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With this volume, Dearcadh has reached a milestone – 5 years of publication. As editors, we have been continuously impressed by the quality of graduate publications submitted to Dearcadh and are honoured to have the opportunity to showcase work that may otherwise not be accessible. This is, for us, very much a labour of love, but one that would not be possible without the support of the Centre for Global Women's Studies at the University of Galway. We would particularly like to recognise the help given to us by Gillian Browne who has provided technical and communications support throughout the past five years. We also acknowledge the support of the reviewers who contribute their time and expertise to identify the strongest works and provide direction for all potential authors on how to strengthen their articles. We would particularly like to thank Ester Basir, editorial assistant, for her consistent and ongoing efforts to ensure that this volume would come to light.

The Editors,

Stacey Scriver and Carol Ballantine

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Editorial

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Emergencies, Emergences and Polycrises: The enduring need for critical feminist interventions

Recent years have once again brought the concept of 'emergency' to the fore. In the current moment, war and conflict, not least of which is the conflict in Gaza and the continuous state of emergency for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, are among the 'emergencies' that are forefront of the public consciousness. But conflict is not alone as an emergency: the overlaying of multiple catastrophic threats have been labelled a "polycrisis" (Rajat et. al. 2024). Applying the term 'polycrisis' to the current conjuncture demands an appreciation of multiple overlapping and mutually-constitutive crises including climate disaster; social and cultural emergencies including sexual and domestic violence; forced displacement; authoritarianism; imperialism; colonialism; the re-emergence of familyist, essentialist, pro-natalist and binarizing discourse; and the unpredictable impacts of artificial intelligence in these contexts. And yet, despite the sense of urgency and fear that such emergencies may generate, many of the challenges we are currently facing are not, in fact, newly emerged.

The current volume of Dearcadh marks our fifth year of publication. Dearcadh aims to give voice to new and emerging feminist researchers, coming mainly, though not exclusively, from the Centre for Global Women's Studies in the University of Galway. In spite of the global upheaval that characterised its beginnings (the first three volumes were all affected by Covid-era public policy measures, introducing significant constraints to the choices that researchers and the editorial team could make in going about their work), this five-volume milestone points towards important trends and patterns that have become visible over time within the research that is profiled in this journal. In Dearcadh, we see researchers responding to contemporary issues with the best tools available to them. Emergencies and responses can feel bewilderingly novel, yet they are always historically situated, arising out of deep-seated power structures and sustained social and cultural norms. As media and funding organisations

relentlessly focus on innovation, feminists, including Dearcadh authors, continue to excavate the origins of our thinking genealogically, seeking to understand the sources of the ideas, concepts and dynamics that are brought to bear on the problems of our time.

Feminist scholarship and activism have long been at the front lines of emergencies: indeed, feminist movements have invariably arisen in response to the emergency of gender inequality. Anti-imperialist women activists were instrumental in India's democratic movement (Prasad, 2024); and the organisation of women politicising their roles as mothers was pivotal in confronting the military junta in Argentina from the 1970s onwards (Howe, 2006). Feminist activism has been central to environmental, peace and anti-nuclear movements (Lockwood, 2012; Berger 2014; Choi and Eschle, 2023; Shor, 2024). The engagement of feminist activists in civil rights movements in the US in the 1960s and 70s highlighted from an early moment that race, class and gender are inherently connected in our experiences of discrimination, inequality and violence (Davis, 1982; hooks, 1990). It has fallen to feminists within broader struggles to relentlessly return the focus to the ubiquity of gendered violence against women, including within liberatory movements (Crenshaw 1991).

While these emergencies highlight the critical role of feminist interventions and feminist thought in tackling crisis globally, clear gaps remain in relation to who, and what issues, are visible. Xenophobia, racism and classism results in the reproduction of inequality, not just between the Global North and Global South, but within the Global North and South, with the most marginalised, often migrant and displaced women of colour, often overlooked in gender equality policies and legislation. The neoliberal and globalized economy exploits these gaps, relying on the exploitation of women's work, particularly in relation to care work, and reinforced through the control of women's lives through violence to maintain its structure (see Cusicanqui (2010) for an example about the Bolivian case). These issues remain pressing concerns for feminist academics and activists.

Through their commitment to equality and justice, feminists have always been activists in states of emergency. In our time working in this field, we have observed the specifics and languages of emergencies change, while at the same time, many elements remain constant. When the MA programme in Gender, Globalisation and Rights programme here in the University of Galway took in its first students in 2008, key concerns – emergencies, if you will - included globalisation, neoliberalism and the need for substantive recognition of women's human rights. Today, following global political upheavals involving ruptures to democracies including the UK and the US, and conflict within Europe adding to ongoing imperial and neocolonialist conflict worldwide, the specifics of the emergencies we face have shifted and arguably worsened. The language used in scholarship and wider public conversations is changing; with critical interventions emphasising the ongoing relevance of imperialism, (neo)colonialism(s), and the intersecting trifecta of gender, race and class. Scholarship is increasingly alert to the rise of the far-right, a distant concern as recently as 2008.

And yet, while the language and specifics demonstrate change, the underlying factors driving emergencies are consistent, and taken up by the authors in this volume. Walsh explores the dynamics of neoliberal globalisation, which persists in both economic and cultural forms, increasing inequalities, disrupting gender relations, and influencing dynamics of violence. Keighron reflects on the multiple contradictory gendered impacts of globalised cultural transformations. Technological advancements have not only improved communications, an aspect of globalisation, but have also intensified and added to the forms of gender-based violence women are exposed to, as interrogated here by Hayman and to some extent, Chippendale. In spite of what many pundits and right-wing commentators would argue, the feminist objective of gender equality is far from achieved. As both Connolly and Moreno note here, women continue to take on the primary role of carer - often under-valued in society and uncompensated, even in, if not more so, contexts of emergency such as the recent Covid 19 pandemic.

Thus, while the language through which we talk about the challenges we face has changed, there are clear continuities that connect previous crises with our current ones, and perhaps those continuities can offer some grounding in insecure times. In spite of certain dramatic changes, such as the digital revolution, fragmented and all-pervasive media contexts, and the multi-polarisms of twenty-first century international relations, many of the issues that concern authors in this volume of Dearcadh echo earlier responses to globalisation.

Drawing attention to these historical roots allows us to see the persistence of feminist analyses and critiques, and to observe certain strategies and responses being passed from one generation to the next (Ruggi, 2023). Changing patterns of language and discourse can elide such continuities, which can in turn be used to weaken opposition to contemporary oppressive regimes, removing us from our grounding in generational solidarities.

The articles presented in this edition of Dearcadh reflect this continuity of feminist concerns, from the experiences of migrant mothers to social norms that result in victim blaming, to new means of inflicting violence against women. They also offer ways of understanding and creating change that are fitted to the current and local context, from the adaptation of labour practices, to policies such as Universal Basic Income for carers, to the potentially transformative role of celebrity feminists. In drawing attention to these continuities we are also issuing a reminder: feminist scholarship and activism have been critical in understanding and managing emergencies and remain a critical and potent force in this present moment of polycrises.

The themes of globalisation, inequality and continuity are evident in the first article of this volume; Walsh's The Fruits of Labour. In her article about globalisation and gender relations in Chile, Walsh investigates how processes of globalisation reinforce, disrupt and/or reshape gender norms and relations, by analysing the situation of female employment within the Chilean context in the commercial agricultural industry. Her engagement with the gendered impacts of the global fruit supply chain recalls important feminist critiques of

globalisation (e.g. Elson and Pearson 1984), including how the feminisation of care work leads to the systematic under-valuing of women's work (Folbre and England 1999). Walsh's discussion engages the contradictory trends of globalising forces, which may simultaneously have supported a disruption to restrictive Catholic gender norms in Chile; brought about greater earning and decision-making power for individual women (Bee, 2000); and provoked violent and patriarchal responses from men, potentially increasing the risk of gender-based violence. The dynamics of globalisation, as Walsh outlines, are far from fully understood, and far from spent: it remains crucial to understand them if we are to address the emergency of gender based violence.

Picking up on a newer trend in international discussions about inequality in the global economy, Moreno explores the relationship between care work/ social reproduction and Universal Basic Income (UBI). An innovative proposal to reorient the valuing of workers' time under capitalism, UBI is sometimes promoted as a way of overcoming some of the greatest pressures of the unsustainable neoliberal world system. Moreno's feminist engagement is of great importance: as she highlights, discussions of UBI do not always or necessarily consider the gendered impacts of such policy proposals, nor indeed their other intersectional impacts. Reviewing existing literature on the subject, she notes the potential for UBI to support more gender-neutral distribution of care; and to support single-parent families in particular, through a reorientation of the welfare system. Nonetheless, Moreno notes that UBI is a fundamentally depoliticising initiative which must engage with citizens to have success. In itself, UBI does not challenge the gender norms, classism or racism that underpin inequality; Moreno therefore concludes that change requires policy interventions alongside more profound structural change.

Public policy concerns are again taken up by Lorraine Hayman, in her article introducing the concept of cyber-located sexual violence (CLSV). Returning, as Dearcadh authors often do (Scriver, Ballantine and Chippendale 2023), to the ongoing emergency of gender-based violence, Hayman focuses on the terms used to describe, define and address violence against women (VAW). Hayman considers forms of VAW which are facilitated by technologies, and therefore constitute non-physical behaviours and harms. As she affirms in her research, the act of naming is essential to understanding and addressing the problem of violence (Kelly, 1988). Situating her research within conceptualisations of the continuum of violence (Kelly 1988; Vera Gray and Kelly 2020), Hayman acknowledges the intersectionality and diversity of women's experiences. Her analysis of a survey on unwanted negative, sexually-based online behaviours leads to her proposal of a new term, Cyber-located sexual violence (CLSV). Hayman suggests that the incorporation of CLSV into formal measurement and responses to sexual violence in Ireland might contribute to a broader change in how such violence is conceptualised, shifting from essentialised and binary definitions to ones more grounded in the words and experiences of women themselves.

Maintaining the focus on the emergency of gendered violence that confronts us, and the ways old patterns intersect with new technologies, Róisín Chippendale conducts an innovative analysis of texts related to the infamous 2018 Belfast rape trial. Chippendale's

enquiry draws on affect theory and the writings of political theorist Chantal Mouffe to explore the political potential of expressions of disgust in relation to sexual violence. She problematises the simplifications of #MeToo evangelism, which can make too much of the potential of social media activism to bring about real social change, and at worst, can tend towards a narrow individualistic and apolitical engagement with social issues (Kennedy, 2021). Chippendale's close analysis of tweets responding to the Belfast rape trial with expressions of disgust illustrates how affective engagements of disgust, contrary to some feminist arguments [Sullivan 2022, Nussbaum 2004], can indeed re-politicise the terms of discourse related to the crisis of sexual violence and hence provide momentum for practical action. This subtle argument advances understandings of political emotions as they relate to inequalities and resistances.

In her intersectional and feminist exploration of the experiences of migrant mothers in Japan during the Covid-19 pandemic, Abigail Connolly also teases out new crises with timeless dimensions. Her qualitative inquiry explores the institutional discrimination against women due to their role as primary unpaid caregivers to children with an intersectional lens. She highlights how migrant women are additionally disadvantaged, although this disadvantage is mediated by language, with English speakers privileged over others. An analysis of two Facebook groups, Connolly's research shows how social media was operationalised by migrant mothers during the Covid-19 emergency to find new information and overcome the limitations of Japanese government responses. Social media is presented here as a source of connection that can help overcome inequalities and barriers to inclusion; in contrast to its role in undergirding cyber-located sexual violence (Hayman, this issue). As with much that is new in our current moment, the underlying power dynamics inherit much from the past.

Shaping the social norms that influence policy and behaviour, is also the cultural sphere. In Keighron's analysis of celebrity feminism, focusing on the popular icon Miley Cyrus, she considers how feminist agents can move forward equality agendas through their art and activism. Interpreting five performances by Cyrus through a Queer theory approach, Keighron explores how these performances help (or hinder) the feminist stance in relation to gender and sexuality. She queries the extent to which Cyrus challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. Keighron's thematic analysis focuses on agency, visibility/representation and breaking societal norms thanks to data collected from Cyrus's performance. The article brings into question traditional ideas of femininitis and masculinities- understood as performative acts, while promoting gender fluidity and sexual liberation to create a more inclusive society. This article also highlights a critical concern for feminism – its reproduction across new generations. With the advent and growth of post-feminism and the challenge of familyist, anti-feminist, gender essentialist ideologies, feminist intervention is as critical as ever. For young women to engage with feminist ideas, often counter to those of their peers, feminist role models are necessary. A question remains however, about who counts as a 'good' feminist role model – but perhaps this too is a binary idea that Cyrus challenges.

Conclusion

The five articles presented in this, our fifth volume of Dearcadh, draw attention to a range of emergencies in the contemporary world that are of concern for postgraduate feminist researchers. Ongoing concerns about the impacts of globalisation and neoliberalism necessitate a return to earlier case studies, as done by Walsh, and a consideration of how to challenge inequalities resulting from such structures, as Moreno does in her consideration of Universal Basic Income from a gendered lens. The ubiquitous issue of violence against women presents as an ever-present emergency. Hayman deepens understanding of new means of conducting violence against women and the changes a new method of perpetrating the same old violence might bring. Chippendale also engages with violence against women but interrogates the role of disgust in sexual violence cases – bringing us perhaps to new conclusions on its function in withdrawing from, or engaging with, the politics and structures of sexual violence against women. Finally, with Keighron's investigation of feminist celebrity, we may find hope for the emergence of new feminists and evolving forms of feminism. In the midst of what appears as a never-ending state of polycrises, feminist scholarship continues to provide critical interventions to understand, challenge, and provide solutions to emergencies.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Fruits of Labour: The Role of Globalisation in Reinforcing, Disrupting and Reshaping Gender Norms & Relations among Chile's Agri-workers

Walsh, Lily

Abstract

This article examines how the processes of globalisation serve to reinforce, disrupt, and reshape gender norms and relations in Chile. Chile has long since been subject to political corruption and societal disruption, but it was the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet and his neoliberal economic policies that reconfigured many aspects of life for Chilean farmers, both male and female. This article contextualises its core arguments in a case-study of the fruit market in Chile's commercial agriculture sector. This article argues that the processes of globalisation operate as a double-edged sword that can transform labour patterns and gender dynamics for better and worse.

Key Words:

Chile, neoliberalism, globalisation, gender

Introduction

> 'Women workers are often the majority and almost always the fastest-growing sector of the labour force. Women sew Levis jeans in Guatemala, wash IBM computer chips in the Philippines, assemble RCA televisions in Indonesia, process broccoli and strawberries in Mexico.' (Tinsman, 2004).

The globalisation of the agricultural industry in many countries in the Global South has stimulated a feminisation of the commercial agricultural labour force, specifically within the context of Latin American countries (Ilie & Dumitriu, 2014). Most scholars agree that between 1980-2012 most Latin American countries experienced varying degrees of trade growth and economic expansion. This required a larger, more diversified workforce, which in turn required tapping into a portion of the population previously untapped – women (Ilie & Dumitriu, 2014) & (Tinsman, 2004). With the onset of the neoliberal agenda and the subsequent economic changes it induced, an increasingly globalised world has been fostering changes amongst existing gender compositions within labour forces and markets. Evolving patterns in employment, production and the consumption of goods has necessitated an increase in female participation in many spheres of labour which has yielded unbalanced, though not entirely negative results. Benería et al. believe that such rapid transformations have had 'differential impacts on men and women workers…the feminisation of the labour force and decline in men's labour force participation in many countries have been integral to the labour market transformations' (Benería et al., 2016). This quote accurately describes the impact of globalisation on Chile's agro-industry and the feminisation of its agricultural labour force from the 1980s onwards (Tinsman, 2004). This article examines the effects of the processes of globalisation on Chile's commercial agriculture sector and how such processes have and continue to reinforce, disrupt, and reshape gender norms and relations in all domains of life.

Processes of Globalisation

Globalisation, a phenomenon that began to gain traction during the 1970s, became the main driver in boosting countries' economies through a series of transnational processes. Such transnational processes would be greatly inhibited without the development of new technologies and the shift to a neoliberal agenda (Benería et al., 2016). The neoliberal agenda prioritises above all, individualised profit-making, which by proxy alters behaviours and belief-systems to fall in alignment with garnering profit. Facets of the neoliberal agenda that were accelerated through Structural Adjustment Plans (SAPs) include the privatisation of welfare and social services, deregulation of the market, free trade policies/trade liberalisation, and reconfiguring industries towards mass and transnational production (Benería et al., 2016). This economic framework sets the stage for the processes of globalisation to come into effect. A core process of globalisation, and the one this essay shall primarily focus on is globalisation's reliance on the labour of those in the Global South (Elson & Pearson, 1984). Hence, processes such as outsourcing labour to countries with a surplus of cheap labour, employing migratory

and temporary workers are all made possible by the intertwining of an economic agenda that requires such labour as well as the globalised trade processes that enable it.

A key process of globalisation is that of trade liberalisation and market expansion (Benería et al., 2016). Confirming this as a key process of globalisation is Benería et al., opining that – 'trade liberalisation and export orientation of production have been instrumental in promoting the expansion of international trade and investment' (Benería et al., 2016). A consequence of such a process is the subsequent lack of protection for workers as framed by Elson & Pearson in their exposition on women's role in the internationalisation of factory production –'workers in world market factories have been left exposed by the abrogation of their rights on such matters as minimum wage payments…limitations on the length of the working day and week, security of employment' (Elson & Pearson, 1984). Though Elson & Pearson's article is dated by over 30 years, the reliance on antiquated and insecure systems of employment continues to predominate. This can be seen in recent results released by the National Statistics Institute (INE) that over 90% of women employed in the agri-sector are only employed for three months or less (Olguín, 2022). Hence, separate to the inadequate conditions associated with the physical work, the short-term contracts of female labourers heighten overall employment precarity as well as trapping many temporeras in a cycle of three-month stints disallowing them from upwards mobilisation in any one establishment (Olguín, 2022). Such a gendered process of globalisation can clearly be seen in the commercial agricultural sector with a glaring delineation in the division of labour based on gender often subjecting women to harder work for less pay than that of their male counterparts. Additionally, this limits their ability to upward mobilise, confining them to positions concentrated at the bottom of Global Value Chains (GVCs) (Barrientos, 2001).

The consequences of attempting to keep up with such demands for goods often require increasing the demands put upon the female labour force, reinforcing and/or metastasizing existing gender inequalities. World market factories benefitted in employing women due to the lower expenditure rates on female labour during the genesis of Pinochet's neoliberal economic expansion programme: 'female labour must either be cheaper to employ…or have higher productivity (than men); the net result being that unit costs of production are lower with female labour' (Elson & Pearson, 1984). Such practices are still in effect in Chile's fruit sector as seen in the evidence provided in Pia Olguín's in-depth investigation into temporeras working during Chile's cherry harvest. Olguín's research builds on the arguments made by Elson & Pearson, arguing that due to the diversification of employment patterns in the agro-industry under Pinochet's regime, the systemic gender discrimination in effect *then* have indisputably set the trend for *now*, as the same conditions (job precarity, lower pay, overwork and inadequate working conditions) have been allowed to persist. The numbers of women being employed as temporeras will only continue to rise due to an ever-increasing demand for higher quality and more exotic fruits supplied with more efficiency. For example, between 2017-2018 the number of female workers in the fruit sector increased to 93.4%, while pay did not (Olguín, 2022).

Globalisation & Chile's Agri-sector

Using Chile and its commercial agricultural sector as a case study, this section of the article shall examine how the processes of globalisation orchestrate to reinforce existing gender norms and gender relations within the lives of female agricultural workers in Chile. When dictator Augusto Pinochet overthrew the socialist government in 1973, his first port of call was economic expansion by way of the commercialisation of agriculture through export specialisation (Tinsman, 2004). Chile's agricultural landscape, formerly consisting of sprawling patrón-owned, peasant-famed Haciendas and meagre campesino (peasant) farm-holdings underwent an aggressive makeover, transforming it into a highly technological behemoth exporter of fruits. Chile has since become the main exporter of out-of-season fruits which are now made available year-round. According to researcher Heidi Tinsman, by 1987 – 'Chile's international fruit sales grossed almost half a billion dollars' (Tinsman, 2004). Throughout the process of such massive agrarian reforms, Chile sought to include women in its agricultural schemes. Such inclusion was successful: over the course of a decade (1982-92), 'the female agricultural labour force increased by 296%' (Barrientos, 1997). The bulk of this employment is concentrated in the exportation of fruit.

Due to such western globalised processes utilised by Pinochet, such as policies of economic liberalisation and mass expansion, the Hacienda system suffered and thousands of campesino families were displaced due to the buying up of arable land by private investors acting on behalf of multinational market actors (Barrientos, 1997). Rural farmers relocated to cities contributing to the now massively urbanised Chile. The workers remaining in now poverty-stricken rural areas became reliant on factory wage labour during the peak season men and women sought employment in the commercial agricultural sector. This demand for employment compounded already precarious labour laws in Chile and enabled an environment of employment precarity and gender segregated employment to flourish formally- 'liberalisation of the labour market which removed most employment protection and low real wages facilitated a low-cost labour force, which was one of the "comparative advantages" of Chilean fruit exports' (Barrientos, 1997). Such "comparative advantages" would be later exploited based on gender as well as reinforcing widely held beliefs regarding women, their role, their value, and their professional capabilities.

Such forms of employment bear the trademark stamps of globalisation as seen above; a core trademark of a globalised labour market is that of job precarity that sustains the free market. Inherent to the very language used to describe the employment of thousands of Chilean women – temporera, meaning temporary female labourers - it is evident that this facet of a globalised labour force is in full effect in the commercial agricultural sector in Chile. Barrientos' research confirms this, as she states that 52% of female employment in the fruit market is temporary versus a paltry 5% of permanent female employment in the same sector (Barrientos, 1997). Whereas among their male counterpart's permanent employment in the same sector lies at 95% (Barrientos, 1997). This article argues that such disparities exist due to the reinforcing of unequal value meted out to female versus male labour. The 95% permanent employment of men is equivalent to that of a primary sector attributing more value to their labour, while female permanent employment at 5% is attributed little or no value in the same

sector. Such meagre doling out of value is predicated on the belief that because a woman is performing the task it is fundamentally less valuable and hence is worth less money. This is a primary disadvantage of the gender dimensions to globalisation and the processes it is reliant on. Elson and Pearson attribute this inequal distribution of merit and the feminisation of job precarity to the belief that formal labour is secondary to a woman's primary role of childbearing, thus relegating the need for employment to the margins of her worth (Elson & Pearson, 1984).

On account of this it can be argued that the processes of globalisation are inherently sexist, preying on antiquated belief systems that women are less likely to unionise, more likely to work in poor conditions and are harder workers due to their 'docile' nature. However, this imbalance is not entirely unfavourable as during peak season women working longer hours than their male counterparts in better conditions and with flexible pay earn much higher wages as it is their labour that is essential to the export of such products (Barrientos, 1997). Such a silver lining is also not without its drawbacks; according to Tinsman, this upsurge in pay destabilises the power balance within households, with men feeling threatened and thus, exercising their control through other means such as increases in domestic violence, desertion, and commandeering the wages of their female spouses (Tinsman, 1997).

Gender Norms & Relations – Reinforced

Chile, a staunchly Catholic and highly gender-divisive society at the time of such agrarian reforms (Tinsman, 2004), relegated women to forms of labour that scholar Saskia Sassen dubs 'the 'invisible' labour of women producing food (Sassen, 2002). However, with the rapidly expanding fruit sector requiring more manpower and the seasonal nature of such labour, Pinochet's regime began to recruit campesinas in the thousands to undertake labour, specifically in fruit-packing plants (Tinsman, 2004). Temporeras experienced capitalist exploitation solely based on their gender, whereupon existing gender norms were reinforced due to the segregation of the genders further through the medium of labour and for many women, a disadvantageous worsening of gender relations ensued (Tinsman, 2004).

How do the processes of globalisation continue to reinforce gender norms and relations Chile's entrance into global markets? Firstly, as previously discussed, globalisation often preys upon existing gender inequalities in order to maintain its functions. One of these inequalities is that of the inequal distribution of unremunerated care work undertaken by women in the domestic sphere. Chile, predisposed to gendered divisions of labour, expects its women to perform most of the unrecognised domestic labour. Thus, where campesinas previously tended to family crops on or near the homestead contributing to a husband's earnings, while carrying out other domestic tasks, women have been outsourced to packing plants, removing them from the home (Tinsman, 2004). At first glance, one may wonder how this reinforces gender norms – surely it disrupts them and often for the better? Yet, in actuality, campesinas, now temporeras, return home after 10-to-16-hour shifts earning piece-rates, to perform a second 'job' uncompensated: 'they returned exhausted from work to additional daily labours of cooking and cleaning' (Tinsman, 2004). The unresolved disparity in care work undertaken by male and female spouses is reinforced to the detriment of many women on account of such processes of

globalisation that assume narrow conceptualisations of what constitutes labour; failing to consider the myriad of roles both paid and unpaid expected of a working mother (Amelina & Lutz, 2018). This is but one example of how the processes of globalisation, such as the reliance on women as 'reserves of cheap labour' (Kelly, 1981), serve to reinforce gender norms as well as increasing the burden of labour overall. Secondly, gender norms are further reinforced from a supposed biological perspective within Chile's commercial agricultural sector. Temporeras are concentrated primarily in pruning and fruit-packing factories especially during peak season. The principal reason for the concentration of female labourers in these roles is not because of a preordained biological skill set but because of the reinforcement of archaic beliefs that rely on the gendered notion that women are more 'nimble fingered' (Elson & Pearson, 1984) and handle the fruit with care due to their intrinsic maternal instincts. The gendered norm that declares women are more inclined to undertake time-consuming and monotonous tasks due to their subdued nature clarifies why they are concentrated at the lower end of this GVC. Not only does this undermine female labour it further reinforces gender norms propounding that women are biologically predisposed to submission and should be treated as such.

Researcher Fernández Kelly maintains that the agroindustry profits off existing cultural norms in rural regions of Chile, where women tend to be viewed as eternal subordinates and their income as merely supportive to that of their husbands: 'from a sociological point of view, what agro-industrial capitalists have done is to make use of certain social and cultural characteristics of the region to achieve certain goals' (Kelly, 1981). This culture-defined perspective on the relationship between women and paid labour further compounds employment precarity for female labourers – the temporary nature of female labour in the commercial agriculture sector is allowed to persist as it is viewed only right that such employment be temporary in order to maintain 'prevailing family structures' (Kelly, 1981). This ideological imbalance rests on the processes of globalisation that continue to perpetuate gender norms, hindering women's ability to operate as equals within the labour market as it is cheaper for multinationals to allow such gender norms to persist.

The above section has endeavoured to illustrate how historic processes of globalisation – namely the precarity of female employment in the commercial agroindustry in Chile made possible by the neoliberal marketisation of the fruit market – continue to reinforce existing gender norms and further segregates men and women on the fault lines of gender and employment. The arguments of Barrientos, Kelly, Elson & Pearson support this essay's belief that though increasing female participation in the labour force is an advantage created by globalised processes of trade liberalisation and workforce expansion, we must always apply a gender lens and query – what kind of employment is being offered and who does it truly benefit, as summed up by Kelly: 'wage levels, working conditions, stability…offered by this industrial employment could simply amount to a new kind of exploitation and subordination of…women' (Kelly, 1981).

Gender Norms & Relations – Disrupted

Having examined how the processes of globalisation at play in Chile's commercial agricultural sector began the continuum of reinforced gender norms and relations, this section

of the article shall investigate how gender norms and relations are disrupted by the same mechanisms. This article investigates what it has identified as the two major disruptions to gender norms and relations: 1) how female employment in fruticulture has increased bargaining power threatening patriarchal power structures within the domestic sphere giving way to increased levels of domestic violence; 2) exposure to Agri-pesticides and toxins inducing illnesses and reproductive issues disrupts the distribution of domestic tasks in the home as women are unable to carry them out and a loss of perceived value due to these ailments disrupting conjugal unions and increasing levels of spousal desertion.

While researching this subject, a common theme that emerged in the relationship between globalisation, the market and gender relations was the threat to masculinity when women began participating in the public sphere and earning wages (Lim, 2005). Moreover, due to the long hours worked by temporeras, spouses rarely interact giving way to rising marital tensions –'women's relations with spouses…became tense and combative because of…women's need to work, and the reality that husbands and wives rarely saw each other. Such conflict contributed to increased male home abandonment…and heightened domestic violence' (Tinsman, 2004). Such increases do not only occur due to women being employed in the commercial Agri-sector, but heightened levels of domestic violence become a by-product of women's increased bargaining power due to earning their own wages. The state policies in existence often foster higher rates of unemployment among men as women are favoured for more skilled labour such as fruit-packing due to the belief that they are 'gentler' when handling delicate fruits (Olguín, 2022). This type of labour provides women with better pay and more hours leaving many men unemployed, without a sense of identity and falling prey not only to the strains of poverty but to perceived emasculation in a society where gender roles are firmly ingrained.

This results in a release of aggression on female spouses for mere catharsis as well as faulting them with the emasculation of their husbands due to their paid labouring which disrupts the gendered norm of husband=breadwinner, overall aggravating gender relations (Tinsman, 1997). Additionally, as women were removed from the private/domestic sphere to keep their families out of poverty, they were exposed to male interactions that did not remain within the parameters of family. This gives rise to male sexual jealousies, unfounded claims of promiscuity and claims of job theft from men to interact with other men (Tinsman, 1997). These reasons compound to increase incidences of severe domestic violence, an undeniable disruption to gender relations due to the recalibration of globalisation-induced gender norms – 'these conflicts sprang directly from the weakening of men's economic positions as the emerging fruit export economy undermined prior-forms of worker security' (Tinsman, 1997).

The second cause for globalisation's disruption to gender norms and relations is that of the physical toll such labouring takes on the body. Tinsman's research dictates that due to prolonged exposure to agricultural pesticides and chemicals, many women experienced a myriad of maladies detrimental to their health as well as their domestic lives (Tinsman, 2004). Such maladies include – respiratory illnesses/failure due to chemical inhalation, birthing foetuses that suffer physical deformities due to the mother's exposure to harmful toxins, miscarriages, and dermatological conditions catalysed by handling pesticides used in

commercial agriculture (Tinsman, 2004). Not only do such ailments jeopardise a female labourer's ability to earn due to the piece-rate pay system, temporeras do not receive medical benefits/insurance from their employers and thus lose wages from illness as well as paying for medical treatment (Tinsman, 2004). One may rebuff – it is the same case for male labourers working in the same industry, how are women more adversely effected than their male counterparts? Firstly, a study conducted at universities in Talca, Chile and Valparaíso, Chile found that of the 1,503 women who participated in the questionnaire over half (57.9%) reported one or multiple instances of violence – oftentimes gynaecological violence - experienced within the public health system (Cárdenas- Castro & Salinero-Rates, 2023). Many of the women interviewed belong to native ethnic groups, are members of the LGBTQIA+, are elderly and/or have lower levels of formal education (Cárdenas- Castro & Salinero-Rates, 2023). Statistics such as these coupled with the lack of medical insurance and benefits as well as the physical toll of the type of employment, all compound to posit women at a higher disadvantage than that of their male counterparts. If a temporera experiences an employment-related illness, not only is she unable to afford medical care due to the piece-rate pay system she may be reluctant to seek such necessary car due to the risk of violence.

The domino effects of such work-induced illnesses see that women are further restricted to the confines of their homes, relegating them to the private sphere. This divides the genders further, disrupting the rhythms of families where both spouses work and removing women from public life. Moreover, such repercussions disrupt the fledgling acceptance and understanding that women too have the right to engage in the public sphere as well as employment. This removes women's voices from conversations surrounding adequate working conditions as well as recognition for the far-reaching arms of such consequences, which are undeniably gendered (Tinsman, 2004). For instance, a temporera who falls ill due to her employment in the commercial agricultural sector inhibits her from earning, lowering her chances of upwards mobilisation and job security; this in turn creates stresses and oftentimes marital strife increasing the risks of GBV compounded by the fact that she is unable to perform in her role as wife and perform her expected domestic duties due to illness, leading to yet more disruption between the genders within the domestic sphere. This was evident in many of the testimonies collected by researcher Heidi Tinsman, wherein many of the temporeras interviewed described physical altercations that occurred between spouses when work-related illnesses prevented wives from fulfilling various duties predetermined by her gender (Tinsman, 2004). This section has sought to illustrate how the structure of the commercial agricultural sector in Chile often serves to disrupt gender relations and further entrench gendered norms within the collective psyche of Chilean society.

Gender Norms & Relations – Reshaped

The final section shall outline the ways in which gender norms and relations are being reshaped within the Chilean commercial agricultural sector. Tinsman asserts that much of the literature documenting the so-called 'plight' of female Chilean Agri-workers often eliminates 'the positive effects that female wage work, despite its exploitative nature, may have had on other spheres of women's lives' (Tinsman, 2004). While researching this article, much of the literature utilises victimising language, framing women as passive instead of active market

players in the labour force. We must reshape our language in order to reshape how such language is then enacted i.e., situating women as victims of a system that excludes them rather than placing them inside a system they have the agency to change. A current reshaping of how women are viewed in Chilean society is that of the societal shifts in gender norms. Much of the oral histories collected opine that 'women's status as workers shaped female identity in ways that broke sharply with the rigid domesticity and sexual subordination of the previous generations' (Tinsman, 1997). This reshaping of the gendered norm that requires women to perform within the role of the eternal subordinate was and continues to reshape norms and gender relations within a gender-divided labour market as well as society.

Another perspective, propounded by researcher Anna Bee, further proves the argument made by this article, regarding the current reshaping of norms, as Bee claims that – '[employment] does bring with it the potential for their empowerment [women] and the re-working of house-hold relations' (Bee, 2000). As stated in the introduction, the increasing feminisation of this particular field of employment has yielded unbalanced but not entirely negative results due to certain aspects of Agri-employment being viewed as skilled, such as that of fruit packing –'women may be able to earn more than men…because they are concentrated in the most highly 'skilled' jobs such as packing delicate fresh fruit for export' (Bee, 2000). This increases women's bargaining power, reconfiguring the power dynamic between the genders and thus how they relate to each other. This reshaping manifests itself in a myriad of advantageous ways for women – increased control over the distribution of their earnings, increased decision-making/bargaining power and the possibility of saving pesos for their own needs (Tinsman, 1997). This essay would be remiss if it did not recognise that access to employment as well as employment associations/unions reshapes the male-employer versus female-subordinate power hierarchy, lending more power to temporeras (Bee, 2000).

The feminisation of Chile's commercial Agri-sector serves to expose women to not only the workings of the global market but also to concept of unionisation and transnational social movements such as 'La Vía Campesina' (LVC). Though collective bargaining and union rights are still inhibited by Chilean labour laws, women's contribution to campesina/o unions has only served to increase female visibility in the workforce and draw attention to the intersections between ethnicity, class, and employment from a female perspective. Not only does this reshape gender norms, the joining of forces between male workers unions and female workers unions reshapes gender relations, encouraging male recognition of the importance of female labour as well as the importance of coalition-building between Campesina and Campesino. LVC have challenged gender issues since its genesis in 1993 and have undertaken a hardline anti-transnational corporation stance (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). As the neoliberal agenda continues to reconfigure itself due to the birth of new technologies, the same technologies play a vital role improving the quality of life for temporeras as well as utilising such technologies to garner attention for their cause i.e., social media. LVC has not only formed a new sense of identity for women and their means of employment; the movement recognises the intersections between rural ways of life and the commercialisation of campesina farming. LVC has created 'an international peasant discourse and identity in tune with the times' (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). More recently, LVC has held yearly seminars on agroecology and holding an annual day of 'Recognition for Peasant Struggles' (LVC, 2019).

LVC transcends gender in many ways, reshaping how the genders interact and relate to one another in the context of Chile, with both parties seeking recognition within the market for their labour rather than fighting for more floor space.

Conclusion

This article has sought to examine the way the processes of globalisation have and continue to reinforce, disrupt, and reshape the processes gender norms and relations in Chile's commercial agriculture, specifically in fruit production and exportation. Exploring the relationship between globalisation and gender within this context has yielded interesting and unbalanced results – as stated in the introduction. Continued studies on such a relationship are imperative to ameliorating our understanding of how globalisation effects women on micro as well as macro level both economically and socially. This article has proven that globalisation and neoliberalism can recalibrate how gender norms and relations are internalised and reproduced within a community, as seen in Chile and its gradual acceptance of women as market players worthy of the same respect as their male counterparts within the commercial Agri-sector. As Tinsman elucidates – '[In Chile] women came to challenge significant forms of male dominance…it sprang from the new meanings attached to women in their capacity as workers' (Tinsman, 2004).

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Who cares? A thematic literature review around the themes of care work, social reproduction and Universal Basic Income

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Abstract

This article explores the themes at the intersection of social reproduction, care work, and Universal Basic Income (UBI) in the literature. UBI has become important, both in the academic and public spheres, in an attempt to even out social disparity and injustice (Parolin and Siöland 2020). Given the global crisis of care, most recently highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic (Heintz *et al.* 2021), it is evident that a shift in the relationship between capitalism and social reproduction must take place (Bauhardt and Harcourt 2019; Heintz *et al.* 2021). The focus of this paper is looking into UBI's potential to transform the way value is attributed to care work and social reproduction in society and, consequently, the gendered practices that lie underneath (Weeks 2011). This article stresses the complexities of such a transformation and shows that UBI can only be transformative if carefully implemented in co-ordination with other interventions, within a targeted policy frame, and with a specific focus on gender and social reproduction. To offer an accurate picture, the author conducted an extended literature review in search for the main debates around social reproduction, care work and UBI. To identify the most relevant themes within the conversation, Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (TA) (2017) was chosen as the most fitting method.

Key Words: Universal Basic Income, Care Work, Gendered Roles, Value Transformation, Citizen Participation

Introduction

In recent years alternative economic theories have experienced a resurgence of attention, given the uncertainties and crises of capitalism and the understanding that endless economic growth does not always lead to wellbeing and happiness. Feminist economists have pointed out that the survival of capitalism lies on the exploitation of those reproductive services that ensure its renewal (Bauhardt and Harcourt 2019; Heintz *et al.* 2021). These services, offered by humans and nature, are highly devalued in the current system and are assumed to be endless and renewable. Many believe that a shift in the way social reproduction and care work are valued in society needs to happen for the system to undergo a real change (Leonard and Fraser 2016; Bauhardt and Harcourt 2019; Heintz *et al.* 2021). One of the policy proposals that aims at the creation of a post-capitalist and post-work society is Universal Basic Income (UBI).

The idea behind UBI is that every member of a society should be given a certain amount of money each month, regardless of employment or status, that is sufficient for subsistence and promotes economic stability (Bidadanure 2019). Despite there being much literature around UBI, the themes of gender, care work and social reproduction seem to be marginal, as will be clarified later in the analysis. This article aims at filling this gap by trying to understand if UBI can truly be transformative in this regard and how it interacts with the feminist economic understanding that social reproduction and care work need to be reconceptualised within economy.

Context

Rethinking work

The industrial revolution is considered the point that separates the modern era from post-modern societies. Before this, the concept of working for a wage did not have such a prominent position within society, given that it did not play as much of a social or political role as it does today, and people used to work less. It was with the advent of industrial capitalism that the role of work slowly asserted its dominance, culminating in being considered an ethical and moral duty of all individuals (Gorz 1999). The rise of neoliberal policies, that started towards the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, came with a promise of endless growth and the idea that hard work equates a good life, happiness, and success (Gorz 1999; Beneria 2016b). Looking at today's globalised marketplace and its multiple financial crises, it is evident that capitalism did not keep the promise that economic growth automatically generates a better life. On the contrary, it is possible to identify a widening of inequalities, increasing social unrest, and the weakening of democracies across the globe (Berger 2001; Beneria 2016a). A new conversation around development began in the 1980s, which aimed to challenge the assumption that economic growth and paid labour are the only source of success and satisfaction for human beings (Gorz 1999; Beneria 2016b).

The reduction of work

Shifting the focus towards human wellbeing would bring a new outlook to human activity, where work is not simply a service offered in exchange for monetary compensation

but also a pleasurable and caring activity (Gorz 1999; Haug 2009). In today's "work-based society" (Gorz 1999, p.41), productive work is considered to be a moral obligation that individuals need to fulfil, with the understanding that it will result in collective success. With the concept of "work ethic", there is an attribution of morality to labour that automatically shifts the responsibility onto individuals. This creates a dichotomy between those who work hard and are therefore granted social recognition, and those that for various reasons do not deliver on this duty and are deemed shameful and unworthy to be in society (Gorz 1999). Under this premises, it is clear why waged labour ends up dominating people's lives. The only way to be able to dedicate attention to other aspects of life is by reducing the number of hours dedicated to paid work. Proponents of a reconceptualisation of time dedicated to wage labour suggest a division of human activity that encompasses "domestic labour and work-for-oneself", (Gorz 1999, p.43) as well as "autonomous activity" (Gorz 1999, p.44). The first includes all of those tasks that do not have a monetary motivation and are aimed at the reproduction and wellbeing of individuals and communities, while the latter refers to those creative pursuits that humans undertake for no other purpose than enjoying the process.

Universal Basic Income as a model to reduce work

A policy proposal and economic model that has been associated with the reduction of working hours is UBI. It is a proposal that since the 1980s has gained more and more attention in academic circles, among activists, as well as in the mainstream discourse (Van Parijs 1991; Weeks 2011). One of the most recent supporters of UBI is Philippe Van Parijs (1991), who in his article "Why Surfers Should Be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income" defines it as "an individual guaranteed minimum income without either a means test or a (willingness to) work condition" (p.102). Bidadanure (2019) expands by defining it as "a *radical* policy proposal of a monthly cash grant given to all members of a community without means test, regardless of personal desert, with no strings attached and, under most proposals, at a sufficiently high level to enable a life free from economic insecurity" (p.482, emphasis added). What is crucial to understand is that it is a grant that is paid out in *cash*, *individually* to people and not households, *unconditionally*, *universally* to the whole population and on a *regular* basis (Weeks 2011; Bidadanure 2019). The fact that UBI offers economic wellbeing to individuals without any work being performed in return is valuable when attempting to achieve an overall reduction of paid work, freeing time from the subordination to labour (Weeks 2011). Furthermore, this model has received much attention for its compatibility with a renewed understanding of the importance of care and reproductive work.

Care work and social reproduction within capitalism

To better understand how UBI could interact with care and social reproduction, it is necessary to zoom out and look at capitalism's relationship with reproductive work. Feminist economists have pointed out that there is a clear interdependence between the market's ability to accumulate capital and unpaid domestic and care work (Beneria 2016c; Bauhardt 2019; Heintz *et al.* 2021). Lourdes Benería and Sen (2016c) identify these unpaid activities as "reproductive work" while the feminist discourse has long been referring to them as "social reproduction" (Bakker and Gill 2003). Reproductive work and social reproduction encompass various activities that contribute to the propagation of capitalism: On the one hand, they include

daily tasks that renew workers ability to work (e.g. eating, sleeping, emotional or psychological support) while, on the other hand, they encompass all aspects of biological reproduction (e.g. bearing, raising, and educating children, and so forth), including nature and the ecological services it offers (Bauhardt 2019).

Care work is located within this broader landscape of social reproduction and reproductive work. The concept of care has been centred in feminist discourse and is fundamental to understand the necessity of reducing waged labour. Care work, as the name suggests, is an activity that is inherent to human beings and is the root of human interaction; it consists of people's ability to connect with each other on a personal, intimate level, to care and to be cared for (Lynch 2009; International Labour Organisation 2018). Because of this relational and intimate nature, it is more difficult to commodify and outsource it as it involves emotional and psychological labour, which are more difficult to assign a market value to (Beneria 2016c; Heintz *et al.* 2021). Truly acknowledging the relevance of care work for social reproduction entails a restructuring and rebalancing of waged work and other types of activities within neoliberal capitalism.

While some care tasks have entered the realm of waged production (Weeks 2011), a big portion is still carried out in the domestic sphere and, because it is often assumed to be performed "out of love", it is therefore unpaid (Beneria 2016c; Bauhardt 2019; Heintz *et al.* 2021). Even when institutionalised and waged, reproductive work is often undervalued and consequently underpaid (Beneria 2016c; Leonard and Fraser 2016). Additionally, it is a sector that is often feminised (Leonard and Fraser 2016; Lynch 2022), with women globally performing three times as much unpaid care work as men (International Labour Organisation 2018; UN Women 2020), often because of gendered stereotypes and cultural beliefs that they are "naturally" more apt to it (Bauhardt 2019). Aspects such as socio-economic status and race contribute to the creation of hierarchies of care, where those that have the economic means hire others to perform domestic caring responsibilities, segregating these chores to a minority of women (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015; Leonard and Fraser 2016; Amelina and Lutz 2019).

Feminist perspectives on Universal Basic Income

When applying a gendered lens to the UBI model, it is possible to interpret it as a tool to rethink and reshape gender inequalities within the family on a small scale, as well as on a bigger, societal scale (Weeks 2011; Bidadanure 2019). In theory, this would allow moving away from a gendered male breadwinner model to a more gender-balanced division of care given that UBI "does not address its potential recipients as gendered members of families" (Weeks 2011, p.149). However, given that gendered roles are deeply rooted in societal understanding of labour division, it is necessary to discuss and address them proactively to unlock UBI's transformative potential to revalue care work and social reproduction within society.

UBI is a policy proposal that is increasingly receiving attention in multiple spheres. Given the opportunity that it offers in restructuring society's current understanding of time and work, it is fundamental that the discourse takes on a gendered lens. This has often not been the

case, given that "[s]ociological, economic, legal and political thought has focused on the public sphere, the outer spaces of life, indifferent to the fact that none of these can function without the care institutions of society" (Lynch 2009, p.36). As economist and sociologist Diane Elson (1998) clarifies in "The Economic, the Political and the Domestic: Businesses, States and Households in the Organisation of Production", "the majority of people reading and writing political economy, and making practical decisions based on their understanding of political economy, do not have women's rights and gender equality as their prime objectives" (p.190).

Methodology

This article is based on secondary analysis of academic papers and was carried out as an extensive thematic literature review with the aim of acquiring insights into the various themes that exist within the literature at the intersection of UBI, care work and social reproduction. Despite this being a thematic review, it was still relevant to maintain an approach to the search strategy that is as systematic as possible, to avoid any bias. For this purpose, it was important to define what criteria for inclusion and exclusion of articles would be applied and maintained throughout the process. Given the time constraints in writing the paper, the criteria adopted in the search were that the articles would be written in English and published in the last 10 years, which would also ensure they are relevant to the current discourse. Additionally, to ensure reliability, only peer reviewed articles were chosen. Given that there was no funding allocated for the writing of this paper, only open access articles made it to the final cut. Because of time constraints it was only possible to search on one database, therefore Web of Science was chosen both for the variety of disciplines it covers and also for its convenient search strategy options. To find articles, keywords used in different combinations were "Universal Basic Income", "Basic Income", "care", "social reproduction", and "gender".

When conducting the review, the process of selecting the articles took time and attention so that the findings would truthfully reflect the discourse. This happened in different stages, starting with an initial scanning of existing articles, followed by a more in depth reading to assess their pertinence and quality. The selection process was thoroughly documented on a separate log to ensure that any decision taken could be traced back and justified. This log included information such as how many articles were originally identified, how many were selected for the final review, and why some were discarded (Punch 2013; Raddats *et al.* 2019; Snyder 2019). The definitive selection was conducted on June 23rd 2023, resulting in 30 articles being picked for further reading.

After more in depth analysis, some articles were removed because they referred to "basic income" as minimum wage and were therefore not pertinent. Others, such as the ones written by Pinto et al. (2021) and Johnson et al. (2019), despite their focus on UBI, looked at extremely technical aspects of health that did not necessarily fit the scope of this specific review. Additionally, two articles by Gopal and Issa (2021) and Cabaña and Linares (2022), despite being very interesting, were excluded because they offered a more general discourse around UBI and did not engage enough with the themes of social reproduction and gendered empowerment. The article by Vega and Santana (2022), despite the abstract being in English,

was written in Spanish, but because of its relevance to the research question and because of the author's ability to speak and read Spanish, it was kept. The literature review was finally conducted on 13 articles that are listed in a table at the end of this article.

The articles selected are mostly theoretical and do not look at specific empirical cases. They come from a variety of journals around Sociology, Policy, Feminist Studies, Economy, Childhood studies, and Law. Once the sample of sources was selected, the articles were thoroughly read to generate specific codes that were later condensed into bigger themes. To identify recurring and specific themes an interpretive TA approach proved to be the best method of analysis (Becker *et al.* 2012; Clarke and Braun 2017). Examples of codes that emerged and were eventually used are "gendered stereotype"; "hindrance to transformation"; "transformative potential"; "policy support"; "cultural assumption"; "alternative proposal"; among others.

Given that the article only engaged with secondary data, much of the ethical considerations had to do with the interaction with the texts as well as with the position of the author within the knowledge. A limitation of this study lies in the necessity to set exclusion criteria to narrow down the scope of the literature. This automatically implies that some articles did not make it to the final selection, and it is possible that relevant sources were excluded because of language and accessibility limitations.

Findings and analysis

Overall, the articles reviewed are based on similar conceptualisations of UBI that rest on the understanding previously presented in the context chapter: a grant paid in *cash*, *individually*, *unconditionally*, *universally*, *regularly*, and that is assumed to be enough to ensure a decent living standard without the need for recipients to engage in paid work. In this theoretical understanding, UBI is presented as a utopic and society-altering intervention, which leads most of the authors to raise some critical questions around its promise of singlehandedly opening a window of transformation into a post-capitalist and post-work utopia. Throughout the literature, twelve of the articles present both positive and negative opinions and five debate interventions that could support UBI and what policy framework would help it deliver on its promise of a society where social reproduction, and care work are re-valued, and consequently gender norms and stereotypes are challenged.

The main themes identified within the articles were: marginality of gender in the discourse; positions in favour of UBI; critiques of UBI; alternative models to UBI; and policy planning and challenging gender norms.

Marginality of Gender

Some of the articles reinforce the claim laid out in the context chapter, that gender and social reproduction have a marginal position in the UBI discourse. Lombardozzi (2020) clarifies that UBI has attracted attention from both left and right wing parties, and when it

comes to progressive left wing positions, it has been praised for its ability to open up space for progress. Despite these claims of the transformative nature of UBI, authors such as Koslowski and Duvander (2018) are sceptical, stressing that the movement does not position itself as explicitly feminist and that, as many other political projects, it has left gender equality behind in favour of other social achievements. Additionally, some of the authors argue that UBI does not challenge the historical norms and cultural understandings rooted in biological determinants that lead to gendered roles in care work (Yamashita 2016; Koslowski and Duvander 2018; Lombardozzi 2020; Yang *et al.* 2021; McGann and Murphy 2023), and the added discrimination that derives from classism and racism (Dinerstein and Pitts 2018; Vega and Santana 2022). Lombardozzi (2020) clarifies that it is fundamental for gender to be at the core of all future policy and economic projects, including UBI, in order to achieve true gender transformation.

Positions in favour of UBI

Nine of the articles articulated the positive outcomes that UBI can have when addressing gender inequality and the invisibility of social reproduction and care work in society.

Even out gendered dynamics

Many of the authors argue that, by freeing up time, UBI would help challenge the social division of labour, inside and outside of the home, and consequently question the biological assumptions that inform the gender segregation of tasks (Zelleke 2022). Lombardozzi (2020), Vega and Santana (2022) and McGann and Murphy (2023) maintain that UBI could help create the right conditions for women to negotiate the value of unpaid reproductive and care work within society. In this sense, UBI could support a more gender-neutral social citizenship (Yang *et al.* 2021) and lead to a more balanced distribution of care work between genders (Lombardozzi 2020), helped by the promotion of part-time employment among men (McGann and Murphy 2023).

Additionally, Yang *et al.* (2021) argue that by offering a per-capita income support, UBI would empower women (Lehmann and Sanders 2018; Lombardozzi 2020; Segal *et al.* 2021; Yang *et al.* 2021; Zelleke 2022), allowing them to access healthcare, pension and income support (Zelleke 2022) and helping them out of abusive situations, that are more difficult to leave when economic support is given on a household basis (Vega and Santana 2022; Zelleke 2022). Furthermore, Yang *et al.* (2021) argue that UBI would hinder the outsourcing of domestic work to women who are usually exploited and discriminated in grey markets. Vega and Santana (2022) add that UBI would support women to leave informal sectors of the market, areas where they are often employed, especially in the Global South. At the same time UBI could empower workers in general to negotiate better conditions, given that they would not need a job to live but would want to work as a personal choice.

Change the welfare state

Lehmann and Sanders (2018) underline how current welfare systems are complex and invasive, arguing that the difficulties in applying and receiving subsidies actively contribute to perpetuating cycles of poverty. From this perspective, UBI can be seen to substitute a very complex welfare system, since it would be granted indiscriminately to every citizen, avoiding scrutinising practices of eligibility, preserving personal dignity, while also cutting the costs associated with assessment and evaluation (Lehmann and Sanders 2018; Vega and Santana 2022). Additionally, UBI has the potential to reach people that live at the margins and fall through the cracks of the welfare system (Lombardozzi 2020), large numbers of which are women (Koslowski and Duvander 2018; Vega and Santana 2022), especially supporting female-led single parent families (Yang *et al.* 2021; Vega and Santana 2022) and thus empowering women in the face of the state (Vega and Santana 2022). Lehmann and Sanders (2018) further argue that UBI can be an expensive policy proposal but that it is fundamental to have a clear understanding of the current costs of the welfare system UBI would replace, while also considering that it would come with health benefits, further reducing the costs on the health system as navigating the current welfare system takes a toll on citizens' mental health and wellbeing.

Transformative potential

Despite controversial opinions around UBI's real power to transform society, Alessandrini (2018) offers a good reading of its transformative *potential,* portraying it as a conversation opener that could lead to a bigger restructuring. As the author clarifies,

> "[i]t may be that in the process, the way in which we conceive of work, and this includes reproductive labour, may be affected so that in place of the old 'work as worth' ideology, a discussion on how to organise the activities we value in life could begin, and in this discussion the meaning of reproductive labour may be re-articulated, delinked from the house, the family, the mother and the woman" (Alessandrini 2018, p.406).

After all, as Segal *et al.* (2021) claim, positive outcomes have been seen in UBI experiments with people actively engaging in paid work, re-entering the workforce long-term after being unemployed for extended periods of time, and being more likely to find long-term and better quality employment. Experiences collected in UBI trials show improved mental and physical health, as well as higher levels of happiness and satisfaction (Lehmann and Sanders 2018; Segal *et al.* 2021). When addressing gendered dynamics, pilot projects prove that UBI enhances women's economic independence while reducing their necessity to engage in transactional sex (Segal *et al.* 2021; Yang *et al.* 2021) and has a positive impact on their social standing, especially for those living in poverty (Lehmann and Sanders 2018).

Critiques of UBI

Twelve of the articles offered a more sceptical perspective on UBI's ability to deliver a long-lasting transformation when it comes to social reproduction and gender inequality.

Reproduction of systems of oppression

A strong critique directed at UBI by Dinerstein and Pitts (2018) and Lombardozzi and Pitts (2020) is that it is not transformative enough, and that it rather seems to be a necessity for capitalism to stabilise its current crises and further reproduce. These authors claim that UBI oversimplifies the social processes that take place in society and has a partial understanding of the complexity of the mechanisms of capitalism and the interconnectedness of today's crises. Given that UBI is designed to work within the capitalist system, it seems difficult for it to have the tools to challenge the system itself (Lombardozzi and Pitts 2020). Dinerstein and Pitts (2018) and Vega and Santana (2022) argue that UBI is presented as a solution to diffuse social tension and even out inequalities by appealing to a concept of universality that does not address the social relations underneath, running the risk of being blind towards intersectional forms of discrimination. They argue that it would only strengthen class and racial segregation in hierarchies of care where women in lower income families would end up tied to domestic work more than women in upper classes, hindering collective action. Finally, because pilot projects have only run for short periods of time, these authors claim there is a gap in the knowledge around long term and intergenerational impacts of UBI. Given these uncertainties and doubts, it is fundamental for proponents of the policy to pay attention to the social relations of capitalism within which UBI operates and address them, if the model is to be transformative (Lombardozzi and Pitts 2020).

Reinforcement of gender segregation

When specifically looking at gendered power dynamics, Lombardozzi (2020) and Vega and Santana (2022) question UBI's ability to offer a rearticulation of these roles, given its foundation in pre-existing patriarchal structures and stereotypes. Because UBI does not openly and intentionally address the gendered dimension of labour distribution in the public and private sectors, and the biases present in the welfare system (Yamashita 2016; Lombardozzi 2020), it might actually end up *reinforcing* segregation in pre-determined roles, gender-based expectations and hierarchies (Koslowski and Duvander 2018; Yang *et al.* 2021; Vega and Santana 2022; McGann and Murphy 2023). Additionally, it runs the risk of playing on top of existing inequalities, worsening the wellbeing of poorer women (Lombardozzi 2020). A thorough deconstruction of gender roles within society needs to happen before UBI can deliver on its promise of equality (Koslowski and Duvander 2018). What seems fundamental to understand is that norms condition decisions in daily life, understanding how they shape culture and institutions is fundamental to properly challenge power dynamics (Lombardozzi 2020).

Depoliticisation of the State

Lombardozzi and Pitts (2020) stress that the state is "the political form" (p.581) that capitalist social relations take and Dinerstein and Pitts (2018) proceed to criticise the fact that UBI lacks a critical perspective towards it. Firstly, they claim, the state must be recognised, not as a neutral entity, but as one of the social relations of capitalism that perpetrate inequality and it is therefore impossible to expect that it will spontaneously alleviate conflicts and contradictions within the system. Secondly, it is fundamental to recognise it as a space that can only deliver a change when there is political struggle and conflict. By overlooking this function,

UBI may end up handing over too much power to the state and obliterate those social contradictions that are the fuel for civil action. Especially looking at how UBI has entered the political agendas of right-wing parties and more authoritarian regimes, the risk that the state might arbitrarily decide who can access the grant and who cannot is a matter of real concern. The fact that UBI "concentrates power absolutely in the hands of the state as a benefactor rather than a boss, with the more subservient and compliant relationship this implies" (Dinerstein and Pitts 2018, p.486) may lead to a loss of civil society's capacity to bargain and enact a class struggle for better conditions. Consequently, UBI runs the risk of reinforcing the commodification and privatisation of care services moving accountability from the state onto individuals (Lombardozzi 2020) and potentially weakening women's position in face of the state (Vega and Santana 2022).

Alternatives to UBI

What emerges from many of the articles is that UBI should be contextualised within a broader and more comprehensive set of actions. As Koslowski and Duvander (2018) claim, "[b]asic income is a freedom project. The question is whether money is sufficient to procure such freedom" (p.9). Many of the authors have drawn attention to alternative policies that could either substitute or complement UBI. These are Universal Basic Services and Universal Basic Infrastructure, Participation Income and Care Income. For the scope of this article the last two will not be expanded on.

Universal Basic Services and Universal Basic Infrastructure

Universal Basic Services (UBS) is a proposal that offers an alternative to UBI's reliance on money. As defined by Lombardozzi (2020), the purpose of UBS is to offer "a set of public, free, basic, and quasi-universal services to address material needs such as shelters, sustenance, healthcare, education, legal support, transport and communication" (p.321). This policy would alter the way care services are seen away from being commodities on the market towards a social resource available for everyone (Lombardozzi 2020), consequently repoliticising the State and its responsibility towards citizens (Lombardozzi and Pitts 2020; McGann and Murphy 2023). Lombardozzi and Pitts (2020) and McGann and Murphy (2023) claim that a state expenditure aimed at offering basic services would have a positive outcome as it would reduce the cost of living and increase the percentage of wage that workers would be able to keep for themselves and not invest in care services. This would additionally foster a sense of collective action that could not be achieved by a highly individualising UBI. In other words, by satisfying human needs more directly, this model could "mitigate some issues and break the individualising link with money inherent in the UBI" (Lombardozzi and Pitts 2020, p.588). As McGann and Murphy (2023) argue, at its core, UBS "is a mission to transform the way services are provided, to put people in control, and to build a new role for the state" (p.20) relying on the understanding that "collective provision yields far better results than market transactions in terms of equity, efficiency, solidarity and sustainability" (p.20). Similarly to UBS, Universal Basic Infrastructure (UBIS) is a model aimed at the direct satisfaction of needs, by focusing on

expanding physical infrastructures such as railways, energy, broadband, as well as social ones such as health or care work, to better satisfy the needs of citizens (Lombardozzi and Pitts 2020).

Policy planning and challenging gender norms

Across the different articles taken into consideration for this review, it is possible to identify one recurrent theme. It is clear that UBI can only work if there is a conscious planning and a systematic intervention of the state in an effort to deconstruct gendered roles and the way care is seen within society (Yamashita 2016; Koslowski and Duvander 2018; Yang *et al.* 2021; Vega and Santana 2022). This concept is fundamental because of the risks of careless implementation, as authors Koslowski and Duvander (2018) highlight:

> "[b]asic income would potentially change the boundaries for state intervention, which for many sounds intuitively positive, and may well bring many benefits. However, if the state does not intervene regarding gender equality, gender norms will be determined by other less visible forces, such as the power dynamics within households" (p.13).

As Yamashita (2016) clarifies, the welfare system is not neutral, rather argues that "[s]ocial policies recognise and offer institutional support to some models of caring and family organisation while sanctioning others" (p.434). In their article, Vega and Santana (2022) stress the necessity to directly address cultural assumptions in order to achieve true gender transformation. In this sense, targeted policy seems to have a more direct impact when addressing the distribution of care and reproductive tasks across society than UBI alone (Yamashita 2016; Koslowski and Duvander 2018; McGann and Murphy 2023). To challenge stereotypical divisions of roles, both Yamashita (2016) and Vega and Santana (2022) clarify that it is necessary to detach any assumptions from specific roles and to normalise the practice of care as performable by all genders.

When it comes to policy, Koslowski and Duvander (2018) claim that worldwide, the policy environment for implementing a UBI is not ready and that the state should intervene to actively shape policy to guarantee transformative results. Given that "[t]he dynamics of implementing change to social policy generally, and income security specifically, are complex in any pluralist democracy" (Segal *et al.* 2021, p.399), there is a strong need for negotiation and for participation of civil society in the shaping of a new post-capitalist landscape. According to Zelleke (2022), Laruffa *et al.* (2022) and Vega and Santana (2022), it is fundamental to self-organise and adjust national policies at a local level in order to have a clearer understanding of the actual needs of the community. Therefore, UBI should be seen as an additional integration to other services and not a substitution of them, obtained through bargaining and with the support of political action and coordination from the state (Vega and Santana 2022).

Conclusions

What is clear from this analysis is that for UBI to be truly transformative, it needs to be supported by other policies, within a framework that aims at redefining where value lies in society (Koslowski and Duvander 2018; Lombardozzi 2020; Yang *et al.* 2021; McGann and Murphy 2023). What was interesting to observe is the variety of positions present across articles and at times within articles themselves. There is consensus around some areas, for example, the understanding that gendered norms, care work and social reproduction are still quite marginal within the UBI literature, that it is necessary for them to come to the fore in order to achieve real transformation (Yamashita 2016; Dinerstein and Pitts 2018; Koslowski and Duvander 2018; Lombardozzi 2020; Yang *et al.* 2021; Vega and Santana 2022; McGann and Murphy 2023) and the fact that how gendered norms are created and performed in society needs to be centred and challenged (Yamashita 2016; Koslowski and Duvander 2018; Lombardozzi 2020). At the same time, there is disagreement around UBIs potential to transform gendered norms.

Some very interesting themes emerged that inform an interesting outlook onto a re-centring of care work and social reproduction within a neoliberal capitalist system and would be worth further research. Firstly, the understanding that care work is a practice that is more cultural than biological and that there is a need to deconstruct the biological understanding that informs social norms around it and implement policies that are built on this premise (Yamashita 2016; Laruffa *et al.* 2022; Vega and Santana 2022; McGann and Murphy 2023). Secondly, the focus placed by authors such as McGann and Murphy (2023), Vega and Santana (2022), Lombardozzi (2020), and Lombardozzi and Pitts (2020) on the need to shift from a more individualised policy planning to a collective and re-distributive approach towards care work is fundamental to expand on. In connection to this, the stress put by the same authors on co-production of services and shared responsibility between state and civil society is key in further organising creative alternatives around UBS and UBIS.

The bringing together of such a variety of articles and disciplines paints a very comprehensive and intersectional picture. Overall, this analysis has clarified that re-centring care work and social reproduction in a capitalist system is a complex process that will require multi-layered interventions and the involvement of multiple actors.

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Appendix

In the following table there is a list of the articles used for the literature review with some keywords identified by the author to clarify what the paper focuses on. Full bibliographic information can be found in the reference list.

Author(s) and year	Title	Keywords	Journal
Lombardozzi, L. (2020)	Gender Inequality, Social Reproduction and the Universal Basic Income	Crisis of social reproduction; gender inequality; challenging cultural practices.	The Political quarterly (London. 1930)
Lombardozzi, L.; Pitts, F.H. (2020)	Social form, social reproduction and social policy: Basic income, basic services, basic infrastructure	Crisis of social reproduction; issues with UBI; UBS and UBIS as alternative models.	Capital & class
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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

"I Couldn't Help but Compare with Other Countries": Migrant Mothers' Lived Experiences of Japan's COVID-19 State of Emergency

Connolly, Abigail

Abstract This article presents the lived experiences of English-speaking migrant mothers in Japan during the early COVID-19 pandemic when school and childcare facilities closed, there was a national State of Emergency (SoE) and foreign residents were banned from re-entering the country. I examine the influence of the intersecting identities and social locations of being a woman, a mother of a dependent child, and a migrant in Japan.

For mothers in this research, the COVID-19 pandemic played out against a backdrop of global gender inequality, which intensifies when women become mothers and is notoriously extreme in Japan. Although non-Japanese people face institutional and social discrimination, these mothers occupy a relatively privileged position amongst migrants, in a country which values English language ability. Still, their daily lives were affected by social structures and inequalities, and by a government response that did not sufficiently mitigate the uneven impacts of the crisis. Mothers experienced stress from the surge in demand for unpaid care of family members in a context of ambiguity, exacerbated by an unmet need for information and, for many, a language barrier. Mothers turned to online communities to provide each other with social support and information; as well as accessing information in English from sources in other countries.

Findings support the case for intersectionality-based policymaking and crisis response which utilise knowledge from lived experiences of people with intersecting characteristics, as these factors influence people's experiences of and access to services, and the ways in which they are impacted by crises such as public health emergencies.

Key Words: COVID-19, motherhood, gender, migrants, intersectionality

Introduction

Japan is often seen as a homogeneous country with one language, culture and ethnicity. Although this "perceived homogeneity is a constructed worldview", in practice, policymaking still often reflects this view (Morita, 2017, p.5). Unless specifically about migrants, research on women in Japan is usually about Japanese women (often implied through lack of data on the nationality or surveys being conducted only in Japanese). The uneven impact of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that a one-size-fits-all approach to policymaking and crisis response in Japan is ineffective and reinforces inequalities. Although gender inequality is of particular concern in Japan (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2021), people experience services and are affected by crises differently because of intersecting social locations such as gender, nationality and parental status (UN Women, 2020).

This article presents the lived experiences of English-speaking migrant mothers in Japan during the early COVID-19 pandemic when school and childcare facilities closed, the first national State of Emergency (SoE)[1] was in place and foreign residents were banned from re-entering the country.[2] The mothers in this research can be described as "middling migrants", in Japan "for work, lifestyle or love", not as refugees nor elite professionals (Williams Veazey, 2019, p.9). I use a feminist intersectional lens to examine how the combined identities and social locations of being a woman, a mother of a dependent child and a migrant, influenced lived experiences. My findings show how macro-level structures and policymaking affected the daily lives of these women. This paper is from a wider research project examining how gender norms in Britain and Japan influenced lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Connolly, 2023).

First, I outline the background of women, mothers and migrants in Japan and the value of an intersectional lens to understand their lived experiences. Next, I describe the methodology, followed by the findings and a discussion. In conclusion, I recommend intersectionality-based policymaking which utilises knowledge from the lived experiences of people with intersecting characteristics.

Background

In this section, I describe the situation of women, parents and migrants in Japan and how each group was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that research on women and mothers in Japan is largely explicitly or implicitly about Japanese women. Nevertheless,

[1] Schools closed 2 March, with most not reopening until June 2020. Following regional emergency measures, 16 April to 14 May 2020 saw the first national SoE which continued in some prefectures until 25 May 2020 and included requests to reduce in-person contact, and to close non-essential businesses and services (Shimizu & Negita, 2020).

[2] Border control measures were strict and extensive (Shimizu & Negita, 2020). Foreign residents could not re-enter Japan from 3 April to 31 August 2020 (Burgess, 2021). Re-entry was even denied to people who met criteria for extenuating circumstances (Dooley, 2020).

the status of Japanese women is still relevant to the status of migrant women in Japan. Then I present how gender, parental status, and being 'non-Japanese' represent both personal identities and social locations embedded in social structures and, therefore, the value of an intersectional feminist lens for research and policymaking (UN Women, 2020).

Women in Japan / Japanese women

Japan consistently ranks very low on the Global Gender Gap Index, because of the poor representation of women in politics and senior business roles (WEF, 2021). Female employment is high at 72%, but women are overrepresented in precarious part time, temporary and contract work with their average income 44% lower than men (WEF, 2021, p.37). Women face institutional discrimination in the employment system (Nagamatsu, 2021), often lacking job security, pay increases or career progression (Yamaguchi, 2019). Moreover, the tax and social security system incentivises the 'secondary earner' in a household to keep earnings below a threshold, disproportionately affecting married women (OECD, 2017).

Economic inequality and overrepresentation of women in the service and retail sector meant that women, as a group in Japan, suffered more job losses and negative socio-economic impacts of the pandemic than men (Gender Equality Bureau [GEB], 2021; Kobayashi et al., 2021; Nomura et al., 2021; Rich, 2020; Shibusawa et al., 2021). The number of women in Japan taking their own lives, compared to men, increased alarmingly in 2020 linked to gender-based violence, job losses and unpaid care work (GEB, 2021; Nomura, 2021; Watanabe and Tanaka, 2022).

Parents (mothers)

Women in Japan are more likely to be the 'secondary earner' in the household and to deprioritise their careers or leave paid employment entirely when they become mothers (GEB, 2020; OECD, 2017; Yamaguchi, 2019). Work culture in Japan is incompatible with caregiving and housework is rarely outsourced, with women doing the majority of unpaid care work (GEB, 2020). Demands from daycare, preschool, school and extra-curricular activities in Japan are high, with mothers becoming the 'default parent' in charge (Rich, 2020). At times of crisis, there is an expectation that women, especially mothers, will take care of people. Former Prime Minister Abe had stated that "women possess the wisdom and knowledge needed to protect their families from disasters […] capable of providing attentive physical and psychological care for the victims" (UNDRR, 2015, para.6).

The school closure announcement in February 2020[3] caused "substantial confusion to families" (Takaku & Yokohama, 2021, p.2) but affected mothers more than fathers (Shibusawa et al., 2021); for example, mothers supervised education often without sufficient resources from

[3] On Thursday 27 February 2020, the Japanese government requested schools close from Monday 2 March (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Daycare and preschools closed in April. Some prefectures extended closures to the end of May and a period of 'self-restraint' kept some children from daycare and after school clubs until July 2020.

schools (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Men, more than women, continued to travel to workplaces during the SoE (Rich, 2020; Yamamura & Tsustsui, 2021); whilst time spent by women on unpaid care remained double that of men (GEB, 2021, p.13). Furthermore, the gender gap in hours spent on childcare for parents with children aged under 12 widened (Yamamura & Tsustsui, 2021, p.41).

During the pandemic, women in Japan were more anxious than men about the health of themselves and their families, with fear of illness and stigma affecting mental health (Kobayashi et al., 2021; Shibusawa et al., 2021; Yoshioka et al., 2021). Separation of family members caused more stress for women, as did the sudden use of the home for work, study, child and elder care (Shibusawa et al., 2021).

Migrants

The term 'migrant' applies to foreign nationals living in Japan for more than three months (Miller et al., 2019). I use the term 'migrant' for consistency, but it is rarely used by research participants who describe themselves by their nationality, as 'ex-pats' or 'foreign residents'.

Migrants in Japan lack minority rights legislation and legal protection against discrimination (Morita, 2017). Insufficient multicultural and integration policies further contribute to the outsider status of even long-term residents (Burgess, 2021). Japan does not allow dual citizenship, nor does it allow non-citizens the right to vote or run for office (Morita, 2017). However, being largely from high-income countries and English speakers, the 'middling migrants' in my research have a relatively privileged position in Japanese society (Margolis, 2020; Shipper, 2002).

The pandemic saw migrants affected in ways that Japanese nationals were not (see Burgess, 2021 for an overview, Córdova & Dias, 2021 on the Brazilian community, Hu & Umeda, 2021 on Chinese migrants, and Bhandari et al., 2021, Kharel, 2022; and Tanaka, 2020 on Nepalese migrants). Notably, for five months, 2.8 million foreign residents could not re-enter Japan if they left (Shibusawa et al., 2021, p.60), and around 100,000 people were stranded outside of Japan (Dooley, 2020). Countless more dared not travel for family emergencies or funerals, even after the re-entry ban was lifted (Burgess, 2021).

Intersectionality and migrant mothers

Gender is a social structure and a significant dimension of social stratification, where women as a group, have subordinate status to men (Risman, 2004). Gender difference extends to parenting "with different expectations attached to being a mother and father" (Risman, 2004, p.436). Experiences of mothering can be positive and empowering, whilst motherhood as an institution reinforces women's secondary status to men (Rich, 1986). Globally, women – especially as mothers – have a disproportionate responsibility for the home and family health

(Harman, 2016). For migrants, the "intersection of gender and parenting is made more complex" (Yang et al., 2022, p.568). Migrants typically have some degree of outsider status, certainly so in Japan. Mothers need "support, advice, information, empathy and companionship", but migration and motherhood represent "a dual disruption of women's social infrastructure" which can lead to isolation even for 'middling migrants' (Williams Veazey, 2019, p.90).

Intersectionality is useful because it shifts how researchers and policy actors think about social categories and their complex relationships (Hankivsky et al., 2014). A gender lens alone is not enough to analyse how the mothers in my research were affected by the first SoE in Japan; an intersectional feminist lens (UN Women, 2020) however reveals how overlapping identities and social locations shaped their lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

This multi-method qualitative research comprises participatory observation and content analysis of Facebook groups for English-speaking migrant mothers in Japan, an online survey shared through Facebook groups, and semi-structured interviews conducted via instant messaging apps. I addressed the research question: How did the combined identities and social locations of being a woman, a mother of a dependent child and a migrant influence lived experiences of the pandemic?

I have used the COREQ check list for reporting qualitative research (Tong et al., 2007) to guide this section, which describes the researcher position, the characteristics of the participants and methods of data collection and analysis.

Participants and researcher position

I am a cis-gender woman, a mother and, during the research, a migrant in Japan as a postgraduate student. I was a member of numerous private Facebook groups for English-speaking mothers in Japan, and selected two of these groups for this research whose combined membership of more than 1,000 mothers includes many nationalities. I had no direct relationship with research participants. I posted the online survey on Facebook groups and asked people to share it. I recruited interviewees from survey respondents.

The majority of the Facebook group members are between 30 and 50 years of age with dependent children. All communicate in English, although it is a second language for some. A notable proportion are married to Japanese men and are permanently settled in Japan, but many still struggle with the language, in particular written Japanese. All interviewees had been living in Japan for at least five years, three of them married to Japanese nationals.

Data collection

I conducted participatory observation of two Facebook groups for 18 months, combining ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1987) with a template organising method (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). I also looked systematically at 91 posts and 1,302 associated comments under the search terms 'covid' and 'school' from February to May 2020.

Survey questions were multiple-choice and open-ended with comment boxes. In June 2020, I received 43 responses from mothers co-habiting with or married to men, with between one and three children aged from four months to 15 years old living at home. Nine respondents volunteered for interview; four replied when contacted. In August 2020, I conducted four semi-structured interviews via the instant messaging apps LINE and WhatsApp and downloaded the chat transcripts. Interviewees could edit or delete answers, but nobody did. Interviews took between one hour and several days to complete (with breaks), there were no repeat interviews and I would have done more, if possible, to reach data saturation.

I collected all data online. I received informed consent (which included the researcher position and study purpose) from Facebook group administrators, from individual members if quoted, and from survey and interview participants. Ethical approval was granted.

Data analysis

I use a feminist intersectional lens (UN Women, 2020) because, although gender was a major influence on the lived experiences of the pandemic for research participants, the inclusion of other categories in the analysis provides a richer understanding. Theories which informed the research design and the data analysis are: pervasive ambiguity (Ball-Rokeach, 1973); mothering as experience and motherhood as institution (Rich, 1983); and the gendered association of women with the domestic and their secondary status to men (Risman, 2004).

As sole researcher, I created a code manual in the template organising style (Crabtree and Miller, 1999), informed by a literature review and my time spent in the Facebook groups. I added codes which emerged during the data analysis using Quirkos software after focused reading. A hybrid deductive and inductive thematic analysis allowed for deep engagement with the data and literature (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). I shared findings with the Facebook groups for comment.

Limitations included use of a small non-representative sample which did not measure for characteristics such as ethnicity, income or education level, as the enhanced ethics screening required would have delayed data collection.

Findings

I present the findings here under the themes of 'ambiguity', 'mothering and motherhood', and 'social support', noting that research participants did have positive experiences during the SoE. Quotations are anonymous and presented here verbatim, as they were written by the authors (quickly on their phones). The data source and ages of their children, if known, are given in brackets.

Ambiguity: "How long will this last?"

Ambiguity and stress

Almost three quarters of words given to describe the SoE had negative sentiments, with 'ambiguity' and related words ('unknown', 'uncertain', 'confused') used in connection to stress: "the unknowns of the situation have been the most challenging aspect - how long will this last?" (survey, 9 & 12). The SoE in Japan consisted of requests, in contrast to strict rules in other countries: "It was ambiguous because Japan can legally not require people to stay home. It was confused because many people did not understand that exercise etc. was permitted and many were angry with children playing outside" (survey, 15). Interpretation of SoE guidelines was difficult, one mother noted not knowing "how to properly self isolate and behave in society" (survey, 13). Others posted on Facebook frustration at the behaviour of others: "people we knew were still going to work and using public transportation. Seeing so many people out and about also contradicted what was shown on tv and in news media" (survey, 7 & 11).

Mothers expressed fear of COVID-19. One found the SoE "stressful because I felt a 'gap' between what I considered safe, ex. [e.g.] isolating at home, and what my husband/neighbours/in-laws were doing … It caused several arguments" (survey, 2 & 8). A mother from a country with a high COVID-19 death rate felt she had "a clear perception of the danger maybe earlier than people from other countries" (interview). There was little confidence in the Japanese government's response: "all voluntary lockdown with no punishment … I couldn't help but compare with other countries" (survey, 2).

Information-seeking behaviour

Of the Facebook posts I reviewed systematically, 66% consisted of information sharing or requests. Most information posts fell under the categories of food (food shopping, cooking), education (homeschooling, schools, early years activities), and health and hygiene (COVID-19 prevention and testing). Requests included help with translation. Members who were fluent in Japanese also posted updates of television press conferences as they were broadcast.

A link to an official source of information often led to a discussion of whether it was correct, what it meant in practice, how it compared with other countries and if it matched personal experiences. One mother described decision-making as a couple: "we approach our

reasoning from very different cultural backgrounds and with different info input sources - mine in English and his in Japanese" (survey).

Tension-relieving behaviour

Tension-relieving behaviour on Facebook consisted of venting and humour. Vent posts, often described as such by the authors, covered frustrations including grocery shopping, family, travel restrictions and interpretation of SoE guidelines. Some survey and interview responses also resembled vents. Comments on vent posts included supportive comments and emojis, other vents and humorous comments and memes. One thread dedicated to humorous memes had more than 1,600 comments.

Mothering and motherhood: "I was free to parent in my own way"

Caregiving challenges

Ambiguity made decisions and tasks more difficult: "Everything is in chaos and it's impossible to plan" (survey, 4). Taking children grocery shopping might be dangerous or socially unacceptable, yet online shopping in Japanese was complicated even for long-term residents of Japan: "I tried, failed, and screamed" (interview, 15). Supporting education was more time-consuming and for some, exacerbated by the language barrier: "Who else is ready to throw their kid's homework packet out the window?" (Facebook). Others worried about the lack of online education. When and how to visit a healthcare provider became more complicated and testing for COVID-19 was restricted.

Family abroad

The re-entry ban caused anxiety about being unable to visit home countries and family members abroad: "We worry about needing to travel overseas in an emergency and being unable to return due to Japan's exclusionist policy" (survey). Indeed, some Facebook group members were stranded outside of Japan. Suspension of international mail to some countries by Japan Post affected connections with family abroad, ranging from being unable to send birthday cards; to one mother unable to send essentials to her son who had recently moved abroad.

Connection with origin country

Survey respondents cited increased use of English as an unexpected benefit: children "became more bilingual" (survey, 2 & 7); with another commenting, "it was good hearing my kids' English improve so much. My oldest sounds closer to a native speaker of the same age"

(survey, 2 & 8). More frequent video calls with relatives abroad, especially between grandchildren and grandparents, were valued and helped with English language.

One mother described school closures as "liberating in that it felt like I was free to parent [i]n my own way, rather than being dictated to by school with it's [sic] different cultural norms" (survey, 6 & 12). Another said the SoE "took away a lot of extra school activities, therefore taking away stress. It has given us more distance from the school which I like" (survey). Another compared the experience favourably with her upbringing: "Kids were at home. It was more like my childhood. Usually feels like they are slowly stolen away as they rise through the school years" (survey, newborn, 7 & 9).

Social support: "No adult interaction at all"

Isolation

Words to describe the SoE included: 'lonely', 'isolation' and 'confined'. One mother described "no parks, no friends, no adult interaction at all" (survey, 3), another said "it made me feel a bit cut off from the community" (survey, 2). Lack of free time also contributed to isolation.

Online communities

Mothers felt supported by knowing that others like them were having similar experiences and feelings. Venting or advice request posts received empathetic comments expressing relief that they were not alone. Support extended beyond the Facebook groups, as members organised drinks on Zoom, sent each other masks and soap, offered to lend toys and English books and offered to babysit.

Discussion

In this section I discuss how the lived experiences of the migrant mothers in this research relate to a Japanese government pandemic response which did not take account of how people with intersecting social locations were impacted by the crisis. First, I explore the need for and inadequate provision of information, followed by the risk and consequences of isolation. In the absence of adequate government provision, migrant mothers were proactive in sharing information and providing each other with social support.

Information

The social locations of woman, mother and migrant in Japan, combined with a government response that was not sufficiently tailored to people with intersecting characteristics, contributed to a particular experience of stress for research participants.

Parents already have a high need for information, validation and confirmation (Sjöberg & Lindgren, 2017). Women worldwide are responsible for family health (Harman, 2016) and a public health emergency strengthens societal expectations on mothers around caregiving. Information-seeking on the Facebook groups in this research related to mothers' gendered caregiver role (education, food, and health and hygiene) in what the mothers described as a context of ambiguity.

'Pervasive ambiguity' is "an information problem" (Ball-Rokeach, 1973, p.379) which causes "stress or tension" (p.397) and can occur in "confusing or chaotic environments" such as after disasters (p.380). The Facebook groups in my research were dominated by the "information-seeking" and "tension-relieving behaviour" exhibited by people experiencing pervasive ambiguity (p.379). Mothers with "perceived similarity" (Ball-Rokeach, 1973, p.385) on Facebook groups based on shared identities, worked together to reduce ambiguity. Research participants, including those fluent in Japanese, sought trusted information and advice based on the lived experiences of others like them (Plantin & Daneback, 2009; Williams-Veazy, 2019).

However, information often did not resolve the stress caused by this situation of pervasive ambiguity. Japanese women during the pandemic were more likely than men to "engage in collecting information to mitigate their anxiety", only to suffer more from information overload and confusion (Kobayashi et al., 2021, p.13). Migrants also suffered anxiety from information overload (Bhandari et al., 2021). As mentioned by some research participants, those whose home countries were severely affected by COVID-19 worried about friends and family and feared the SoE was ineffective. Hu & Umeda, (2021) had similar findings amongst Chinese migrants.

As demonstrated by the many requests on the Facebook groups for translation support, the complexity of written Japanese meant even competent speakers faced problems when services went online (see also Córdova Quero and Dias, 2021). Research on Nepalese and Chinese migrants also found that the language barrier and difficulty accessing information caused mental distress (Bhandari et al., 2021; Hu and Umeda, 2021). Mothers in my research found that vaccinations and the COVID-19 support payment were difficult to access because of language difficulties and the complexity of the processes, even though information in English was more readily available than other languages (see Burgess, 2021; Miller et al., 2022 for similar findings).

Public health emergencies require "accurate information provided early, often, and in languages and channels that people understand, trust and use" (WHO, 2017, p.ix). Japan already needed to improve in this area, especially in the use of social media (OECD, 2019). Despite availability of multilingual information, it was not disseminated through the most appropriate channels or necessarily trusted. For example, the Governor of Tokyo spoke in English on information videos, but they were never shared on the Facebook groups and most had less than 1,000 views (Tokyo Metropolitan Government Official Video Channel, n.d.). Yet, mothers translated live press briefings and shared links to another Facebook group where a member translated televised news reports and infographics daily (Yates, n.d.). Similarly,

Vietnamese, Nepalese and Burmese migrants did not access public multilingual websites for COVID-19 information, relying instead on Facebook groups (Kiyohara et al., 2022). Vaccine reservations and forms were generally only in Japanese (Burgess, 2021), but foreign resident and mother LaShawn Toyoda developed a multilingual database that hundreds of thousands used to book appointments (Find a Doc, n.d.).

In addition to information not reaching the intended audiences, government health communication alongside sensational media reports contributed to increased fear and stigma around COVID-19, affecting people with certain social locations more severely (Shimizu & Negita, 2020). For women, fear of COVID-19 and of stigma were risk factors for serious psychological distress (Yoshioka et al., 2021). Migrants feared contracting COVID-19 with no one to care for them (Bhandari et al., 2021). The re-entry ban, alongside a government-funded domestic travel campaign, reinforced the idea of the virus as something foreign and contributed to stigmatisation of foreigners (Burgess, 2021; Cordova Quedo & Dias, 2021; Kharel, 2022; Honorato et al., 2021). The social consequences for migrant mothers, not being seen to comply with the SoE, made ambiguity more stressful and the need for information higher.

A topic of discussion on the Facebook groups was how to access COVID-19 support payments, which as women and migrants, could be harder to receive. Economic support for migrants during the pandemic was found to be "structurally inequitable" (Miller et al., 2022). Furthermore, the 100,000 yen COVID-19 support for each person (including children) was paid together to the head of the household, who is almost always a man (Honda & Ogawa, 2021). Compensation payments after disasters have similarly been paid to the head of the household (Saito, 2014). Sharing household wealth between couples is difficult, with joint bank accounts not allowed and married women largely dependent on their husbands (Niimi, 2022). This payment method represents at best a gender bias, at worst a danger for women in abusive relationships at a time when domestic violence was a particular cause for concern (Nomura et al., 2021; Yoshioka et al., 2021).

Multilingual domestic violence hotlines were available during the SoE; however, migrant women who experience the "intersectionality of discrimination based upon both gender and ethnicity" need much more than language support (Honda & Ogawa, 2021, p.47). Fears about visa status (Tanaka, 2020, p.1) and the risk of losing their children also prevented migrant mothers from seeking help (Kakuchi, n.d.).

Isolation and social support

Policymaking and crisis response which ignores feminised caregiving roles and gender inequality serves to reinforce it (Harman, 2016). After disasters in Japan, men have been compelled to return to work quickly, with women expected to do the unpaid care work (Saito, 2014). Government did not stipulate women should absorb the extra unpaid care needed during the pandemic, but overwhelmingly women did (Kobayashi, 2021; Yamamitsu & Sieg, 2020). For example, schools closed before the SoE began and even then teleworking was only

requested, so the higher-earning father was more likely travel to work (Yamamura & Tsustsui, 2021).

Isolation and the risk to mental health affects people differently, depending on social locations. For migrants in Japan 'being female', 'lack of social support' and 'language difficulties' are known barriers to mental wellbeing (Miller et al., 2019). Facing unique parenting challenges, migrant mothers can experience isolation (Yang et al., 2022), which during the pandemic was linked to the status of migrants and mothers (Lim et al., 2022). Research participants lost jobs, reduced hours, took unpaid leave and worked from home alongside their children. Of the survey respondents who had paid employment, 45% had lost income. They experienced stress from increased demands on their time, but in following SoE requests to reduce social contact, increased their isolation whilst some husbands still had interactions with colleagues.

During school closures, more mothers experienced worsening mental health than fathers (Yamamura & Tsustsui, 2021) and during 2020, the categories of 'female' and 'caregiver' were risk factors for serious psychological distress (Yoshioka et al., 2021). Foreign residents appeared "more vulnerable to increases in stress, anxiety, and depression in relation to COVID-19" than Japanese citizens (Hu and Umeda, 2021, p.7). The pandemic has hindered some migrants' integration with host communities (Burgess, 2021). Knowing that people with different intersecting characteristics will experience crises differently, government measures to support mental health, loneliness and isolation needed to be gender-sensitive (Nomura et al., 2021; Yoshioka et al., 2021) and explicitly include foreign residents (Burgess, 2021; Hu & Umeda, 2021).

However, for some research participants, separation from daily Japanese life had unexpected benefits of connecting with their home country's culture and language. Parenting practices and experiences "differ across cultural contexts" (Yang et al., 2022, p.568), and the education system in Japan demands a lot from parents (Rich, 2020). School closures gave some mothers more freedom to parent in the way they might have in their home countries and for children to become more fluent in English. These positive lived experiences are a demonstration of how 'cultural identity' is a facilitator for the mental well-being of migrants in Japan (Miller et al., 2019).

A facilitator of mental well-being for migrants in Japan are 'social networks' too (Miller et al., 2019). My findings showed migrant mothers experienced isolation, but also agency to build and use support networks. Online groups are an invaluable source of information and social support for parents (Sjöberg & Lindgren, 2017). Migrant mothers create and use online communities for information, support and friendship. The Facebook group administrators undertook "unpaid emotional, social and technical labour" by creating guidelines and moderating posts to maintain a safe and supportive online space (Williams Veazey, 2019, p.92).

Conclusion

The daily lives of research participants were affected by structures of inequality associated with their social locations as women, mothers and migrants; exacerbated by the uneven socio-economic impact of the pandemic and by the response of the Japanese authorities. These social locations represent positions both of vulnerability and empowerment (Williams Veazey, 2019). Research participants provided social support to each other through online communities of migrant mothers; still, the early pandemic was a time of stress, fear and anxiety. The agency of overlooked and under-served groups should be recognised, but that is not a substitute for effective government action.

Findings support the case for intersectionality-based policymaking, disaster response and public health communication, to better serve more people in Japan. Hankivsky et al. (2014) developed a framework for this analysis from a health perspective, also applicable in other contexts. Others including the Scottish Government (2022) have also explored how to apply intersectionality in policymaking. To facilitate an intersectional approach in Japan, sex-disaggregated data is essential and future research should be clear about who is included and excluded in the data, especially concerning non-Japanese participants. Particularly in the absence of adequate representation in decision-making bodies, policymakers should be informed by the lived experiences of people with intersecting identities, including women, mothers and migrants.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

What's in a Name? Drawing on Women's Lived Experiences to Introduce and Define Cyber-Located Sexual Violence (CLSV)

Hayman, Lorraine

Abstract

Feminists have long since drawn on women's lived experiences to support advancing the concept of Violence Against Women (VAW) to incorporate previously overlooked behaviours/actions. Still, finding the right language to use when naming and defining VAW facilitated by technologies presents a challenge. For example, stretching the concept of sexual violence to include non-physical behaviours/actions occurring online and via Internet-connected devices is questioned within dichotomous binary thinking advocating an offline/online, real/not-real duality. This paper reflects my attempt to meet the aforementioned challenge, providing a working term and definition that applies continuum(s) thinking to the various unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online and via Internet-connected devices that women in Ireland experience. I draw on findings from a quantitative multiple-choice questionnaire distributed in Ireland in October 2023 that invited women to share their understandings and experiences of the various behaviours/actions outlined in the questionnaire. N=397 women participated, including N=281 who had experienced unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online and via their devices. The respondents unequivocally understood the behaviours/actions outlined, both comment-based and image-based, *as sexual violence*. I interpret these findings through the lens of continuum(s) thinking, recognising that all forms of sexual violence exist on continuum(s) of experiences, making them episodic and maintaining a sense of fear and threat in women's lives. This paper offers an insight into the lived experiences of women in Ireland and the potential to shift how we understand safety and (sexual) violence. It contributes to the expansion of our legal, social and cultural understandings of sexual violence.

Key Words: Cyber-located Sexual Violence (CLSV), Continuum(s) Thinking, Violence Against Women (VAW), Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA), Quantitative Research in Ireland

Introduction

All forms of violence should be *described and named,* especially insidious forms overlooked due to their non-physical nature. Naming violence helps us identify what various behaviours/actions are wrong and the seriousness of those behaviours/actions, situating that knowledge within our 'cultural understanding of what [is] socially acceptable' and what is not (Dunn 2021, p.40). Still, finding the right language and terminology to use when naming and defining emergent violence and situating it within Violence Against Women (VAW) discourse 'remains a challenge', not least due to the critiques of the term VAW (see Boyle 2019, p.22). This paper contributes to meeting this challenge, providing a working term and definition positioned in VAW discourse that draws on the lived experiences of women in Ireland concerning comment-based (via written messages, voice notes, and video messages) and image-based (via images and videos) unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions that occur online and/or via Internet-connected devices. As with all umbrella terms, I recognise that VAW has limitations. Nevertheless, it best reflects the existing literature on who is targeted in the various behaviours/actions discussed in this paper, the impact those behaviours/actions have on women, and the questionnaire findings outlined below.

In this paper, drawing on N=397 questionnaire responses to twelve questions from respondents in Ireland who identified as women most of the time[4], I answer the Research Question (RQ), 'How far do women in Ireland consider unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions online and/or via Internet-connected devices to be sexual violence?'. The findings indicate that the respondents unequivocally understand the various non-physical cyber-located behaviours/actions outlined in the questionnaire, including comment-based and image-based, as sexual violence. I introduce the term *Cyber-located Sexual Violence* (CLSV),[5] defined as '*A form of VAW occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices, encompassing non-physical sexually-based behaviours/actions, including image-based and comments/threats/sexual requests, experienced as negative, sexual, unsolicited and/or coerced at that time, or at a later time'*. This paper centralises the lived experiences of women in Ireland to advance the concept of sexual violence, incorporating often overlooked behaviours/actions by revealing that women in Ireland understand multiple forms of CLSV as sexual violence.

Background

Technology-Facilitated Violence (TFV) reflects the 'range of behaviours where digital technologies are used to facilitate both virtual and face-to-face' harms (Henry and Powell 2018, p.195). TFV exists within multiple continuums, for example, Online Violence Against Women

[4] My research is transgender women inclusive, recognising the socially constructed and shifting nature of gender identity.

[5] This term was referred to in a prior publication (Hayman 2023) as Cyber Sexual Violence (CSV). I shifted to CLSV to distinguish the acronym from Child Sexual Violence (CSV) and highlight the cyberspace-location of CLSV.

(OVAW), 'an umbrella term for numerous abusive acts committed against women and girls online' (Jurasz 2024, p.11); Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV), where the harms are sexually-based (Henry and Powell 2015); and Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) that highlights the significance of the gender identity of the victim-survivor as a reason for violence (United Nations (UN) Population Fund n.d.). In my research, I situate CLSV within VAW discourse. VAW reflects 'any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to [those identifying as] women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' (UN 1993, Article 1).

Like VAW, there are multiple approaches to defining sexual violence. The UN (2017) defined sexual violence as:

> Acts of a sexual nature…that cause [engagement]...in an act of a sexual nature by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment or…incapacity to give genuine consent (p.8).

The feminist-inspired approach emphasises the importance of believing victim-survivors who report experiencing sexual violence: 'The act of sexual violence…[has] occurred when a person claims that an act or experience is one of sexual violence' (Bourke 2007, p.4). It is this feminist approach to sexual violence victimisation I employ in this paper by centralising the lived experiences of women in Ireland concerning CLSV.

Conceptualising CLSV

CLSV captures and emphasises the cyberspace-located spatial and temporal dimensions of various sexually-based behaviours/actions (Harris and Woodlock 2021). That is not to say the harm experienced by a victim-survivor of CLSV is restricted to cyberspace, but that the behaviours/actions that constitute CLSV are cyberspace-located and non-physical (see Powell and Henry, 2017). Cyberspace is complex, existing within and between the interconnection of people, the Internet, software and hardware, and it is not distinct from our offline world (Powell and Henry 2017). The use of 'cyber' in CLSV rather than 'online' or 'technology-facilitated' draws attention to the messy interconnections and compatibility between people, their devices, and the Internet, where the 'interplay between the user and the provider [is] so in simpatico' it is impossible to distinguish between offline/online, rendering such dualist perspectives redundant (Bowie 1999).

CLSV includes comment-based and image-based behaviours/actions, including sexualised electronic vitriol (unsolicited sexual comments/threats/sexual requests), referred to as 'e-bile' (Jane 2014; 2017), and Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA) (McGlynn and Rackley 2016). IBSA 'encompasses all forms of the non-consensual creation and/or distribution [and threats to create/distribute]…private sexual images' (McGlynn *et al.* 2017). E-bile captures

'the sexualised threats of violence, and the *recreational nastiness* that has come to constitute a dominant tenor of Internet discourse [emphasis in original]' (Jane 2014, p.532). Jane (2014; 2017) characterises 'flaming', 'trolling' and 'cyberbullying' as e-bile. Notably, the text in e-bile is situated in social, cultural, and historical contexts that influence their meaning and impact (Smith 1990). Citron (2014) offers an example of socially, culturally and historically situated e-bile experienced by body-positive activist and influencer Anna Mayer: 'Guys who might be thinking of nailing her [should know she has] untreated herpes' (p.1-2). This e-bile should be interpreted in the social, cultural, and historical contexts of Internet discourse, VAW, sexism, heterosexism, fattism, and social stigma around Sexually Transmitted Infections, among others.

Galtung's (1969) seminal work on violence is central to conceptualising CLSV as VAW: '*Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations* [emphasis in original]' (p.168). Galtung (1969) identified that violence occurs when there is a difference between someone's potential in life and their actual situation. Oyedemi (2016) further explains that any impediment to bodily, psychological, emotional and cultural health and well-being is violence. As CLSV harms victim-survivors in multiple ways (see McGlynn *et al.* 2017), including psychologically, their well-being (their potential) is lower than if they had not experienced CLSV. In fact, the mere existence of CLSV influences the freedom women feel able to exercise on the Internet, whether they are directly victimised or not. Hence, like Galtung (1969) and Oyedemi (2016), my approach to violence rejects narrow conceptions that suggest it is only physical in its nature and harms.

CLSV is a form of VAW when perpetrated against those who identify as women. As adopted at the eleventh session of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1992), gender-based discrimination is referred to as 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately'. Existing literature demonstrates the behaviours/actions characterised in CLSV (see Table One) disproportionately affect women in both its prevalence and negative impacts and is highly gendered in its nature, for example, sending unsolicited penis images (colloquially known as a 'dick pic') to women (see Citron 2014; McGill 2021; McGlynn *et al.* 2017). The European Commission's Directive on VAW and Domestic Violence (2022) highlights that women 'more frequently experience cyber violence based on their sex or gender, in particular, sexual forms of cyber violence' (p.2). McGill (2021) outlines the gendered 'double-standard' facing women and girls who experience forms of CLSV in Ireland: While the perpetrators, often men, are proclaimed to be 'heroes' or 'legends', the women and girls victimised are 'shamed and ostracised' (p.1). Gender identity matters in the prediction of who will experience CLSV, the impact CLSV has on victim-survivors, how victim-survivors are treated in the aftermath, and the fear women experience due to the prevalence of CLSV in society (see Vera-Gray and Kelly 2020).

However, there exist challenges in naming CLSV *as violence*, specifically sexual violence. For example, in January 2024, it was reported in the media in the United Kingdom (UK) that a girl's avatar was virtually 'gang raped' by avatars controlled by men in the Metaverse (as cited in Camber's Daily Mail newspaper headline, 2024). In response to the UK police investigation, Camber's (2024) newspaper article questioned 'whether police should be pursuing virtual offences – given police and prosecutors are currently struggling with an enormous backlog of *actual rape* cases [emphasis added]' (para.9). While the police investigation of a so-named virtual rape is notable, such questioning in the British mainstream media of whether this is a crime that the police should investigate is telling given the recent ratification of the Online Safety Act in the UK. It reflects the ongoing sentiment in mainstream media discourse that crimes in cyberspace are not as harmful as those occurring offline nor as worthy of police attention and resources. This sentiment exists despite the UK police highlighting the girl experienced the 'same psychological and emotional trauma as someone who has been raped in the real world as…[virtual reality]…is designed to be completely immersive' (Camber 2024, para.4). Nevertheless, Camber's (2024) questioning of whether the police investigation into the 'virtual rape' was worthwhile in one of the most widely read mainstream newspapers in the UK is telling, indicative of the widespread minimisation of the harms of CLSV in social, media, and legal discourse (see Powell and Henry 2017).

The absence of physical contact within CLSV often prevents its characterisation as sexual violence, and stretching the concept of sexual violence to include non-physical behaviours/actions occurring online and via Internet-connected devices is questioned within dichotomous thinking advocating an offline/online, real/not-real duality. In Ireland, the recording, distributing, or publishing of intimate images or threats to distribute or publish without consent *is illegal* (Hayman 2023). These behaviours are commonly understood as IBSA (McGlynn *et al.* 2017). However, Irish law does not acknowledge IBSA and other forms of CLSV as crimes of sexual violence due to their non-physical nature. This failure to account for IBSA as sexual violence 'is surprising since [the law] is known as Coco's Law in honour of Nicole 'Coco' Fox, who died by suicide after experiencing an online hate campaign, including [CLSV]' (Hayman 2023, p.37). That IBSA is not approached in Irish law as a crime of sexual violence as it is non-physical is disappointing, given the embodied corporeal impacts it had on Coco.

I reject binary/dualist understandings of sexual violence as physical, instead utilising the concept of continuum(s) thinking. Engaging with the 'feminist political stretching of the concept of violence to incorporate hitherto normal, unnoticeable actions and interactions', I position CLSV as existing on multiple continuums, including the Continuum of Violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), the Continuum of Sexual Violence (Kelly 1998a; 1988b), and other TFV and TFSV continuums (see McGlynn *et al.* 2017). I assert that sexual violence exists beyond the physical by centring victim-survivors' lived experiences of CLSV. Through centring such perspectives in this paper, like that of Anna Mayor, the girl whose avatar was virtually 'gang raped', and the women who responded to my questionnaire, I identify that CLSV exists on various continuum(s), whereby women's experiences of multiple sexually

violent behaviours/actions across their lifetimes provide the context in establishing specific behaviours/actions of CLSV as sexual violence.

The Feminist Politics of VAW

Naming and defining VAW draws on feminist politics and theory, consequently facing a backlash from opponents of feminism and resulting in debates among feminists (Frazer and Hutchings 2020). For example, Boyle (2019) critiques the use of VAW due to the 'too-frequent conflation' of VAW and 'gender-based violence', which perform erasures, including the failure to gender the perpetrator (p.32). In drawing on the lived experiences of women in Ireland to introduce and define CLSV as a form of VAW, I do not seek to overlook the gender identity of the perpetrators, minimise the CLSV experiences of multiple gender identities who do not identify as women, or endorse a gender binary of victimhood (see Frazer and Hutchings 2020). However, whilst acknowledging the limitations of the term VAW, I do seek to highlight the gender identity of the questionnaire respondents, situate CLSV within VAW discourse in Ireland, and acknowledge my commitment to openly ideological research (Lather 1986). Using the term VAW is political; it demonstrates a refusal to be silent about the so-called normal interactions, including those in cyberspace, that women experience as violence (see Htun *et al.* 2012; Kelly 1988a; 1988b; 2017; Mardorossian 2002).

To attempt to combat the critiques of research on VAW, an intersectional lens confronts epistemological assumptions that essentialise women (Vera-Gray 2017). Intersectionality aligns with the continuum(s) thinking applied in this paper in problematising the dualist/dichotomy - us and them - perspectives found in essentialism (see Collins 1986). Continuum(s) thinking further recommends challenging dichotomous assumptions (Kelly 1988a; 1988b). It supports recognising the fluidity and indistinguishability in the 'boundaries' between women who exist in a coalition of 'affinity, not identity' (Haraway 2016, p.17). Intersectionality and continuum(s) thinking offer a means for engaging in feminist research on naming and defining forms of VAW while seeking to avoid essentialising women in that work (see the critiques of Boyle 2019).

Moreover, continuum(s) thinking supports a nuanced exploration of the 'grey areas' between non-physical comment-based and image-based CLSV and physical forms of sexual violence whilst avoiding 'equating speech with rape' (Boyle 2019, p.28). A notable contribution to continuum(s) thinking, the Continuum of Sexual Violence (Kelly 1988a; 1988b), identifies how sexual violence happens across women's lifetimes and is temporal, whereby sexual violence experienced in adulthood recalls childhood experiences, reestablishing the harms and impacts in women's lives (see also Vera-Gray and Fileborn 2018). As Kelly (2017) explains, 'One's life and sense of self are changed, and continue to be changed, by the legacies of violence and abuse' (p.xi). Consequently, the meanings women make of their CLSV experiences are related to their past and future experiences, to reality and what may happen (possibility), thus maintaining a pervasive sense of fear and threat in women's lives

(Vera-Gray and Fileborn 2018). After all, any woman who uses the Internet or an Internet-connected device is arguably at risk of CLSV.

Research Methodology and Methods

Feminist Research Practice

In line with the doctoral research project this paper relates to, I adopted Feminist Research Practice as the methodological approach in this paper. My Feminist Research Practice acknowledges that the research is not feminist because of the topic, questionnaire respondents, or myself but because of *how I undertake the research* (Harnois 2013). I centralised the lived experiences of the women who responded to the questionnaire, employed a collaborative and participatory approach to the questionnaire development through engaging with organisations like Safe Ireland, and used an intersectional feminist theory lens in data analysis. Additionally, I wrote this paper to inform the debate on improving women's lives in Ireland through better understanding their experiences of sexual violence in its multiple forms.

Quantitative Questionnaire

A multiple-choice questionnaire about unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices informed this paper (see Table One). N=397 respondents who self-identify as women most of the time and live in Ireland answered 12 questions discussed further below. These 12 questions formed the opening section of a more expansive questionnaire that explored women's experiences of CLSV. Of the N=397 respondents, N=281 women identified they had experienced some form of CLSV and answered additional questions about their experiences. I do not discuss the results from these other questions in detail in this paper. Due to the collection of personal data, the questionnaire was anonymous and compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation in the tools I used (Microsoft Forms) and data storage. I undertook a Data Protection Impact Assessment to demonstrate a rigorous consideration of ethics, including concerns around privacy and confidentiality, in line with my Feminist Research Practice. The University of Galway's Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for my doctoral research project in September 2023.

I disseminated the questionnaire online between October 2nd and 22nd 2023, through multiple social media channels, including X (formally Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram. Participants were further recruited by widely disseminating the questionnaire in my networks within Ireland. These networks included academic institutions, activist groups such as Cyber Awareness Ireland, and civil society organisations, including the Rape Crisis Network, Women's Aid, and Safe Ireland. I also shared posters about the questionnaire with community libraries throughout Ireland. This recruitment process may have resulted in respondents who were more likely to identify the behaviours/actions explored as sexual violence. The demographic details collected from N=281 respondents included gender identity, sex,

sexuality, age range, educational experience, and employment status. Most notably, 52 percent of respondents were aged 18-24, increasing to 76 percent 18-34. Of the N=214 respondents aged 18-34, 72 percent identified as a student/researcher or student/employed, suggesting that the questionnaire recruitment process resulted in university students in Ireland being the majority of respondents. These respondent demographics further suggest the questionnaire reached women who may be more likely to critically evaluate existing norms about sexual violence in Ireland.

I adopted the phraseology of 'unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions [occurring] online and/or via Internet-connected devices' from the well-tested questionnaire applied in a large research project in multiple English-speaking countries, including Australia, New Zealand, and the UK (see Henry *et al.* 2020; McGlynn *et al.* 2021; Powell *et al.* 2019; Powell and Henry 2019). I piloted my questionnaire with eight individuals between June and August 2023, making changes based on the feedback. I analysed the questionnaire in December 2023-Februrary 2024 using IBM's SPSS quantitative analysis software.

In the questionnaire, I asked: (1) '*Do you think the following are examples of sexual violence occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices?'* (See Table One). Respondents had the option to select one answer from (A) *'Yes, this is sexual violence'*, (B) '*No, this is not sexual violence*', or (C) '*I am unsure'*. I guided the respondents with, 'In this section, I seek to understand whether you think sexual violence can occur online and/or via Internet-connected devices. There are no right or wrong answers'. Due to the exploratory intention of the questionnaire, I did not provide one definition of sexual violence to be followed, and the respondent's understanding of the words 'sexual violence' was not examined in detail in the questionnaire (though in my doctoral research project, I interrogate the questionnaire findings using qualitative methods). Still, given the focus of the questionnaire and reflecting societal knowledge of sexual violence in Ireland, I made a reasonable assumption that the respondents who chose to engage with this research and answer A, B or C understand what sexual violence entails and its potential to harm, whilst noting that these understandings may not all be the same.

Findings

CLSV is Sexual Violence

The results indicate that respondents overwhelmingly understand the behaviours/actions listed in Table One, bar the first behaviour/action identified by italics, as sexual violence. Eighty-eight percent of respondents identified that 'someone threatens to comment online and/or message others another person's contact details and say they are available for sexual acts' is sexual violence. Respondents rated all other behaviours/actions as sexual violence with 90 percent or higher (see Table One). The highest scoring behaviour/action understood as sexual violence with 98 percent was: 'Without permission,

someone posts online and/or sends to others a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video of another person (including ones that have been altered to resemble another person)'. Of the behaviours/actions that were threatened (rather than acted upon), 93 percent identified those as sexual violence. For the behaviours/actions that included action (rather than a threat to act), 94 percent identified those as sexual violence. This finding suggests that the respondents recognised *the threat to perpetrate* behaviours/actions *as sexual violence* as much as acting upon those threats.

I undertook a cross-tabulation analysis of the respondents who identified they had experienced CLSV (N=281) compared to those who did not (N=116). Strikingly, there was an overwhelming consensus in both groups that the various comment-based and image-based behaviours/actions identified in the questionnaire constitute sexual violence. I included an additional question asking respondents: '*Have you ever witnessed any of the unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions online and/or via Internet-connected devices mentioned above happening to another person?*'. Notably, with Chi-square/Phi and Cramer's V statistical significance (<.001), of those who had experienced CLSV, 77 percent said that they had witnessed the behaviours/actions happening to another person, compared to 41 percent of those who had not experienced CLSV. This 36 percent difference may indicate that CLSV victim-survivors are more perceptive to others experiencing similar victimisation. This finding warrants further investigation during the next stage of my doctoral research project.

The only behaviour/action that scored less than 88 percent to (A) 'Yes, this is sexual violence' was the assault on an avatar: 'Someone online/in a virtual world/gaming environment comments that their avatar/game character did something unwanted and sexual to another person's avatar/game character'. Fifty-five percent of respondents said they were either unsure that this was sexual violence or they did not think this was sexual violence. This finding is interesting in the context of the so-named virtual 'gang rape' discussed earlier in the paper. While applying the Continuum of Sexual Violence (Kelly 1988a; 1988b) supports considering an assault on an avatar as a form of sexual violence, the questionnaire findings do not currently support this. However, firstly, I used the language 'comments' rather than 'simulated' or 'acts out' to capture the comment-based behaviours/actions describing an assault on an avatar. Yet, this choice of language may not capture the full nature of an assault on an avatar, as suggested in Camber's (2024) article above (an assault in virtual reality). Secondly, the questionnaire was live before the case in Camber's (2024) article occurred. Since October 2023, there has been a growing awareness of IBSA facilitated using Artificial Intelligence (AI), largely due to the viral sexual videos of Taylor Swift in January/February 2024 (colloquially referred to as 'deepfake pornography') (see Montgomery 2024). In addition, at the time of writing, primarily due to this increase in awareness of the harms of the IBSA facilitated using AI, the UK is recommending legislative adjustments that criminalise the *creation* of so-called sexualised 'deepfakes' (see Gov.uk 2024). With this in mind, I propose that if I conducted this questionnaire again today, an assault on an avatar may be more widely understood as sexual violence by respondents.

Omitting the assault on an avatar, an average of 92 percent of respondents identified that comment-based and 95 percent of respondents that image-based behaviours/actions are sexual violence. There was no significant difference between these comment-based (written, voice notes, and video messages) and image-based behaviours/actions identified as sexual violence (see Table One). This finding suggests that the respondents recognise the range of behaviours/actions that constitute CLSV as sexual violence rather than only considering IBSA, which is more often discussed in media discourse in Ireland. In the existing literature, comment-based examples of unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online/via Internet-connected devices are rarely defined using the language of ‘violence’. Instead, terms like ‘e-bile’ or ‘hate speech’ are frequent (see Citron 2014; Jane 2014; 2017). In contrast, this finding suggests that the comment-based behaviours/actions featured in my questionnaire are also understood as constituting sexual violence in Ireland by the women respondents.

Table One: The Behaviours/Actions and Results in Full

Behaviours/Actions	Answer = Yes, this is sexual violence	Answer = No, this is not sexual violence/I am unsure
Someone online/in a virtual world/gaming environment comments that their avatar/game character did something unwanted and sexual to another person's avatar/game character.	45%	55%
Someone threatens to comment online and/or message others sexually explicit details about another person.	92%	8%
Without permission, someone comments online and/or messages others sexually explicit details about another person.	93%	7%
Someone comments online and/or privately messages another person unwanted sexually explicit comments/threats/sexual requests.	95%	5%
Someone threatens to comment online and/or message others another person's contact details and say they are available for sexual acts.	88%	12%
Without permission, someone comments online and/or messages others another person's contact details and says they are available for sexual acts.	91%	9%
Someone comments online and/or messages others that they want to do something unwanted and sexual to another person and/or encourages others to do so.	92%	8%
Someone sends another person an unwanted nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video.	90%	10%
Someone threatens another person that if they do not send a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video to them, something bad will happen.	95%	5%

Without permission, someone creates a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video of another person (including ones they alter to resemble another person).	96%	4%
Someone threatens to post online and/or send to others a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video of another person (including ones that have been altered to resemble another person).	96%	4%
Without permission, someone posts online and/or sends to others a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video of another person (including ones that have been altered to resemble another person).	98%	2%

Discussion

Naming and Defining CLSV

The women in this study unequivocally understand CLSV as sexual violence. My CLSV definition draws on this notable finding and the existing literature (see Jane 2014; McGlynn *et al.,* 2017), highlighting that CLSV exists on various continuum(s) of experience. It identifies the nature of CLSV, including comment-based and image-based behaviours/actions. It draws on the lived experiences and interpretations of the women respondents by gendering CLSV and centralising their experiences of the various behaviours/actions that constitute CLSV. I will further investigate this CLSV definition during the next stage of my data collection for the doctoral project; I anticipate it will change and adapt based on future findings.

Nevertheless, the questionnaire findings support situating CLSV on the Continuum of Sexual Violence (Kelly 1988a; 1988b). The respondents understand even arguably ‘unremarkable’ acts as sexual violence. For example, a man sending a woman a ‘dick pic’ may be ‘unremarkable’ in today’s dating scripts in Ireland (see Dunphy 2022). Yet, the women respondents in my questionnaire who did not want to receive this image understood it and experienced it as sexual violence. Situating CLSV on multiple continuums (of violence), including Kelly’s (1988a; 1988b) Continuum of Sexual Violence, offers greater insight into the findings, highlighting the potential significance of women’s previous experiences of sexual abuse and violence in all its forms. This significance is further suggested as 11 percent of the women in the questionnaire who experienced CLSV identified that it included physical violence, and 54 percent stated they knew the perpetrator. Through the continuum(s) thinking

lens, it is not only the individual incident/s of CLSV the women reported in their questionnaire responses that give CLSV its meaning as sexual violence, but also the context in which some women experienced CLSV that proceeded and surrounded it.

Significance and Recommendations

The questionnaire findings support that the term Cyber-located Sexual Violence (CLSV) is valid to refer to the various unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online/via Internet-connected devices that women in Ireland experience. Significantly, before this questionnaire, it was unknown whether women in Ireland considered CLSV as sexual violence. The recent Sexual Violence Survey in Ireland that examined sexual violence prevalence and impact did not include such non-physical behaviours/actions (Central Statistics Office 2022). Hence, I firstly recommend incorporating CLSV in future large-scale research on sexual violence in Ireland among the general population to validate the findings in this paper across multiple gender identities and social locations *and* establish the prevalence of CLSV victimisation in Ireland.

The findings further suggest that laws in Ireland have not kept pace with the public's understanding of sexual violence, although further research in this area is also recommended. Contrary to perspectives that stretching the concept of sexual violence to include non-physical behaviours/actions is, and should be, avoided, the findings presented illustrate that some women in Ireland are willing to name CLSV behaviours/actions as sexual violence (see Boyle 2019). If we expand the understanding of sexual violence in Ireland, this could enable victim-survivors of CLSV to access more tailored and better-funded support. Moreover, expanding the approach to sexual violence in Ireland could encourage a shift in the way we think about safety and various forms of violence. Instead of considering that the most important forms of violence to address in Ireland are visible and physical forms, a more nuanced approach that incorporates the findings outlined in this paper could expand our legal, social and cultural understandings of sexual violence in Ireland and beyond. By acknowledging that CLSV is sexual violence, Ireland could firmly rebuke the widespread minimisation of CLSV by centring the lived experiences of victim-survivors.

Summary

The results from my multiple-choice questionnaire demonstrate that the women respondents overwhelmingly understand unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices as sexual violence. Notably, of the N=397 respondents, N=281 had also experienced CLSV. Interpreting the findings through the lens of continuum(s) thinking supports recognising that the respondents relate their experiences and understandings of CLSV to their past and (possible) future sexually violent experiences. The continuum(s) thinking approach helps us appreciate how a 'dick pic', though non-physical and often impersonal, is interpreted as a sexually violent behaviour/action

without minimising the harm it causes *or* equating it to other forms of sexual violence, such as rape (Kelly 1988a; 1988b). Applying the findings, I introduced and defined the term CLSV in this paper as '*A form of VAW occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices, encompassing non-physical sexually-based behaviours/actions, including image-based and comments/threats/sexual requests, experienced as negative, sexual, unsolicited and/or coerced at that time, or at a later time'*. Overall, this paper demonstrates that some women in Ireland understand sexual violence as existing beyond the physical forms prioritised in social and legal discourse, locating it firmly on Kelly's (1988a; 1988b) Continuum of Sexual Violence, and providing important findings to support shifting how we understand safety and (sexual) violence in Ireland.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Tweeting Disgust: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the Language of Disgust used in Response to the Belfast Rape Trial

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Abstract This study is an exploration into the political potential (or lack thereof) of the vocabulary of disgust that was expressed in Tweets in response to the controversial Belfast rape trial in 2018. Although research has largely examined the positive role that emotion can play in feminist activism, literature exists which suggests that this is not the case for all emotional responses to injustice (Nussbaum 2004; Sullivan 2022). The political potential of the vocabulary of disgust was interrogated using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis within a case study research design. The generation of themes was deeply influenced by the work of political philosopher Chantal Mouffe (2013) on agonism, the political and counter-hegemonic struggles. This work adds to the field of study surrounding the narratives that we construct around rape, as it uses theories of rape and political emotion to interrogate what is really being said when the vocabulary of disgust is chosen when confronted with rape. Ultimately, this article is one that focuses on the importance of reflexivity in how we respond to disclosures of rape, and how this may, or may not, challenge the structural underpinnings that lead to rape and sexual violence.

Key Words: Belfast rape trial, Twitter, disgust, rape narratives, feminist online activism

Introduction

This paper investigates whether the vocabulary of disgust used in tweets relating to the 2018 Belfast rape trial facilitated political engagement with the issue of rape in Irish society, or whether said language was instead mobilised to frame the case as an isolated event, therefore effectively withdrawing from political critique.

This paper addresses the complexity of articulated moral disgust, specifically in the context of online reactions to a high-profile and controversial rape trial. Conflicting opinions coexist about the political use of disgust when confronted with injustice (see Nussbaum 2004; Sullivan 2022; McGinn 2011; Pantti 2016). Disgust vocabulary is commonly articulated in response to cases of rape, however disgust and sexual violence have a complicated history. Nussbaum (2004) has noted that a link between misogyny and expressed disgust exists, therefore describing such language as 'a slippery and double-edged way of (apparently) expressing feminist sentiments' (p.128). This research interrogates how the same 'slippery' vocabulary of disgust behaves on Twitter[6] within the context of the Belfast rape trial.

The Belfast Rape Trial

The Belfast rape trial took place over a nine-week period in Belfast, Northern Ireland, from January to March of 2018. The case involved the plaintiff, a woman of 19 years old at the time of the incident, and four men, two of whom were professional rugby players for the Ulster and the Republic of Ireland teams. Of the four men, two were accused of rape, with one additional charge of sexual assault for one of the two defendants; one of the three was charged with exposure and the fourth man was accused of perverting the course of justice (Comyn 2018). All men pleaded not guilty to the charges, and on the 28th of March 2018, the jury of the Belfast Crown Court acquitted the men of all charges that had been brought against them (McKay 2018).

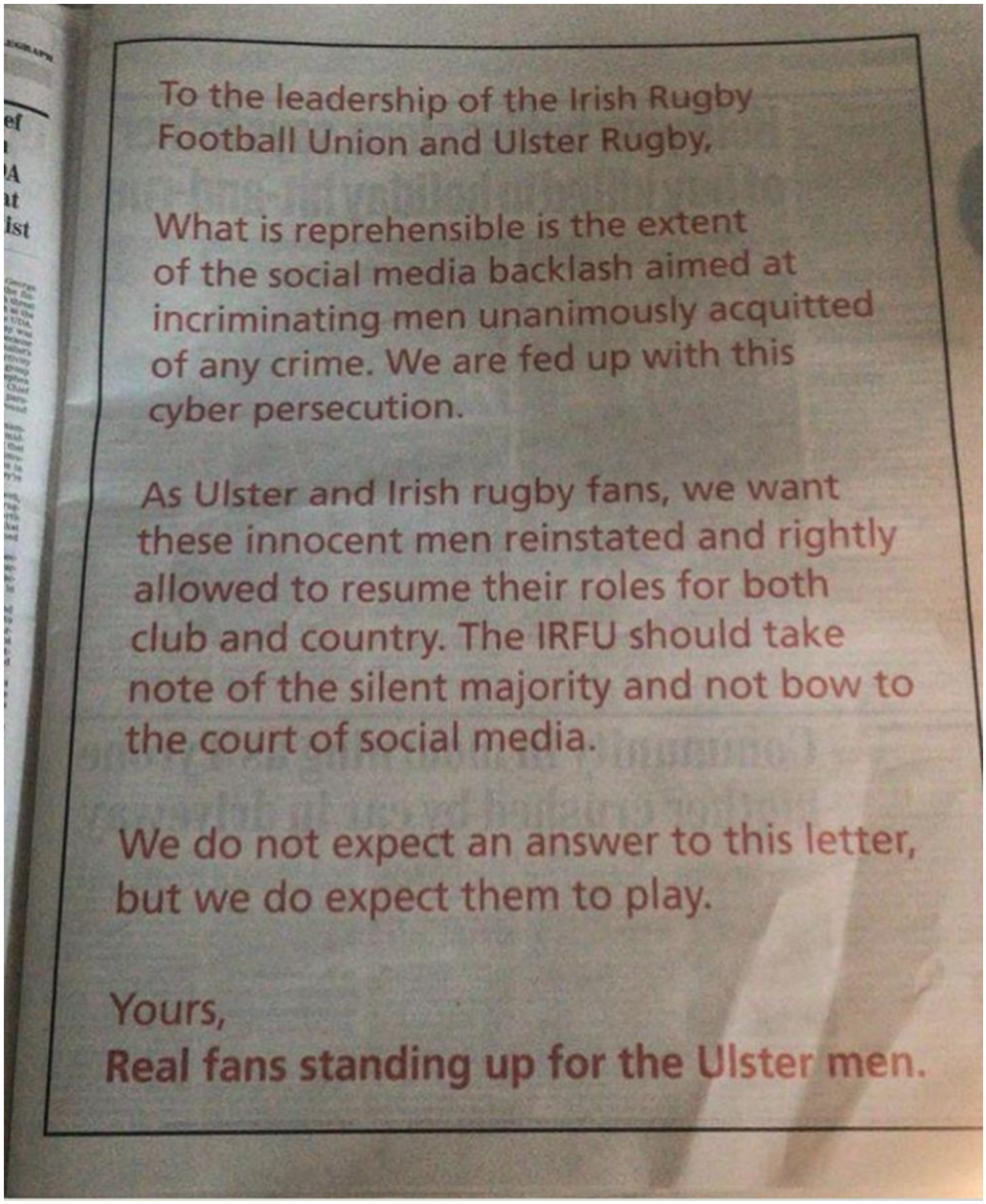
The verdict resulted in an outcry from those who saw it as a gross injustice for the plaintiff, with rallies and feminist protests being organised in major cities across Ireland. In addition to the verdict, WhatsApp messages the accused had sent to each other following the incident were a cause of indignation and condemnation, with over 69,000 people signing a Change.org petition calling for a thorough review of the accepted behaviour of the Irish rugby team after the worrying conduct that was highlighted during the trial (Whyte 2018).

However, the case also saw notable support for the men accused, especially after the acquittal, encapsulated by a full-page advertisement that was placed in the Belfast Telegraph. This advert was funded by over 100 Ulster rugby supporters, urging the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) and Ulster Rugby to reinstate the players (Doherty 2018; see Figure 1). In light of these conflicting opinions regarding who were the true victims of the trial, it is not difficult

[6] The research and writing of this paper were carried out before Twitter became rebranded as X (23rd July 2023).

to conceive why the media reported that this was a case that 'divided Ireland', igniting debates relating to sexual violence on both sides of the Irish border (McKay 2018).

Figure 1 – Advertisement funded by supporters of the accused.


To the leadership of the Irish Rugby Football Union and Ulster Rugby,

What is reprehensible is the extent of the social media backlash aimed at incriminating men unanimously acquitted of any crime. We are fed up with this cyber persecution.

As Ulster and Irish rugby fans, we want these innocent men reinstated and rightly allowed to resume their roles for both club and country. The IRFU should take note of the silent majority and not bow to the court of social media.

We do not expect an answer to this letter, but we do expect them to play.

Yours,
Real fans standing up for the Ulster men.

(Belfast Telegraph 11th April 2018, p.9)

Following the announcement of the verdict, the hashtag #IBelieveHer trended on Twitter in support of the plaintiff (The University Times 2018). This hashtag became Northern Ireland's answer to the #MeToo movement. In the days following the verdict #IBelieveHer was used to show support for the plaintiff, in contrast to #IBelieveThem and #IBelieveTheJury, which were used, amongst others, to show support for the acquitted (Whyte 2018). The Belfast rape trial resulted in the publication of the Gillen Review in 2019, which contained 253 recommendations to ensure that complainants in cases of serious sexual crimes receive fair

treatment by the courts. The report placed a large emphasis on the work that needs to be done in removing rape myths, a concept which will be expanded upon further on in the paper, from rape trial proceedings (Gillen 2019).

Literature review

Rape and its Narratives in Feminist Research

Feminist research and activism began focusing on sexual violence, including rape, towards the end of the twentieth century. This study focuses on discussions within feminist literature regarding the narratives that surround rape, online feminist activism and research which focuses on the use of affective-discursive language to explain and understand rape. While this paper will concentrate on rape, many studies included in the literature review relate to the continuum of sexual violence, which includes rape but also sexual assault, harassment and threat of violence (Kelly 1988).

Anderson and Doherty's (2008) *Accounting for Rape: Psychology, Feminism and Discourse Analysis in the Study of Sexual Violence* employs a feminist psychological perspective to analyse the discourses that are constructed around rape. Specifically, the authors are interested in examining how rape narratives are dominated by the idea that victim-survivors of rape should be held to account for their 'role' in the rape. Importantly for this research, Anderson and Doherty (2008) maintain that narratives surrounding sexual violence and victimhood are 'social creations', and that these creations are reliant upon the meaning making that happens through the discourses that emerge in the aftermath of alleged rape (p.5).

Building upon the emphasis of rape narratives as 'social creations', Gavey's (2019) *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape* employs a social constructionist lens and the theories of post-structuralism to inform her feminist discussion of what she terms 'the cultural scaffolding of rape' (p.3). This 'cultural scaffolding' refers to the socio-cultural context within which rape is perpetrated and then is understood by society. What is especially noteworthy is Gavey's (2019) examination of feminist narratives that have developed in anti-rape activism and literature. Gavey (2019) rightly argues that, although feminist researchers and activists have made great strides in challenging historical understandings of rape, how feminists have constructed discourses around rape and victimhood must not go unexamined, as these counter narratives may also result in unwanted negative repercussions for victim-survivors. For example, the dissemination of understandings of men as sex-crazed and women as passive victims within the context of a rape could ultimately result in the reproduction of gender relations that facilitate rape in the first place (p.3). For Gavey (2019), reflexivity is essential in both feminist literature and activism in order to avert potential unwanted harms, an understanding which was extremely helpful while carrying out this study.

Online Activism and Its Conflicts

The influence of the online sphere has grown, meaning that the internet, and especially social media, has become an arena in which rape narratives are constructed. However, it is also a space where the substantive nature of such activism is contested. Fileborn and Loney-Howes' (2019) *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change* focuses on recent online meaning making surrounding sexual harassment and violence in the wake of #MeToo. A noteworthy chapter by Mendes and Ringrose (2019) argues that Twitter campaigns such as #MeToo can be transformative in nature despite their limitations, by making rape culture visible, allowing for awareness raising and education on issues such as consent, showing solidarity with the victim-survivor and, importantly, locating sexual violence as a political issue. The potential of online feminist activism is also stressed by Rentschler (2014), who argues that feminist online 'response-ability' enables a challenging of rape culture, of holding individuals accountable for their behaviour and also create networks of support for those who have experienced sexual violence (p.64).

Empirical research has been published to support the assertion that Twitter campaigns can have a substantive impact, such as the longitudinal study by Kaufman et al. (2021). By examining Google search trends after #MeToo, the authors underline that there was a sustained increase in users searching for information regarding sexual assault and harassment in response to the movement. They argue that this is evidence of the potential impact that online Twitter activism can have for educating and awareness-raising around the issues of sexual violence (Kaufman et al. 2021). The findings of this study were supported by others, such as the work of Szekeres et al. (2020), which noted a link between the visibility of the #MeToo movement and a drop in self-reported dismissal of reports of sexual assault exhibited by both men and women (Szekeres et al. 2020).In contrast, there exists literature that argues online activism lacks substantive political impact in the off-line world. For example, Bouvier and Machin (2021) argue that the nature of Twitter's cancel culture negates the possibility for a nuanced discussion of complex social justice issues. Instead, the authors argue, it creates 'binary polarities between good and evil', which ultimately cannot address complex issues such as racism in its structural entirety, and instead individualises (p.308). In addition, Blair (2021) argues how the Instagram movement "Blackout Tuesday" can be seen as an example of performative utterances against online racism, or in other words was an empty cyber gesture instead of being political (Blair 2021).

Although these studies examine anti-racism online activism, the papers by Bouvier and Machin (2021) and Blair (2021) are helpful for this research, as they underline issues which affect not only online anti-racism activism, but also can be applied to interrogate the work of online anti-rape activism. As already noted, reflexivity in how rape and sexual violence are discursively framed is essential to avoid unintended harms, and to support gendered understandings that underpin rape-supportive cultures (Gavey 2019). The assertion of Bouvier and Machin (2021) that online discourse in the face of injustice tends to rely on the oversimplification of complex issues into matters of good versus evil can also be applied to online narratives of rape and sexual assault.

Disgust and Its Conflicts

Online activism is emotive in nature. Literature studying emotions includes scientific explorations into their cognitive functions, but also their cultural and social functions. An example of the latter is Ahmed's The Cultural Politics of Emotion (2004). Here, Ahmed (2004) insists that emotions cannot be disconnected from the social, and that emotions play an increasing role in our politics and culture. The socially and culturally contingent nature of emotions that Ahmed (2004) puts forward is especially relevant to consider in the context of the Belfast rape trial. The emotion at the centre of this paper is moral disgust. The study of disgust has been undertaken by feminist scholars looking to investigate the gendered elements of this powerful feeling (see Kristeva 1982; Kanai and Coffey 2023). It has been noted that the language of disgust is commonly evoked in response to disclosures of sexual assault and rape (Niemi 2018), as a result of what Ahmed (2004) refers to as the 'stickiness' of disgust (p.89). The language of disgust seems to 'stick' to rape discourses, and Ahmed (2004) explains this is a result of widespread repetition that transforms individual word choices into unconscious linguistic signs (p.91).

The literature is divided as to whether moral disgust can be helpful in the face of injustice, or whether it creates an invisibility of larger structural issues and the individual's role within them. Advocates of moral disgust, such as McGinn (2011), argue that it is a reaction generated through exposure to injustice and therefore works to rectify it, or that it works as a civilizing force. Munch-Jurišić (2014) agrees that disgust can be a helpful response to injustice, however with the assertion that what is understood as disgusting is 'always culturally and socially conditioned' (p.280).

In contrast to the above work (McGinn 2011; Munch-Jurišić 2014), literature exists which argues against the beneficial nature of disgust. A key contributor to this body of work is Nussbaum's (2004) *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law.* Of notable interest is the distinction Nussbaum (2004) draws between reactions of disgust and anger to a violation, arguing that while anger can mobilise, disgust nullifies. Nussbaum's (2004) work looks to unearth why the reaction of disgust is elicited instead of others. Notable throughout the text is the assertion that what is deemed disgusting is culturally contingent and unfixed, as Nussbaum (2004) explicitly warns against the use of disgust to justify laws and legal decisions, citing the criminalisation of homosexuality as an example of how this can be deeply harmful and problematic.

Whilst Nussbaum (2004) focuses on the limitations of disgust in the legal sphere, Sullivan's (2022) paper argues the limits of reactions of disgust in the #MeToo movement. Sullivan (2022) employs a discourse analysis to evaluate what function the language of disgust plays in reactions to accusations of systemic sexual harassment and sexual assault. The author argues that the language of disgust is a linguistic tool that works to avoid confronting the 'cultural scaffolding of rape' (Gavey 2019), refocusing the disgust solely at the accused individual and need for longer prison sentences in the cases of rape and sexual assault. In doing so, Sullivan (2022) argues that the language of disgust removes the reflexivity of the observer,

making it difficult to understand the systemic issues which underpin sexual violence against women. Reflexivity is well captured in Ahmed's (2017) *Living A Feminist Life*, where it is defined as the "living" of feminist theories through constant processes of self-reflection and critical engagement with the environment one lives in and the cultural norms that shape it.

Conflict, Politics, Emotions and Chantal Mouffe

The arguments and ideas present in the work of political theorist Chantal Mouffe were helpful in navigating the potential political power, or lack thereof, of the language of disgust elicited in response to the Belfast rape trial. Her text, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (2013), provided insightful arguments regarding how political hegemony comes to be established within a democratic context, and more interesting still, how this hegemony can be challenged. For example, Mouffe (2013) argues that 'What is at a given moment accepted as the "natural" order, jointly with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices. It is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity that is exterior to the forces that brought it into being.' (p.2) This understanding of hegemony is relevant to this research in its attempt to assess political and social justice movements that seek to challenge the 'common sense' order of society and institutions, as it underlines that the only certainty of hegemony is that it is contingent and can be replaced.

Equally influential were her conceptualisations of what constitutes politics and how different approaches to political critique can impact counter-hegemonic political movements. Specifically, Mouffe (2013) highlights two conflicting approaches to politics which advocate either 'engagement with' or 'withdrawal from' the systems which organise society. 'Engagement with' is understood as the political articulation of challenges to the existing power structures which cement current hegemonic institutions and social norms, and in doing so creating a new, counter-hegemony (Mouffe 2013, p.71). In contrast to this, while there is no escaping 'the political' (the ineradicable antagonism that structures relations of consensus and dissensus), withdrawing from concrete political struggle risks leaving the prevailing hegemony intact (Mouffe 2013). The concepts of 'engagement with' and 'withdrawal from' provide a valuable and novel framework with which to approach the research, as Mouffe (2013) argued that although choosing to abstain, reject or withdraw from a political issue may be understood as a political act, choosing to engage with the problematic structures that exist may be more conducive to substantive political change.

Mouffe's examination of politics has also brought her to look at the role that emotions play in politics, arguing that certain affects, such as anger or hope, can act as the catalyst to mobilise a challenge to a hegemonic status quo (2005). It is understandable that, for individuals who are invested in a political issue, emotions are often a key aspect of shaping political subjectivity and mobilisation. Mouffe (2013) underlines that although this emotional investment can be a positive force in terms of mobilisation against a perceived issue, it can also be destabilising for these individuals, who may now perceive their own identity at stake in the political field. Although Mouffe's work does not explicitly look at the role of moral disgust in

the political arena, it can be argued that she does so implicitly within the broader framework of emotions she discusses, particularly when exploring how political identities are constructed against an "other" or an antagonist (Mouffe 2005). The recognition of the role that negative emotions do play in the political arena was helpful in examining to what extent could the language of disgust be involved in challenging entrenched patriarchal norms concerning sexual violence.

Methodology

The data collected from the Belfast rape trial was in the form of tweets. The data was collected manually in April 2023, using Twitter's advanced search tool. The search parameters chosen were that tweets had to include one or more of the following hashtags: #IBelieveHer, #IBelieveHim, #Belfasttrial and #PaddyJackson. In addition, the following key words were included in the search: "disgust or disgusting or sick or sickening or gross". This allowed to search for tweets that included the vocabulary of disgust and its related metaphors, such as 'it makes me sick', that were expressed in relation to the case. Finally, temporal boundaries were established in the search for tweets that met the above criteria, which ranged from tweets posted from 01/03/2018 to 31/05/2018. These dates were chosen as the climax of tension regarding this case was evident after the return of the verdict on the 28th of March 2018. Of the 88 tweets collected, 67 of these were used in the analysis as the themes/sub-themes emerged. Indicative tweets that reflect these have been included in the paper, with the usernames anonymised to protect confidentiality. Twitter was chosen as it allows access to a vast amount of data that is accessible at no cost and is simple to access using Twitter's application programming interfaces (APIs) (Hino and Fahy 2019), and has been used effectively in similar studies examining public opinion elicited in response to sexual violence in Ireland (see Gannon 2022).

The content of the tweets selected was analysed using thematic analysis (TA), specifically reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), as it focuses on interpretation while acknowledging the researcher's positionality in relation to the research. Additionally, reflexive TA acknowledges the influence these aspects have on the researcher who is tasked with generating themes from the chosen data. For this study, a deductive approach was chosen, as before analysing the data, the arguments and ideas present in the work of political philosopher Chantal Mouffe (2013) influenced understandings of the contingency of hegemony and politics.

The biggest limitation of this research paper is using Twitter as a data source, as there is little control over what information may be removed from the website (McCormick et al. 2017). Nonetheless, enough content was available to carry out the study. Additionally, due to the time constraints and word limit of this paper, socio-demographic factors, such as age, or geographic location, were not included in the analysis of the tweets, however this would offer interesting insights and could be the focus of a future research paper.

Findings and Analysis

Using the Language of Disgust to 'Withdraw From'

25 tweets were interpreted as using the language of disgust to criticise elements of the case, but ultimately withdrew from seeing rape as a systemic and social issue, as it frames the accused as abnormal behaviour in a normal society, instead of reflecting that they may in fact be normal behaviour in an abnormal society. Although these tweets were understood as withdrawing from political engagement, this was not done in a uniform way. Four subthemes were generated within the larger 'withdrawal from' theme: personal dialogues of disgust; individuals as disgusting; lad culture as disgusting; and scandalised disgust.

Personal Dialogues of Disgust

Some tweets that commented upon the Belfast rape trial used the language of disgust to exhibit what Pitkin (cited in Mouffe 1993) has called the 'personal dialogue' of moral discourse. This 'personal dialogue' presents its critique through emphasising personal feelings of disgust towards the case. Some tweeters spoke of their feeling 'physically sick' (Figure 2) and 'sick to the core' (Figure 3) in response to the content of the accused's WhatsApp messages that were made public, the alleged rape and the online support for the verdict.

Figure 2

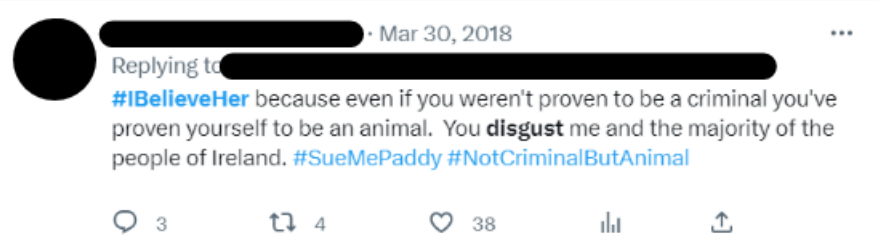
Figure 3

In these tweets, it seems that the vocabulary of disgust functions primarily to highlight the morals of the tweeter, and doing so without any further reflection or critique of what societal and institutional forces are at play in everyday life which result in rape. In other words, these tweeters seem to use disgust as a linguistic vehicle with which to convey their 'personal dialogue' in response to the trial. By not including references to the 'cultural scaffolding of rape' (Gavey 2019) the trial unearthed, these tweets are deemed as failing to engage disgust in a political way. This supports what Pitkin has argued, stating that 'political discourse concerns a public, a community, and takes place among the members generally' (cited in Mouffe 1993, p.50). These tweets do not involve this public or community, instead it individualises, and by doing so disgust vocabulary replaces political engagement with a statement of personal moral disgust against behaviour they wish to distance themselves from.

Individuals as Disgusting

Tweeting disgust can place the accused in the crosshairs of a judgement that functions as a boundary marker separating 'them' from 'us'. One tweet stated '#IBelieveHer because even if you weren't proven to be a criminal you've proven yourself to be an animal. You disgust me and the majority of the people of Ireland' (Figure 4).

Figure 4



The decision to equate the accused with an animal is a notable choice. Although it allows for an apparent criticism of the behaviour as unacceptable, it also places the accused outside the confines of society within which they learned the acceptability of certain behaviours. Additionally, some tweets described the accused as 'scum' (Figure 5) and 'disgusting pigs' (Figure 6) after reading the WhatsApp messages in which the accused discussed sexual acts that occurred in a derogatory manner.

Figure 5

Figure 6

The fact that "disgusting" behaviour is framed as being performed by scum and animals acts to place the accused and their behaviour outside of what is framed as the normal, well-functioning society.

The "animalistic character" of the accused was often articulated by using various metaphors commonly associated with expressions of disgust. This is interesting to note, as it has been argued that metaphors in conversations regarding rape can have the effect of displacing accountability, effectively deflecting it away from the accused (Gavey 2019, p.107). Gavey (2019) argues that 'although the monster/fiend can be constructed at fault for his actions, this identity construct does not position him as responsible' (p.118, emphasis added), resulting in the reflection of blame back to the victim-survivor, who failed to adequately avoid the 'uncontrollable fiend/monster' (p.118). This could also be applicable to the scum/animal character given to the accused in these tweets; in choosing the vocabulary of disgust to frame the accused as a social aberration, the 'cultural scaffolding' (Gavey 2019) that sustains rape remained unexamined.

The disgust levelled at individuals was not exclusively seen in relation to the accused, but also directed to those who showed support for them, especially after the verdict was returned. Examples of such tweets include one which labels the support shown by other men as disgusting after witnessing 'a lads insta story with a photo of Paddy Jackson saying winner winner, disgusting a rape trial isn't something to be won' (Figure 7). Another tweet more pointedly framed the accused supporters themselves as disgusting, stating that 'I am beyond disgusted at all the people I see defending these disgusting men STILL' (Figure 8).

Figure 7

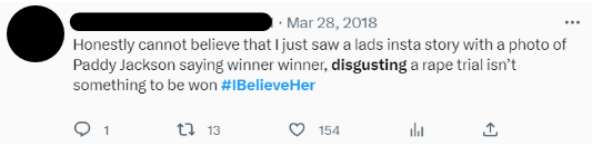
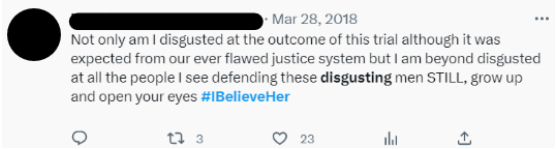


Figure 8



These tweets are interesting, as at one level they seem to offer a critique of patriarchal thinking. However, another reading could offer a different interpretation, namely that by framing the supporters of the accused as disgusting individuals, it gives credence to the fantasy of a moral order, which can be protected by othering the individuals who are seen to contaminate it. Although these supporters are not referred to as animals or scum, the idea that they are disgusting to the tweeters is evident, and this could be working to place them outside society, as aberrations of the normal. The potential issue here is that it results in a withdrawing from understanding this disgusting behaviour as also being normalised behaviour in society.

Targeting the language of disgust solely towards the accused individuals may have another unintended function, namely that focusing on condemning the accused comes at the expense of centring the complainant. As Ahmed (2004) has argued, disgust involves a recoiling from what is disgusting, and although this creates a distance between the disgusted and the disgusting, she argues that it also 'keeps the object at the centre of attention, as a centring which attributes the affect of sickness to the very quality of the object.' (p.86) The centring of the object of disgust could be seen to overshadow the complainant and her experience. This argument by Ahmed (2004) complements Nussbaum's (2004) assertion that disgust 'does not adequately register the thought that a harm has occurred. In short, disgust seems not quite the relevant emotion.' (p.126) The fact that the tweets outlined above chose to direct their disgust towards individuals means that individuals remain the focus of the speech act, therefore negating the possibility of looking at this case as an example of macro issues that result in widespread rape in society.

Lad Culture as Disgusting

Tweets that centred lad culture as the object of disgust had a similar effect as seen in tweets that framed rape as a problem caused by abhorrent individuals, not a societal issue rooted

in patriarchal thinking. Some tweets voiced fears about an increase in lad culture acceptance after the trial, such as one user who wrote that they were 'so terrified for what this means for Ireland's lad culture' (*Figure 9*). Some tweets spoke to lad culture in a less explicit way, with assertions such as 'let's hope none of their future daughters/sisters are ever discussed in group chats like theirs' (*Figure 10*).

Figure 9

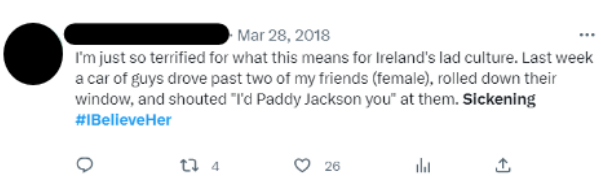
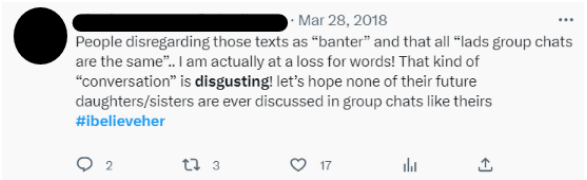


Figure 10



Lad culture is best understood as a "pack" mentality' among groups of men, notably evident in sports teams, with sexism and misogynistic language and behaviour branded as harmless 'banter' (Jordan *et al.* 2022, p.701). Although problematic in creating an environment where misogynistic behaviour is often tolerated and rewarded, by fixating on lad culture these tweets could also be seen to segregate the 'disgusting' individuals into a 'contaminated group' who exhibit laddish behaviour, which is then easy to separate from the rest of society.

The withdrawal that these tweets advocate is subtle. Nevertheless, it is made more evident when contrasted with tweets that removed the boundary drawn around lad culture, and instead expanded the issue to wider society. An example of this is outlined by a tweet stating: 'Important that as men we *all* take a hard look at our own actions, however small, that might contribute to this culture of disgusting behaviour towards women.' (*Figure 11, emphasis added*)

Figure 11

This tweet highlights that when it comes to understanding how larger societal and institutional structures facilitate, reproduce and sustain rape, it is impossible to stand outside these systems. Nussbaum's (2004) argument regarding the limitations of disgust is evident in the tweets condemning lad culture, notably the assertion that it allows one to avoid self-scrutiny. This reflexivity is challenging, and it is easier to expel than to explore uncomfortable

aspects of our society and ourselves. Nussbaum (2004) highlights the discomfort in reflexivity, as it is 'warning us that we might have done the same under comparable circumstances. It alerts us to the presence of evil (whether active or passively collaborative) in ourselves' (p.146).

Scandalous Disgust

Whilst some tweets expressed disgust in tandem with placing the accused outside the realm of the human, other tweets framed the trial as a rugby scandal, making this scandal for the sport the focal point of their articulated disgust. Some tweets argued that the accused are 'disgusting human beings' (*Figure 12*), that the accused showed evidence of being a 'disgusting misogynist' (*Figure 13*) followed by vowing to never attend Irish rugby games or wear the Irish jersey again if the defendants rejoined the team.

Figure 12

One tweet stated: 'Regardless of the outcome of this verdict, there is hard evidence of their disgusting attitudes towards women. They don't deserve to represent Ireland' (*Figure 14*).

Figure 13

Figure 14

Gavey (2019) highlights the role that scandal can play in understanding high-profile rape cases. Using the example of the 2013 Steubenville case, she argues that although a collective response of condemnation may initially be seen as a challenge to the status quo of rape culture, in fact it could also be interpreted in another way, namely that 'there are conservative undertones to this "exceptionalising" response.' (Gavey 2019, p.236) The hidden conservative element of using

the language of disgust to describe the Belfast rape trial as a *scandal* can function to show reality, in this case the reality of rape, as a singular, exceptional event. This is evident in some tweets that see the alleged rape as a scandal for Irish rugby. The tweeters articulate disgust towards the behaviour of the accused, stating 'Shame on you @UlsterRugby @IRFURugby if this is the calibre of your players' (*Figure 15*).

Figure 15

Perhaps the fact that two of the accused were public figures made its scandalous label unavoidable, however the focus on the impact of the trial on Irish rugby worked to make invisible the reality of widespread issues of consent and rape supportive culture. Articulating this trial as the scandalous exception rather than an example of the norms of society with the language of disgust could result in the inability to see this case as part of a larger societal issue, thus neutralising the possible transformative nature of these tweets.

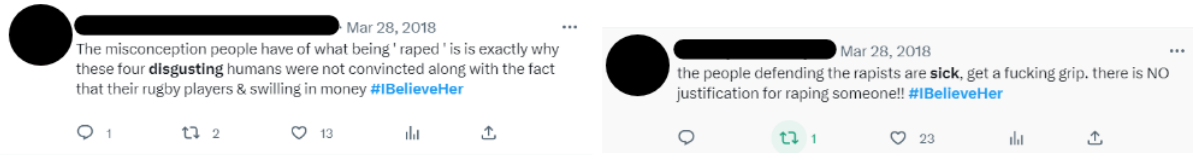
Using the Language of Disgust to 'Engage With'

Despite the sample of tweets that were interpreted as using the language of disgust to 'withdraw from' structural and social issues that the case brought to light, the majority of tweets collected (51) challenged the assertion that 'the most visible forms of popular feminism are the most apolitical.' (Kettrey *et al.* 2021, p.2) The users that tweeted their disgust but *also* demonstrated an attempt to engage with macro issues fell into two categories: tweets that used disgust to challenge rape myths and tweets that used disgust to criticise the judicial system and court proceedings in rape cases.

The Language of Disgust vs Rape Myths

Disgust vocabulary was notable in a number of tweets that problematised, and in some cases rearticulated, common rape myths. Several tweets challenged rape myths in a broader sense, stating that there exists a misconception of 'what being "raped" is is [sic] exactly' (Figure 16), and arguing that 'there is NO justification for raping someone!!' (Figure 17).

Figure 16 *Figure 17*



One of the most common rape myths challenged concerns the idea that the alleged rape victim-survivor is lying about the sexual violence. This refusal to believe the victim-survivor has been termed as 'secondary victimisation' by Williams (1984, cited in Anderson and Doherty 2008, p.9). This rape myth was rearticulated in a variety of ways, with tweets stating that this narrative disgusted the users, such as stating that such assertions were 'absolutely disgusting' (*Figure 17*).

Figure 17

These examples of tweeted disgust directed at the "victim as liar" rape myth was often accompanied by an image that outlined the evidence provided by both the defence and the complainant during the trial, ending with: 'If girl is telling the truth, it's just them lying' (*Figure 18*).

Figure 18

The above tweets present a distinct challenge to the entrenched rape myth of the victim as the liar, and in doing so disrupting the secondary victimisation often experienced by victim-survivors who are condemned by the community after reporting an alleged rape. Although some tweets used the personal dialogue of disgust, they do not 'withdraw' in the same way as seen in the first section of the paper, as here this language was used to frame a discursive engagement with an element of the 'cultural scaffolding of rape' (Gavey 2019). This was done by making visible the hidden rape myth that places the blame on the victim-survivor while absolving the perpetrator, and consequently presenting a counter-narrative to the "unreliable victim-survivor" rape myth. This use of the vocabulary of disgust can therefore be understood as contributing to the 'wealth of criticism' levelled against rape culture in print and social media in Northern Ireland in response to the Belfast rape trial (McFalone 2021, p.291).

The Language of Disgust vs the Northern Irish Legal System

In addition, 29 tweets used the vocabulary of disgust to criticise the verdict of the trial and the way the complainant was treated during the proceedings.

Disapproval of the verdict was common, with users choosing to express their dismay through statements such as 'feel physically sick at the thought of the Ulster rugby boys getting acquitted of raping that poor girl 😭 fucking disgusting' (*Figure 19*).

Figure 19

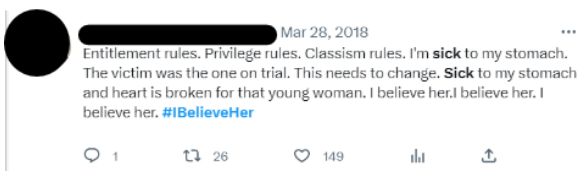
A common critique was expressed by contrasting messages exchanged between the accused and the verdict, with one tweet questioning 'how in any way could anyone call them innocent? disgusting' (*Figure 20*), accompanied with an image of text from the defendants' WhatsApp messages, including 'she was very loose' and 'It was like a merry go round at a carnival' (*Figure 20*).

Figure 20

Twitter users also directed disgust towards the justice system in general: 'What she went through is horrifying but what the justice system put her through is sick' (*Figure 21*) and highlighted that 'The victim was the one on trial. This needs to change. Sick to my stomach' (*Figure 22*).

Figure 21

Figure 22



Others identified the Belfast trial as an example of how the justice system fails those who report rape beyond the example of the Belfast rape case, stating that ‘our justice system has failed her and continues to fail women every day. It does not protect, it degrades. Disgusting.’ (*Figure 23*).

Figure 23

The issues of the Belfast rape trial were contextualised by some Twitter users, levelling criticism against larger flaws of the Northern Irish legal system and how rape cases are conducted. Sullivan (2022) has argued that approaching sex crimes with the sole focus on individuals means that ‘the social structures that make possible sexual violence and the myriad systems that are entangled in its logics are not addressed.’ (p.91) However, in the case of these tweets, it is not individuals but the structures themselves that are deemed disgusting, and in need of transformation, allowing these tweets to create a political space in which to address the problems that arise when a rape case is brought to a patriarchal justice system.

This carving out of space is reflective of the tactic of ‘engaging with’ an issue politically. Tweets that criticise patriarchal justice systems through the vocabulary of disgust can be understood as a helpful tool in disrupting hegemonic understandings of institutional violence (García-Mingo and Prieto Blanco 2023), and underline why people choose not to engage with these institutions, a system which one tweet argued ‘does not protect, it degrades’ (*Figure 23*). Tweets also work to disconnect understandings of the verdict as absolute truth, by highlighting ‘Just because you are proven innocent does NOT mean you are innocent’ (*Figure 24*).

Figure 24

Therefore, it can be argued that this sample of tweets also mobilised the language of disgust to create what García-Mingo and Prieto Blanco (2023) have described as a space in

which to 'negotiate meanings of sexual violence', or to use Mouffe's (2013) words, the tweets seek to engage with larger systems, in this case judicial, that impact the perception of rape in society (p.6). Although these examples lack explicit attempts at rearticulation of patriarchal justice, the vocabulary of disgust is nevertheless used to carve out space within which this rearticulation may take place in the future.

Conclusion

This research paper analysed how the language of disgust behaved when used in tweets responding to the Belfast rape trial. What the analysis demonstrates is that the language of disgust is malleable, as noted by Pedwell (2014), who argued that instead of being inherently 'good' or 'bad', the same affective language can result in contrasting outcomes, depending on *how* it is used.

These conflicting outcomes were conceptualised using Mouffe's (2013) understandings of attempts to 'engage with' or 'withdraw from' addressing the systemic and social issues underpinning rape. While examining tweets for these two overarching themes, subthemes were generated relating to both. The subthemes generated in tweets that withdrew from political engagement were personal dialogues of disgust; individuals as disgusting; lad culture as disgusting; and scandalous disgust. Subthemes understood as 'engaging with' the cultural scaffolding of rape were the language of disgust vs rape myths, and the language of disgust vs the Northern Irish legal system.

Notably, tweets using the language of disgust to 'withdraw' from engaging in structural issues that support rape made up the *minority* of the dataset, with the majority challenging assertions that saw disgust as apolitical (Sullivan 2022) or unhelpful in response to injustice as proposed by Nussbaum (2004).

Therefore, it appears that the tweets examined relating to the Belfast rape case complicate Sullivan's (2022) argument that 'Disgust is flaccid because it only disavows, and it only disavows at the individual level', in reference to the #MeToo movement (p.82). It is true that some of the tweets examined were interpreted as drawing a boundary between the tweeter and the accused through personal declarations of disgust, framing the accused as aberrations of the normal, declaring lad culture as a disgusting community to be expelled, or placing the case outside of the norm by framing it as a scandal. However, these were a notable minority. Interestingly, the analysis of tweets containing the language of disgust largely challenged the assertions that disgust is apolitical (Sullivan 2022) or unhelpful in response to injustice (Nussbaum 2004). Although Nussbaum (2004) has argued that disgust and reflexivity cannot coexist, the disgust vocabulary evident in the majority of the tweets in response to the Belfast rape trial was arguably reflexive, seen in the tweets that took common rape myths and rearticulated them, questioned Northern Ireland's judicial system and its ability to deal with rape cases, and problematised the shows of support for the accused after acquittal and its impact on social understandings of consent. It is conceivable that the tweets 'engaging with' the scaffolding behind the Belfast rape trial are attempting to go beyond the disavowal of the

accused individuals, and instead articulate disgust at injustices evident in wider societal norms and systems, an outcome of tweeted disgust also identified in a study by Pantti (2016).

The lanugage of disgust in response to the Belfast rape trial can therefore be understood as an agonistic arena (Mouffe 2013), meaning that it is yet another sphere of human society in which consensus and uniformitivity are out of reach. Understood as an agonistic arena then, the language of disgust is deeply political. In other words, as a way of engaging with the issue of sexual violence and rape culture, the register of disgust can be used in different ways, whether as a performative mode of virtue-signalling on the part of individuals, or as a potentially transformative way of engaging critically with the cultural scaffolding of rape. In short, and as the analysis of the Belfast rape trial presented in this research paper demonstrates, the social effects of disgust as a mode of expression are contingent on the play of agonistic forces as these exist in a given conjuncture. This research challenges previous assertions regarding the usefeulness of disgust of bystanders in response to public discussions of sexual violence and rape (Sullivan 2022), and offers another lens with which to look at the narratives that we construct around sexual violence in our society and the individuals who perpetrate it. It may be interesting to apply to other trials and/or movements to see if this is true for cases outside of the Belfast rape trial of 2018.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

She won't stop! Reframing the sexualisation of Miley Cyrus: A theoretical approach using Queer Theory to assess Cyrus's feminist potential through her on-stage performances

Keighron, Aoibhín

Abstract This article explores the feminist potential within celebrity pop culture by using Miley Cyrus as a case study, specifically examining her on-stage performances. It evaluates Cyrus's feminist stance through these performances and her resistance to negative responses. Queer theory serves as the primary framework to assess the implications of this feminist potential and its contribution to the broader feminist discourse. Miley Cyrus, an American pop singer and actress, began her career as a child star on Disney Channel's "Hannah Montana" (Kennedy, 2014). As Cyrus matured, she increasingly sought to distance herself from her Disney image, engaging in provocative behavior. Some argue that this was her attempt at achieving personal empowerment (Kennedy, 2014). This research aims to examine this attempt and understand its implications for feminism. A descriptive analysis identifies key findings and themes from queer theory, interpreting these themes within Cyrus's performances. A thematic analysis of her performances is conducted and assessed through the lens of queer theory. This study contributes to literature on feminist theory, particularly queer theory and feminist approaches, highlighting the complex relationships between celebrity culture and feminist debates. Further research is needed to uncover nuanced insights.

Key Words: Celebrity Feminism, Queer Theory, Miley Cyrus, Pop Culture, Social Constructionism

Introduction

It is hard to ignore the phenomenal influence of contemporary pop culture and the growth of modern feminism (Storey, 2010). This paper is interested to explore the two concepts by examining Miley Cyrus’s contribution to feminist discussions through her on-stage performances. This paper aims to queerly think about gender and sexuality, this way of thinking opens up questions about the social construction of such identities. This concept will be discussed throughout this paper using elements of Queer Theory to evaluate Miley Cyrus’s on-stage performances. Miley Cyrus a 31 year-old American singer, songwriter and actress (born November 1992) who has long been an advocate for equality and diversity as she positively uses her platform to raise awareness of the issues facing marginalised groups. This awareness can be seen in several ways through her on stage performances. This paper is interested in examining these performances, to assess what understandings they can bring to a broader feminist discussion. It can be a powerful influence when a celebrity publicly identifies as a feminist, and this is important to consider (Keller & Ringrose, 2015). Cyrus first entered the celebrity industry as a Disney child star. Her quick rise to fame saw her become one of the most sought-after stars with over 200 million followers on Instagram and 69 million monthly listeners on Spotify. This manifestation of celebrity, however, exacts a toll that Cyrus knows all too well. Cyrus shifted her wholesome persona to a bad girl image professionally when she released her 2013 Bangerz album. This signified Cyrus’s move from Disney child star to a ‘racier’. performer (Kennedy, 2014). The heightened level of scrutiny she faced saw the media dissecting her character, from accusations of setting a negative example to critiques of her perceived 'oversexualized' performances (Jackson et al, 2016). This paper is intended to take a different approach when assessing Miley Cyrus’ performances. This will be done to explore if Cyrus’s on-stage performances over the span of her career, can positively contribute to feminist representation.

Literature Review

According to Sarah Casey and Juliet Watson (2017), celebrities are "key conduits through which feminism is mediated to larger audiences" (Casey & Watson, 2017, pp. 2). This suggests that celebrities can bring feminism to the mainstream population. The term celebrity feminism was first coined by Wicke (1994) who became the first person to critically theorise the concept. Wicke (1994) suggested that attention is needed to how feminism and celebrity culture inevitably mix in ways that may be both positive and negative, with limitations and opportunities. Celebrities have always played a crucial role in defining the specific feminisms that have emerged in western media (Taylor, 2014). In contemporary society, the rise of celebrity culture, opens the doors for a more direct impact on the general public, that can shape understandings of feminism.

Miley Cyrus can be argued as an example of using her celebrity platform to promote feminism. Cyrus undoubtedly has left an indelible mark on popular culture, maintaining a prominent presence in the public sphere for more than a decade. The span of her career saw

her grow from a Disney channel child, to one of the the most popular female artists of this decade. After her time ended on Disney channel's Hannah Montana, she reinvented herself in the image of a more mature popstar (Kennedy, 2013). Cyrus boasts a catalogue of successful albums, among them "Bangerz," "Can't Be Tamed," and her most recent release, "Endless Summer Vacation''. The BBC (2023) deemed her the ultimate 21st century pop star for her range of contributions to the music industry (Savage, 2023). A public figure of her calibre can use their influence to speak out or highlight social and political issues. In an interview with Rolling Stone magazine Cyrus proclaimed she thinks she is the '*biggest feminist in the world*' (Cyrus, 2013, cited in Rolling Stone). Cyrus exhibits a fearlessness in pushing boundaries, whether through provocative acts like swinging naked on a wrecking ball or engaging in onstage twerking. Cyrus's actions mean she is often a hot topic for debate, with the media scrutinising her every move. Nonetheless, Cyrus has always maintained agency over herself and rejects conformity to societal norms prescribed for women. In 2013, Cyrus claimed ''*I know what I'm doing, I know I'm shocking''* (Cyrus, 2013, cited in Rolling Stone magazine), she believes it is her way to demonstrate empowerment. Agency in feminism can be defined as the capacity of individuals, particularly women, to act autonomously and make choices that reflect their personal interests, opinions, and desires, free from coercion or undue influence (Davis, 1991). Furthermore, in a 2023 interview with British Vogue she reiterates this comment stating *"I was creating attention for myself because I was dividing myself from a character I had played. Anyone, when you're 20 or 21, you have more to prove''.* This agency and empowerment are an aspect that this paper will consider when assessing the on-stage performances. It will also consider how the over sexualised performance can inadvertently reinforce harmful stereotypes about women's worth being tied to their sexuality or physical appearance.

Queer Theory

This paper engages with key findings from sociological theorists Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich and Michael Foucault. The term Queer theory first appeared in academia in a 1991 article by Teresa de Lauretis. The article titled Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities in 1991 aims to make sense of challenges to normality (Hall, 2003). Lorber, 1996 argues that "*Sociology assumes that each person has one sex, one sexuality and one gender which are congruent and fixed for life. A woman is assumed to be feminine female, a man a masculine male with heterosexuality the uninterrogated norm*" (Lorber, 1996, pp. 144). Queer theory deconstructs these concepts by highlighting the constructed nature of sex, gender and sexuality. This rethinking queerly opens a new understanding of old concepts (Valochhi, 2005). In the process of gender identification, influential social institutions such as the state wield substantial power in shaping and moulding individual perceptions and expressions of gender. Social scripts and social labelling in this way limit how these identities are learned and acted out. This notion is best exemplified by Judith Butler's work on how sexual and gender identities are constructed through performativity (Butler, 1990). According to this theory, sexual and gender identities are performatively constructed by the very manifestation of the gender and sexuality that are assumed to produce them.

Gender and Sexuality Performativity

Gender

Judith Butler is one of the leading academic contributors to the field of queer theory and feminism, known for their work on gender performativity. Butlers book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990) incorporates what would now be considered a Queer perspective on the production of sexuality with a concern of gender regulation and the subordination of women. Butler suggests that gender is a social construct, that has been established over time through behaviours and language. This construction has created a conventional idea of gender and sexuality. The constructed ideas of gender and sexuality has facilitated the oppression of homosexuality and the dominance over women (Butler, 1990). Butler argues that 'woman' as a concept is flawed since how it is defined leads to the identical exclusionary behaviours that feminism purports to oppose. According to Butler, gender is not a fundamental quality or nature, rather; it is a set of behaviours in constant repetition that gives the illusion that there is a fundamental nature. Individuals assigned male at birth are frequently informed they are boys, starting even in their youngest years. They are often encouraged to conform to their gender, to be assertive and not express emotions. Individuals assigned female at birth are told they are girls and are taught to be nurturing and timid to not take up too much space (Butler 1990).

Butler's (1990) work in Gender Trouble can be seen to reiterate Simon de Beauvoir (1949) claim '' One is not born but rather becomes a woman'' (de Beauvoir, as cited in de Beauvoir vintage, 2011). The central claim from de Beauvoir is that men fundamentally oppress women by categorising them as other. Men are seen to be the stronger, dominant oppressor with a hold over women. This concept has been reinforced in societies through language and behaviours. De Beauvoir's claims that while it is instinctive for individuals to view themselves in contrast to others, this approach is flawed in the realms of genders (Vintges, 1999). By defining woman as other, man is effectively denying the humanity of women. De Beauvoir's work influenced movements within the second wave of feminism and contributes to the notion that gender is socially constructed. Her analysis challenges traditional notions of femininity and highlights the need for women to assert their autonomy and agency in patriarchal society. Feminist scholars Butler and De Beauvoir bring attention to the hierarchy of sexes and promote an equal stance among both men and women.

Sexuality

Definitions of sexuality are reliant on gender and if gender can be understood to be socially constructed, the same would apply for sexuality. Adrienne Rich's essay Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (1980) examines the social construction of sexuality, particularly the ways in which heterosexuality is enforced and normalized in society. Rich argues that heterosexuality is not an innate orientation but rather a social construct that privileges certain forms of relationships and marginalises others. While Rich's work came before that of Butler, the work of gender performativity ties in well with Rich's

understanding of sexuality. Rich believes that a variety of factors including cultural representation of relationships and sexuality, institutions of law and economy, favour heterosexual relationships and norms, pushing individuals to conform to societal norms which re-enforce heterosexuality as the standard. Rich argues that women are forced into heterosexual relationships in order to achieve social and economic stability, this can restrict their opportunities for personal and professional growth (Rich 1980).

Michael Foucault, the French philosopher. contributed significantly to the field of gender and sexuality studies and can be seen to be central to the development of Queer theory. Foucault suggested that understandings around sexuality have been socially constructed and have created categories of people based on their behaviours and desires (Foucault, 1990). These categories according to Foucault have been used to create a hierarchy of power. In order for Foucault to challenge the dominant view of the connection between sexuality and repressive power, he had to consider the nature of power. His main argument concluded that power is not always oppressive but rather constructive (Foucault, 1990). It does not work by supressing and prohibiting the true and authentic expressions of sexuality. Instead, it is produced in the ways individuals view their sexuality through cultural norms and practices.

These understandings underscore the importance of critically engaging with representations of gender and sexuality in popular culture, highlighting the potential for both reinforcing and subverting dominant norms. By applying feminist and Queer theory to analysis of cultural artifacts such as Cyrus's performance, the research deepens understandings of the complexities surrounding gender identify, sexuality and power in contemporary society. Drawing upon these theoretical frameworks, this paper explores the performance of gender and sexuality in popular culture, through the lens of Miley Cyrus's on-stage performances, to assess the extent to which they conform or challenge gender norms and expectations.

Methodology

This research paper adopts an interpretivism paradigm, a methodological approach used in the field of social sciences that explores the motivations and reasoning behind certain social situations. This approach works on the assumption that reality is socially constructed through shared ideas and experiences (Myers, 2008). Miley Cyrus is used as a case study to explore celebrity feminism and whether she challenges or conforms to societal expectations. The methodology involves a literature review of Queer theory and an examination of recorded performances.

Data Collection

Data was collected from five of Cyrus's performances spanning her career. It includes performances by Cyrus at various points in her life because it aims to examine her body of work across the course of her career. The performances were chosen from a larger selection of performances. The performances to be included were all broadcasted on television and had

hit headlines in the media. By selecting performances that span from the start of Cyrus's career to the present day, and specifically focusing on those that were showcased on television with high audience engagement, this research paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of her evolving artistry and impact on popular culture. By examining performances from different stages of her career, ranging from her early days as a Disney Channel star to her more recent ventures into pop and rock music, the research seeks to trace the trajectory of Cyrus's artistic development and the evolution of her public persona. This approach ensures that the analysis captures key moments in Cyrus's career that have shaped her public image and contributed to broader discussions about gender, sexuality, and identity in contemporary media.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a research technique used to assess qualitative data, it involves searching for patterns within in the data and identifying themes (Becker et al, 2013). The analysis, rooted in social constructionism, involves interpreting the meanings of these themes through a feminist perspective. Thematic analysis is employed to identify patterns and themes within the performances, focusing on agency, visibility/representation and breaking societal norms. Agency in feminism refers to individuals' ability, especially women's, to act freely and make decisions that represent their own interests, views, and wants without being coerced or subjected to undue influence. It underlines how crucial it is to acknowledge and value women's autonomy and self-determination in a variety of spheres of life, such as intimate partnerships, sexual orientation, professional decisions, and social engagement (Davies, 1991). Visibility is the acknowledgment, representation and amplification of marginalized voices, experiences, and contributions across a range of social contexts (Schroer, 2014). Breaking societal norms involves challenging or disregarding the established expectations, customs, or behaviours that are widely accepted within a particular society or culture. This can encompass a wide range of actions, from questioning traditional gender roles to advocating for social change (Giddens & Griffiths, 2006).

Video footage serves as the primary data source, with rigorous watching and detailed description of each performance. Once this stage was completed, emerging themes were identified and given a code. These codes allowed for easy identification of each theme and shows what performances showcased which theme. The method of coding is a good tool for this research as it allowed for the labelling and grouping of similar concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2012. The main findings highlight moments in Cyrus's performances that align with themes of agency, visibility/representation, and challenging societal norms. These themes are discussed in conjunction with Queer theory to provide deeper insights.

Performances

1. 2009 Teen Choice Award Performance (Party in the USA)
2. 2010 Britain's Got Talent Performance (Can't Be Tamed).
3. 2013 Video Music Awards Performance (We Can't Stop).

4. 2016 Maya and Marty in Manhattan Performance (Mash up I'm Your Man/I'm A Woman, cover of Leonard Cohen and Peggy Lee).
5. 2021 Stand by You Pride Special (Cover of Believe by Cher).

Performance	Year	Code
Teen Choice Awards	2009	A, C
Britain's Got Talent	2010	A, C
Video Music Awards	2013	A, C
Maya & Marty in Manhattan	2016	VR, C
Stand By You Pride Special	2021	VR, C

Codes

Agency = A

Visibility/Representation = VR

Challenging Societal Norms/Expectations = C

Similarly, McNicholas Smith (2017) conducted a descriptive analysis to explore feminist potential from Cyrus's 2013 Video Music Award performances. The findings concluded that there is Queer feminist potential from Cyrus in this performance from the way she has visibility and attachment in the media. This research paper will expand on this finding and look at other performances to explore is there an overall feminist representation within them. Feminist representation can be defined as the portrayal of women that challenges conventional gender norms, empowers female agency, and embraces diversity and inclusivity. It goes beyond simplistic stereotypes to depict women as multifaceted individuals with their own desires, ambitions, and complexities (Coleman, 2014).

There is limited available research that explores performances in such a manor. While McNicholas Smith (2017) provides a good example of examining Cyrus's performances, it only focuses on one and lacks a theoretical understanding. This research paper will attempt to achieve a more theoretical understanding of themes within Cyrus's on-stage performances.

This will be done by considering if the performances showcase Cyrus following or challenging the binary gender expectations.

Findings

1 Teen Choice Awards (2009)

Miley Cyrus performances at the 2009 Teen Choice Awards (TCA) can be argued to be the starting point of her rebellious days. The Teen Choice Awards was an award show from 1999-2019 that honoured achievements in film, television, music, sporting and social media. In 2009 Miley was a sought-out performer since her Disney channel show Hannah Montana first aired and was one of the performers at that years TCAs.

She enters the stage in an edgy look completed with leather shorts, a tank top on cowboy boots. She was performing her hit single Party in The USA and partied on stage is what she did. As the song reach the bridge, she steps on to a passing ice cream cart with a striper pole. As she is moved along the stage, she is dancing with the pole.

Figure 1 Teen Choice Awards 2009 (Getty Images, 2009).

According to a Salon magazine article after the performances, there was approximately 2,750,00 google results for 'Miley Cyrus and pole' (Clark-Flory, 2009). Furthermore, there were more than 1300 articles published about the performance (Clark-Flory, 2009). This performance appears to showcase agency for Cyrus with her having fun on stage doing what she felt comfortable to do. Firstly, her choice of song and performance style represented a departure from her previous image as a child star. By selecting a more mature and contemporary song, Cyrus demonstrated her independence in determining her public identity and creative path that shifted from the innocence of her Hannah Montana character. Cyrus seemed to be completely in charge of her performance, emulating autonomy over her own body and image, from her energizing dance moves to her interactions with the crowd.

2 Britain's Got Talent (2010)

Miley Cyrus's performance at the Britain's Got Talent show caused quite a stir at the time in 2010 with headlines such as 'Miley Cyrus simulates lesbian kiss in front of family audience for Britian's Got Talent' (Daily Mail, 2010). Cyrus was there to promote her new album Can't Be Tamed; this was an album she was using to change her image from Disney child star to sex symbol in the music industry. As seen from her 2009 TCA performance this is something she was trying to do, and the album name itself is a give-away of a Cyrus's

intentions. Adorned in thigh-high boots and a black leather leotard, Cyrus emerges on stage through open doors, performing the lyrics, "I can't be tamed, I can't be tamed''.

Cyrus embodies the song's theme through her dynamic and provocative choreography. She engages in energetic dancing and grinding movements with her backup dancers. Midway through the performance, she pulls one of the female dancers close, creating the appearance of simulating a kiss. The lyrics suggest Miley is not letting anyone prevent her from pursuing her desires. Similar to the TCA performance, the Britain's Got Talent performance drew some controversy. The media reported on the outrage of Miley supposedly 'making out' with a girl. This is seen in the news headlines at the time (Daily Mail, 2010). The controversy, rooted in homophobia, was based on one flash second of a simulated lesbian kiss, causing such a public reaction.

Figure 2 Britain's Got Talent (Gotty, 2010).

The simulated kiss appears on screen for less than a second, yet Miley had to come out and apologise for the action. Taking to her official website Cyrus stated "*I promise you I did not kiss her. It is ridiculous that two entertainers can't even rock out with each other without the media making it some type of story*." (Cyrus, 9 News , 2010). If this was to happen in 2024, one might question if Cyrus would be expected to apologise for her behaviour. It is likely that Cyrus herself would not apologise now, She is happy with how she expresses sexuality (Setoodeh, 2016). While Cyrus demonstrates agency in these performances, the response to her action and her subsequent apology suggests that she was still constrained by heteronormative stereotypes at this time.

3 Video Music Awards (2013)

Miley Cyrus performances at the 2013 Video Music Awards is one of her most famous performances to date. This is largely due to the widespread controversy following the performance. ABC News (2013) reported that after the performance there were 306,000 tweets per minute more than the Superbowl[7]. The illusion for the performance suggests a psychedelic animation (McNicholas Smith, 2017) which is a reference to the song she is performing *We Can't Stop*. Cyrus shows no fear in

Figure 3 Video Music Awards 2013 (Gotty, 2013).

[7] Tweets is in references to Twitter the popular social media platform now known as X

twerking[8] with her dancers. Mid-way through the performances the music cuts, the song changes and Blurred Lines by Robin Thicke plays. Cyrus is then joined on stage by Thicke dressed in a referee style outfit. A quick outfit change revels Cyrus dressed in a nude latex two piece, paired with a foam finger. Cyrus uses this prop to dance seductively and grind against Thicke. The performance once again is showcasing Cyrus's agency over her performance. This was not a typical performance for the VMAs: Miley was pushing boundaries, and she was not afraid to use her body to do this. Like her hit song We Can't Stop, Miley won't stop. The controversy surrounding the performance primarily stemmed from its overtly sexualized nature and the perceived appropriateness of Cyrus's behaviour, particularly in the context of her transition from a Disney Channel star to a more mature artist. Critics argued that Cyrus's performance perpetuated harmful stereotypes about women and objectified her and her dancers (Jackson et al., 2016). However, in the years after her performance Cyrus has used this media attention for the greater good. "Not only was culture changed, but my life and career were changed forever…It inspired me to use my platform for something much bigger. If the world is going to focus on me and what I am doing, then what I am doing should be impactful and it should be great." (Cyrus for Wonderland Magazine, 2018).

4 Maya and Marty (2016)

Miley Cyrus was invited to perform on the stand-up comedy show Maya and Marty. The 2016 comedy show blends comedy sketches, musical performances, and celebrity guests into their show. Cyrus was performing a cover version of the classics I'm Your Man by Leonard Cohen and I'm a woman by Peggy Lee.

Figure 4 Maya and Marty 2016 (Portman, 2016)

Cyrus dressed in a black tuxedo and top hat begins singing I'm Your Man in a deep husky voice, hitting all the big notes. As the song switches to I'm a woman Cyrus throws away the hat and rips off the trousers to reveal a black leotard while singing in her normal more feminine voice. This gender bending performance is a classic example of Cyrus not subscribing to the expected gender norms. She showcases she can do both and in doing so is bringing gender fluidity to mainstream media. This simple performance is good example of Cyrus showing that she does not need big theatrics to get her point across. Through her performance, Cyrus celebrated the diversity of gender identities and challenged the notion that gender is binary or fixed.

[8] Twerking is dance style originating in Africa (Gaunt, 2021).

5 Stand By You Pride Special (2021)

Figure 5 Stand By You Special 2021

The 2021 Stand by You Pride special was hosted by Miley Cyrus in Nashville, Tennessee. The hour long special featured special guests and performers all to celebrate the month of Pride and show solidarity for those in the LGBTQIA+ community. Cyrus opens the show to thank everyone for coming and stating, 'everyone is welcome here'. She performs her hit songs as well as some covers including, I'll stand by you, which she dedicated to the audience. However, her stand out performances of the night was her rendition of Believe by Cher. Cyrus was joined on stage by 6 drag queens who danced in perfect synchronicity beside her.

This performance is showing visibility for the LGBTQIA+ community, highlighting the struggles they face which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Cyrus calls on the state of Nashville to be a safe place for the community and welcome everyone. "*Let's be that place Nashville, where people of all identities feel at home"* (Cyrus, 2021, Stand By You Pride Special).

Performances	**Themes**
Teen Choice Awards (2009)	Agency Challenging societal expectations/norms
Britian's Got Talent (2010)	Agency Challenging societal expectations/norms
Video Music Awards (2013)	Agency Challenging societal expectations/norms
Maya and Marty (2016)	Visibility Challenging societal expectations/norms
Stand By You Pride Special (2021)	Visibility Challenging societal expectations/norms

Discussion

Agency

In sociology agency is defined as an expression of autonomy that goes against social institutions and structures and cultural forces (Shapiro, 2005). The story of Miley Cyrus's career has revolved around her agency in her performances, especially in the last few years. In this sense, agency refers to her capacity for conscious and independent choice-making regarding her public character, image, and artistic expression. This is evident in both Cyrus's professional and personal life, where she freely expresses herself as she chooses. Regardless of public or media scrutiny, Cyrus remains steadfast in her actions. She demonstrates agency by consciously utilizing her body as a source of empowerment. As previously mentioned in a 2013 Rolling Stone interview Cyrus is quoted as saying "I know what I am doing, I know I am shocking you" (Cyrus, 2013, cited in Rolling Stone). Cyrus's statement implies that when she takes the stage, she does so with deliberate intent, fully cognizant of her actions and their potential to generate shock and stir controversy. This would suggest agency and power over the performances. Power as described by Foucault allows for the dictation of what knowledge is produced across society (Foucault, 1990). In this case Cyrus is using her own power to have creative control over her performances and the image she puts out. Agency was found in three of the five Miley Cyrus performances. The first performance in 2009 set the precedent for what was to come from Cyrus. The TCA performance was Cyrus's attempt at power through her performance. She continued to demonstrate her agency in her 2010 and 2013 performances by her choice of outfits and the way she moved herself on stage and the way she interacts with her dancers. This agency indicates that Cyrus holds feminist potential in her performances in the way that she articulates herself while performing. She takes control of her image and her sexuality; by doing this she is asserting her agency and independence. Cyrus's agency in her performances is characterized by her fearless approach to self-expression, her commitment to social activism, and her willingness to challenge conventional norms. By asserting control over her image and artistic output, she embodies the principles of autonomy and empowerment, redefining what it means to be a modern-day pop icon.

Visibility

Miley Cyrus is no stranger to the fight for LGBTQIA+ recognition and visibility, this is seen throughout her career including her on stage performances. In 2014, Cyrus was inspired by the tragic death of a transgender girl Leelah Alcorn to set up her own charity The Happy Hippie Foundation (Setoodeh, 2016).The foundation is a non-profit organisation that aims to raise funds and awareness surround LGBT+ youth and homelessness (Happy Hippie Foundation, 2014). Through the Happy Hippie Foundation Cyrus has initiated various projects and campaigns to raise awareness and funds for LGBT+ rights and homelessness. Some notable initiatives include Cyrus launching the Backyard Sessions, a series of music performances featuring herself and other artists with proceeds going to the Happy Hippie Foundation. These sessions have featured LGBT+ themes and artists, helping raise awareness and support for the cause. This representation and visibility are needed for those in the

community to feel comfortable with who they are. GLAAD (formerly known as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) reported in 2021 that 7.1% of adult Americans are LGBTQ+, with that number rising with each generation. The CEO of GLAAD Sarah Kate Ellis stated that thanks to the increase in visibility and representation more LGBTQIA+ Americans can be comfortable to be their authentic selves (GLAAD, 2022). The outrage after Cyrus supposedly kissed a girl on stage during her BGT performances indicates the deeply rooted ideas of traditional sexuality inscribed via heteronormativity. As stated by Rich (1980) there is pressure to conform to heterosexual norms in society; however, Cyrus serves as a prime example of challenging socially constructed views of sexuality, advocating for more positive representation of the LGBTQIA+ community. Through her actions and advocacy, she highlights the diversity of sexual orientations, emphasizing their myriad expressions of sexuality beyond traditional norms. As Rich (1980) contends, societal norms often reproduce and reinforce certain expectations. However, Cyrus has challenged these norms through her onstage performances, demonstrating that individuals need not conform to such expectations. In doing so she creates space for individuals to embrace their true selves authentically. Cyrus's Stand by You Pride 2021 was a prime opportunity for her to bring attention and visibility to the struggles faced by the LGBTQIA+ Community.

Challenging Societal Expectations/Norms

The key findings from theorists Butler, Rich and Foucault suggest patriarchal society has created binary categories that males and females are supposed to fit into. Butler alludes to this in their findings, believing that gender itself is a social construction used to oppress women (Butler, 1990). It was found in all five of the performances that Cyrus was seen to challenge societal norms and expectations. This is largely due to Cyrus not subscribing to the gender rules she was expected to follow. Rich (1980) emphasised the importance of women finding their voices: Cyrus uses her performances to create empowerment and allow her voice to be heard in a deeper way than just her singing on stage. Furthermore, as Butler (1990) posits, women are often expected to conform to societal expectations of timidity, purity, and unobtrusiveness. Cyrus actively rejects these notions, a defiance that is evident throughout her performances. However, this way of acting often found Cyrus being portrayed negatively in the media. The 2009 TCA performance was her first attempt at showing the world she was ready to perform the way she wanted. This transpired to her 2010 BGT performance with her once again dancing on stage and kissing her female dancer. Despite the controversy surrounding both these performances, Cyrus still maintained her power for her 2013 VMA performance. The controversies surrounding this performance centres around the sexualisation of Cyrus. The media persistently oversexualized Cyrus for her performances, which Cyrus claimed were, in reality,

expressions of her enjoyment in performing. In 2019, Cyrus publicly addressed this issue on her Twitter page, condemning the slut-shaming directed at her (Cyrus, 2019; see Figure 6). She expressed frustration with the misrepresentation of her image and highlighted the double standard, noting that men rarely face slut-shaming. These findings suggest that Cyrus is an example of using her celebrity status to promote the ideas of Queer feminism positively.

However, it is important to acknowledge that Cyrus' interpretation of feminism may not garner universal acceptance within scholarly discourse. Cyrus's journey reflects the challenge of navigating feminist ideals in a culture that often equates sexualization with empowerment. On one hand, her unapologetic embrace of sexuality can be seen as an act of defiance against societal expectations and an assertion of autonomy. On the other hand, using hypersexualised imagery as a form of rebellion risks reinforcing the very structures that limit women's freedom. Her provocative performances and explicit imagery challenge traditional norms and asserts her right to express herself on her own terms. However, this approach also raises questions about the effectiveness of using sexualised imagery to promote feminist ideals. Critics suggest that this kind of imagery can uphold the same patriarchal systems that earlier waves of feminism worked to break down. Sinead O' Connor's response to Cyrus's 2013 'Wrecking Ball' video encapsulates this tension (O'Connor, 2013). O'Connor who was an Irish singer-songwriter and activist best known for her powerful voice and outspoken views, criticized the sexualised imagery, suggesting that it played into a system that exploits women and uses them as commodities. She urged Cyrus not to allow herself to be manipulated by an industry that profits from objectifying women. However, Cyrus herself has addressed this letter in 2023 remaining unapologetic for her early career choices (Weisholtz , 2023). *''I had been judged for so long for my own choices that I was just exhausted, and I was in this place where I finally was making my own choices and my own decisions and to have that taken away from me deeply upset me*," (Cyrus for Today News , 2023). Cyrus response 10 years on from the open letter offers a contradiction to O' Connor's thoughts. Cyrus suggests that her provocative choices were an assertion of her autonomy and a way to break free from the constraints placed upon her during her early career. Cyrus here is clarifying her agency and the power she had during these performances.

Figure 6 Miley Cyrus Tweet

Conclusion

The findings from this article indicate that Miley Cyrus demonstrated positive feminist themes within her on stage-performances. Cyrus' performances challenge conventional gender norms and expectations. She brings into question traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity. As demonstrated by key insights from Queer theory, challenging societal expectations requires confronting and defying established norms. The research suggests that Cyrus has used her on stage performances to positively promote feminist themes. When considering the concept of power, Cyrus uses her body as a symbol of power within in the performances. This power represents itself as Cyrus's agency in that she controls how she performs when on stage. Moreover, when thinking of Rich and Butlers work Cyrus promotes gender fluidity and sexual liberation. Rich and Butler both argue that

gender and sexuality have been socially constructed over time to create traditional expectations of men and women. Cyrus's performances can be interpreted as a direct challenge to conventional gender norms. She dresses, dances, and interacts with her dancers on her own terms, demonstrating her commitment to breaking down the boundaries between gender and sexuality. Through her actions, Cyrus advocates for a more inclusive society.

All five performances demonstrated ideas that promote the acceptance of nontraditional ideas of gender and gender roles. This article suggests that the sexual nature of Miley Cyrus's on-stage performances was her attempt to break down the binary mould society put her in and her attempt to reclaim her authority. By having the agency over her performances, she also had the ability to breakdown traditional societal expectations. Overall, this article can conclude that when using Queer theory to assess Miley Cyrus on stages performances, there is positive feminist representation, promoting non-traditional ideas surrounding gender and sexuality. This allows for feminist ideas to be brought to a larger audience. This type of representation is vital to challenging binary traditions and create a more inclusive society. The media and society were intent on judging Cyrus for her antics but really, they should have been celebrating it as it was Cyrus's way of saying no to the standards society holds on women. She uses her on stage performances to include themes of agency, visibility and challenges societal expectations, these are all themes that can allow for positive feminist representation.

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