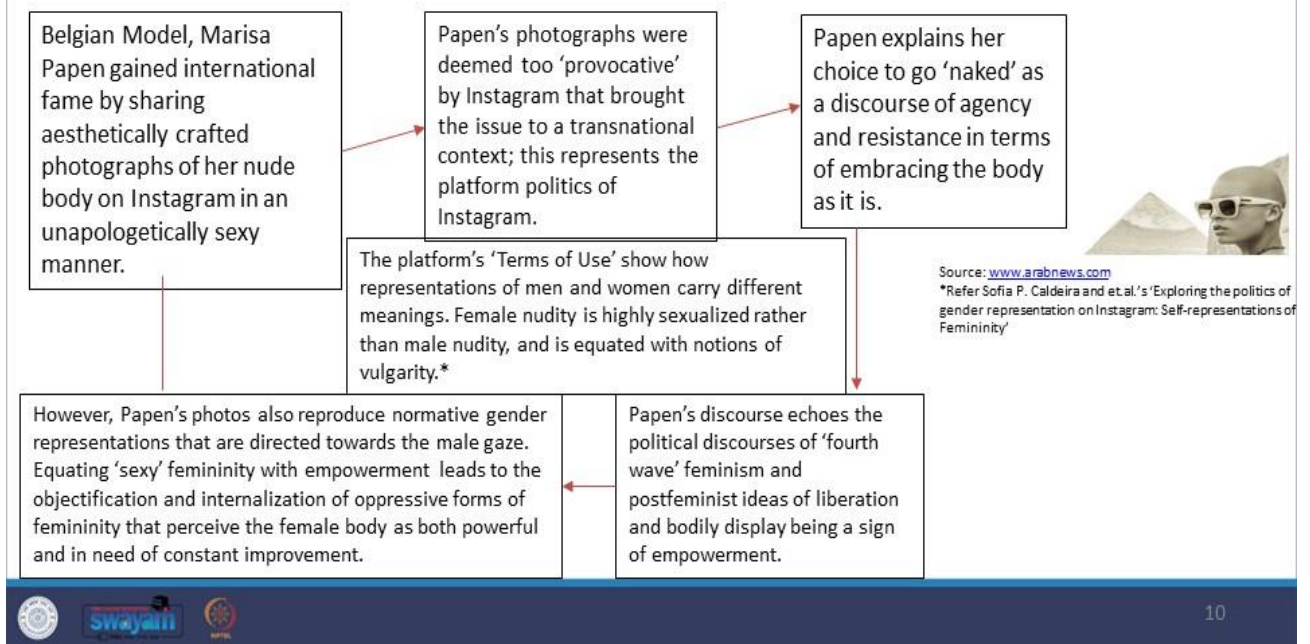


It was Teresa de Lauretis who in her 1987 work had used the term technologies of gender and had drawn on the idea that gender is constructed and is enacted through a series of performances, repeated stylisations of the body which operates within a specific cultural frame resulting into a well-made technology. Gender is the product of representation and self-representation. It is seen as the outcome of various social technologies like cinema as well as social networking sites.

Self-representations on social networking sites can be seen as gendered performances. The use of a series of filters reproduce socially and culturally accepted gendered conventions such as the idea of women as essentially constructed as to be looked at. The process of constructing gender is related to the notion of power also. The visibility of women self-representation also implies personal agency as an embodied subject and thus becomes a kind of activism to seek control and to take pleasure in one's own image. It also created double consciousness of being a subject and also simultaneously an object.

Self-Representations through videos and images create a sense of agency and resistance because they carry the potential for different constructions of gender that emerge from the user's subjectivities. But we have to know that social networking sites like Instagram accords different value systems to different gender representations. Representations of femininity or masculinity carry different meanings and are also treated differently. This highlights the ideological and hegemonic representations of gender. Let us take the case of the Belgian Instagram model Marisa Papen to analyse the construction of gender between the interplay of Instagram's gender politics and the politics shaping the user's self-representations.

## Gendered Instagram Struggles and the Case of Marisa Papen\*



Marisa Papen had gained international fame by sharing aesthetically crafted photographs of her nude body on Instagram in an unapologetically sexy manner. Her photographs were deemed too provocative by Instagram that brought the issue to a transnational context and this represents the platform politics of Instagram. Papen explains her choice to go naked as a discourse of agency and resistance in terms of embracing the body as it is. Papen's discourse echoes the political discourses of fourth wave feminism and post feminist ideas of liberation and bodily display being a sign of empowerment. However, her photographs also reproduce normative gender representations that are directed towards the male gaze.

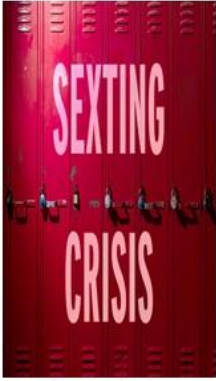
Equating sexy femininity with empowerment leads to the objectification and internalization of oppressive forms of femininity that perceive the female body as both powerful and in need of constant improvement. It can also be mentioned at this point that the terms of use of Instagram show how representations of men and women carry different meanings. Female nudity is highly sexualized in comparison to the male nudity and it is equated with notions of vulgarity. This is just one instance among many that shows the politics of gender representation on social networking sites and how to find a middle ground in such cases between empowerment and the objectification of male gaze. Another sphere we shall discuss at this point is the approaches towards sexting.



We see gendered power imbalances in the circulation of sexual and bodily images as well as attempts to discursively position women as sexual agents and their consequential victimization. Sexting as we know refers to the act of sending sexually explicit messages or engaging in sexual communication online.

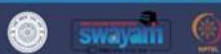
## Sexting and Gender Politics

- The narratives around sexting position girls and women as inherently at risk of sexual violence and as victims in danger of ‘sexual self-exploitation’.
  - This naturalizes cultured gendered dynamics whereby women’s sexual images are more fetishized and more shameful than men.
  - This also reinforces the depiction of women’s role as the moral gatekeepers of society and male sexuality as brutal and uncontrollable.



Sources: perlego.com, tribuneonline.com

Sexting as a Choice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several young people positioned sexting in terms of body confidence and agentic choice. It was also discursively framed as “attention-seeking”.</li> <li>• Publicly posting or privately sharing heterosexy self-images of women were also perceived as “culpable” for any harassment or bullying that came from the misuse of images.</li> </ul>
Are there consequences for legitimating sexual agency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an unresolved tension in this ambivalent gestures by positioning women as ‘sexual agents’ and ‘victims’ in the broader cultural and social context.</li> <li>• Legitimating sexual agency and desire is highly proportional to the extent of its circulation and associated to harassment. The social legitimization of ‘victimhood’ and the discourse of being inherently ‘damaged’ by the publicization of sexual images are made legible for girls in a way that boys are not.</li> </ul>


11

The narratives around sexting position girls and women as inherently at risk of sexual violence and as victims who are in danger of sexual self-exploitation. This naturalizes cultured gender dynamics whereby women's images are more fetishized and more shameful in comparison to those of men. They also reinforce the depiction of women's role as the moral gatekeepers of society and male sexuality as brutal and uncontrollable.

So can we look at sexting as a choice and are there consequences for legitimating sexual agency? Several young people positioned sexting in terms of body confidence and agentic choice. It was also discursively framed as attention seeking. Publically posting or privately sharing heterosexy self images of women were also perceived as culpable for any harassment or bullying that came from the misuse of such images. We can say that there is an unresolved tension in this ambivalent gestures by positioning women as sexual agents and victims in the broader cultural and social context. Legitimating sexual agency and desire is highly proportional to the extent of its circulation and it is

associated to harassment.

The social legitimation of victimhood and the discourse of being inherently damaged by the publicization of sexual images are made legible for girls in a way that boys are not. The question of to what extent is there space for girls to adopt subject positions in relation to sexting rather than being associated with victimization and psychosocial damage is still ambiguous. Digital femininity in online communication is largely constructed through participants' judgments of and attitudes towards specific digital practices. The gendered politics of respectability show how markers of visibility intersect with the neoliberal body as well as the culturally hegemonic femininity.

## The Politics of Visibility

- The discourse of 'likes and comments' on social media are visual markers of approval and a form of social capital.
  - The 'correct' standards of femininity in online communication forums can be defined in terms of 'corporeal capital' to refer to the ways in which an individual's body and appearance can be a part of the social apparatus.
  - Often, specific visual images are heavily criticized as part of the performance for 'likes' and signified as a transgressive type of hypersexualized femininity.
- The contemporary notions of visibility and surveillance in relation to identity construction in digital cultures has been largely put under the label of 'glamour labor'.
  - This constructs the embodied experiences of women as a spectacle and demonstrates the male gaze.
  - The patriarchal structures of the visual arts are built around the culturally normative desires of an assumed heterosexual male spectator.



The neoliberal and the cultural notions of hegemonic femininity are reinforced through the digital spectrum of beautification that ranges from filters to photo editors.  
Sources: yahoo.com, forbes.com

The discourse of likes and comments on social media are visual markers of approval and a form of social capital.

The correct standard of femininity in online communication forums can be defined in terms of corporeal capital to refer to the ways in which an individual's body and appearance can be a part of the social apparatus. Often, specific visual images are heavily criticized as part of the performance for likes and signified as a transgressive type of hypersexualized femininity. The contemporary notions of visibility and

surveillance in relation to identity construction in digital cultures has been largely put under the label of glamour labour. This constructs the embodied experiences of women as a spectacle and demonstrate the male gaze. The patriarchal structures of the visual arts are built around the culturally normative desires of an assumed heterosexual male spectator.

We have already talked about Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of capitals while we were discussing the performing authorship in digital literary domain. Apart from cultural capital, Bourdieu had also talked about social capital that pertains to the social connections, networks and relationships an individual has. The networking in social media platforms are also an important part of this. The widely termed Snapchat dysmorphia is also connected to this. It refers to the widespread dissatisfaction among people with their own appearance after the use of these filters.

Feminist activism has emerged out of differing digital platforms such as Tumblr, Twitter or Instagram. Each of these platforms is unique in terms of their socio-technical affordances and this delineates the concept of platform vernacular.

## Platform Vernacular

- *Platform Vernacular* refers to a range of common conventions (discursive, stylistic and visual) that develop among specific digital spaces.
  - They are used to understand feminist engagements via differing social media platforms.
- For example, the platform vernacular of Tumblr is used to map its 'queer temporality'.
  - Tumblr has a massive traffic in vintage erotica, both male and female.
  - The assemblage of images include less explicit retro erotica and mainstream depictions of homosexuality that depict a queer inclusive politics.
- The particularities in the sociotechnical affordances of digital spaces is also useful from an intersectional point of view.



Sources: [www.adweek.com](http://www.adweek.com), [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca)

Platform vernacular refers to a range of common conventions, discursive, stylistic as well as visual that develop among specific digital spaces. They are used to understand feminist engagement via differing social media platforms. For example, the platform


vernacular of Tumblr is used to map its queer temporality.

Tumblr has a massive traffic in vintage erotica both male as well as female. The assemblage of images include less explicit retro-erotica and mainstream depictions of homosexuality that depict a queer inclusive politics. The particularities in the socio-technical affordances of digital spaces is also useful from an intersectional point of view. Over the years we have seen how the coming out videos in YouTube have become a genre in itself. Time-lapse videos of gender transitions are shared across network platforms to help young people to negotiate their genders and sexualities.

The platform vernacular of Facebook has also enabled young queer people to tailor identity performances to specific context and to negotiate privacy. Let us analyse the social networking platform Tumblr and see how it is described as a queer ecosystem because of its platform vernacular that resonates with the lived experiences of queer people.

## Queer Communities and Tumblr

- Based on the study conducted by Brady Robards, Paul Byron and et.al.\*, it was found out that rather than being a place for connecting with friends, Tumblr operates as a distinct platform where users are motivated to connect with an amorphous sense of 'community' based on shared experiences and interests.
  - Tumblr's discursive significance lies on two themes- a desire for connecting, comfort and community and for learning and exploring gender and sexual identities.
  - The semantics and register of Tumblr are that of a felt sense of belonging and safety that queer and gender diverse users experience.



Sources: www.buzzfeednews.com, theconversation.com

14

Based on a study conducted by Brady Robards, Paul Byron, etc. It was found out that rather than being a place for connecting with friends, Tumblr operates as a distinct platform where users are motivated to connect with an amorphous sense of community based on shared experiences and interests. In this study, the details of which are



mentioned on the reference page, it was also found that Tumblr's discursive significance lies on two themes.

Firstly, a desire for connecting comfort and community and secondly, for learning and exploring gender and sexual identities. The semantics and register of Tumblr are that of a felt sense of belonging and safety that queer and gender diverse users experience. Tumblr also becomes a site of queer pedagogy because it offers access to vocabulary and knowledge to self-identity and set up identity boundaries through the open-ended responses. However, the intense drive on Tumblr to define vocabulary, circulate perspectives on power and to create a sense of community can also be levied and experienced as a negative style of policing. The dialogue between established media texts and sexual transgressions are often seen in slash fiction depictions.

Slash fiction which is a form of fan fiction typically focuses on sexual relations between the same genders. It can be depicted as a form of 'carnavalesque' that celebrates the anarchic body. This is important in the context of digital feminism because of its exploration of marginalized communities as well as challenging of heteronormativity.

## The Carnavalesque Modes of Slash Fiction

- According to Simon Dentith, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of carnivalesque depicts the aesthetic that celebrates the anarchic body-based and grotesque elements of popular culture.
  - Slash fiction, in its transgressive and non-canonical coupling, is a carnivalesque form of sexually explicit fan writing.
  - These texts depict a 'parody' by seeking to subvert and make homoerotic homosexual relationships on media for political purposes.



Slash fiction contains the ambivalence of the carnival, and juxtaposes the grotesque body of slash against the classical body of its source



Sources: pinterest

The playful nature of Slash's transgression lies in mimicking the 'mash-up' practices of cyberculture

Slash writing provides a space where writers can explore their own sexual desires and sexualities in dialogue with a favourite show or character.

For Bakhtin, the carnival must be liberating and slash has liberated many LGBT writers by allowing them to explore their identities and desires in a creative way



Slash fiction contains the ambivalence of the carnival and juxtaposes the grotesque body of slash against the classical body of its source. Simon Dentith had commented that Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of carnival is depicts the aesthetic that celebrates the anarchic body-based and grotesque elements of popular culture.

In its transgressive and non-canonical coupling, slash fiction is a carnivalesque form of sexually explicit fan writing. These texts depict a parody by seeking to subvert and make homoerotic homosexual relationships on media for political purposes. The playful nature of slash transgression lies in mimicking the mash-up practices of cyber culture. Slash writing thus provides a space where writers can explore their own sexual desires and sexualities in dialogue with a favorite show or character. For Bakhtin, the carnival must be liberating and slash has liberated many LGBT writers by allowing them to explore their identities and desires in a creative way.

In a way, the web has pornified slash, but slash stories in themselves are far more playful. They bypass the explicit content in chat rooms and forums, but allow for a sexually explicit exploration of desire. When it comes to digital feminist interventions, it is important to look at certain positions that negotiate gender politics with reference to technology and digital spaces. Let us look at feminist hacking and certain viral performances of gender as feminist positions that delineate gender as a mutable and heterogeneous cultural process.

## Feminist Hacking

- The term denotes hackers who engage in feminist hacking practices.
  - Feminist hackspaces challenge the dominant hackerspace and hacker cultures to recognize analogous forms of oppression and to recognize intersectionality as an important framework.
  - Since gender can be culturally shaped and reshaped by feminist hackers, the values embedded in digital technologies can also be recoded in a feminist way.
- Feminist servers are good examples of how feminist hackers create visibility while at the same time pointing to their roots in discourse as well as in the materiality of technology.
  - They realize the importance of forming a ‘counter-public’ to understand the oppositional ways of looking at identities and promote the use of technology is in resistance to patriarchy.



Geek Feminism Wiki and Riot.im (matrix) are examples of Feminist Servers  
Sources: twitter.com, medium.com



The term feminist hacking denotes hackers who emerge in feminist hacking practices.

Feminist hack spaces challenge the dominant hacker space and hacker cultures to recognize analogous forms of oppression and to recognize intersectionality as an important framework. Since gender can be culturally shaped and reshaped by feminist hackers, the values embedded in digital technologies can also be recorded in a feminist way. Feminist servers are good examples of how feminist hackers create visibility while at the same time pointing to their roots in discourses as well as in the materiality of technology.

Geek feminism wiki and Riot.im matrix are examples of feminist servers. The idea of feminist hacking has inspired many people to form a cyber identity in hybridity with technology. Let us look at the Trans Hack Feminist 2014 convergence that looked at feminist server projects to have more feminist and intersectional activists at the forefront of the development of liberation and freedom technologies.

## TransHackFeminist (THF!) Convergence Report (2015)

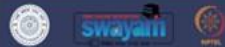
- The THF! was mainly about the questions of identity and the re-politicization of feminism.
  - It was about the plurality of ways to go beyond the binaries of gender, to experiment with body and technology, to understand the relations between privilege and oppression and using hacking as a means of resistance and transformation.



- Feminist servers have been a set of political practices among an informal group of transfeminists as a response to online gender-based violence.
- THF! was formed out from the assumption that once we understand how gender is constructed, we can hack the concept.
- Two feminist projects were rebooted during the THF! - the **'Systemserver6'** project that focussed on hosting online services and **'Anarchaserver7'** which focussed on hosting data.



Source:anarchaserver



The THF that is Trans Hack Feminist was mainly about the questions of identity and the re-politicization of feminism. It was about the plurality of ways to go beyond the binaries of gender to experiment with body and technology to understand the relations between privilege and oppression and using hacking as a means of resistance and transformation. THF was formed on the basis of the assumption that once we understand how gender is constructed, we can hack the concept.

Two feminist projects were rebooted during the THF, the SisterServer6 project that focused on hosting online services and Anarkaserver7 which focused on hosting data. The aim of the THF convergence was basically to open up possibilities to experiment life and identity as a process of performativity. It is also important that viewers and users react and respond to an online post and this is known as virality. This becomes a feminist position because it shows how much feminism has expanded in the space of digital networks. The MeToo movement and hashtags which we have discussed also fall under this viral digital performance of gender.

## Viral Feminist Performances of Gender

- The performances of contemporary feminist artists within digital spaces expands the potential to be seen and to interact with the audience.
  - They question the traditional images of women, created by and for the male gaze as they subvert the poses and expressions of women that are widespread through art history and digital culture.
    - The reception of their works reflects the duality of the artists as simultaneously the subject and object of representation.



- The artist Ann Hirsch puts into perspective her statement “...whenever you put your body online, in some way you are in conversation with porn” in her online performance *Playground* (2013).
- The live performance is set in the late 1990s and is based on the artist’s real life experience of an online relationship with a much older man.

- Hirsch blurs the distinction between the emerging emotions that reflect the course of the relationship and the artist’s imagination.
- By adopting such a volatile character, Hirsch critically explored a relationship with unequal dynamics by presenting it as problematic and connected with people who reacted to her performance in a multidimensional way.

Source: <https://youtu.be/91K0Y6p-zA3?list=PL1188MT-r0I>



The performances of contemporary feminist activists within digital spaces expands the potential to be seen and to interact with the audience. They question the traditional images of women created by and also for the male gaze as they subvert the poses and expressions of women that are widespread through art history and digital culture. The reception of their work reflects the duality of the artist as simultaneously the subject and object of representation. We can refer to the artist Ann Hirsch who puts into perspective her statement suggesting that whenever you put your body online in some way you are in conversation with porn in an online performance playground presented in 2013. This live performance is set in the late 1990s and is based on the artist's real life experiences of an online relationship with a much older man.

In this performance Hirsch had adopted a volatile character and thereby she had critically explored a relationship with unequal dynamics by presenting it as problematic and connected with people who reacted to her performance in a multi-dimensional way. These feminist performance artists control how they present themselves to the gaze of others. They manifest their interiors as well as exteriors. Interiors that is experience and knowledge, exteriors that is bodily and aesthetic forms. So they manifest their interiors and exteriors as objects of criticism and praise.

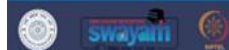
Therefore it is hard not to notice how online vitriol or hatred has become a worsening problem which is silencing women in public discourse and negatively impacting the civility of the public cyber sphere. Let us look at eBile in media text and online misogyny in CMC that is computer mediated communication.

## Understanding E-Bile

- Australian author, Emma A. Jane, in her 2012 article (“You’re a Ugly, Whorish, Slut: Understanding E-bile) uses the term ‘E-bile’ to refer to the extravagant invective and the sexualized threats of violence that have come to constitute a dominant tenor of internet discourse\*.
- E-bile targeting women commonly includes charges of unintelligence, hysteria and ugliness, combined with threats or fantasies of violent sex acts.
  - Female targets are dismissed as both unacceptable, unattractive man haters and hypersexual ‘sluts’ who are “inviting” sexual attention or attacks.
  - E-bile aimed at men commonly attacks their masculinity via derogatory homophobia.
- Mainstream media reports and scholarly research show that women are more likely to be the targets and less likely to be the authors of this discourse.



Sources: bit-tech.net  
\*<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01468077.2012.741073>



The term eBile was used by Emma Jane in her 2012 article. She uses this term to refer to the extravagant, invective and the sexualized threats of violence that have come to constitute a dominant tenor of internet discourse. eBile targeting women commonly includes charges of unintelligence, hysteria and ugliness combined with threats of fantasies of violent sex acts.

Female targets are dismissed as both unacceptable and unattractive man-hitters and hypersexual sluts who are inviting sexual attention or attacks. eBile which is aimed at men commonly attacks their masculinity via derogatory homophobia. Mainstream media reports and scholarly research show that women are more likely to be the targets and less likely to be the authors of such discourses. eBile reduces the inclusivity and civility of both on and offline cultures. By normalizing a hostile and hateful mode of discourse marked by misogyny of threats of violence, it is harmful.

Digital feminism, digital feminist activism and online misogyny represent complex and dynamic aspects of contemporary gender politics. While digital feminism and activism have made significant strides in amplifying women's voices, the persistent presence of online misogyny highlights the urgent need to create inclusive and safe digital spaces for all.

## Conclusion

- Digital Feminism has facilitated conversations about gender equality, dismantling traditional power structures, and challenging oppressive norms.
- Through social media, blogs, podcasts, and other digital platforms, women have been able to mobilize, educate, and advocate for their rights.
- From hashtag movements to online campaigns against gender-based violence and workplace discrimination, digital feminist activists have harnessed the power of the internet to create tangible, real-world impacts.
- By fostering dialogue, implementing policies, and supporting initiatives that challenge patriarchal norms, we can work towards a more equitable and just digital future.



Digital feminism has facilitated conversations about gender equality, dismantling traditional power structures and challenging its oppressive norms. Through social media, blogs, podcasts and other digital platforms, women have been able to mobilize, educate and advocate for their rights. From hashtag movements to online campaigns against gender-based violence and workplace discrimination, digital feminist activists have harnessed the power of the internet to create tangible real-world impacts.

By fostering dialogue, implementing policies and supporting initiatives that challenge patriarchal norms, we can work towards a more equitable and just digital future. In the next module, we will discuss the genealogy of cyber feminism. We will also look at how cyborgs serve as a powerful conceptual framework in digital and cyber feminism,

allowing us to critically examine the intricate relationships between technology, gender-based identities and communication. Thank you.