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Ellie McMahon. Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

Joseph Kalelo-Phiri. Opposed by Men and Rejected by Women: The Dilemma of Male Gender Equality Activists in Malawi

Clair Butler. Indigenous Australian Women: Towards a Womanist Perspective

Eimear Savage. Exploring Young Women's Attitudes towards the Feminist Movement and Popular Music Artists' Claims to Feminism

Joanne Mangan. The Dev Girls: gender constructions and competing identities through self-representation on Instagram

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Carol Ballantine and Stacey Scriver

Editors

September, 2021

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Editorial

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The Possibilities of Feminism(s) in an Uncertain World

When we published the first edition of Dearcadh, in the summer of 2020, we were working through what seemed to be an exceptional, but short-lived, experience. Little did we imagine that one year on we would have continued to work through a full year of COVID-19 related restrictions. MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights students, like students throughout the world, graduated virtually in 2020. A new intake of MA students undertook their entire programme online. The world of 2020 and 2021 was certainly unlike anything we could have imagined when we first decided to create this journal.

For many of us, this is our first direct experience of a pandemic. For some of us, it is not, as we continue to live through the HIV pandemic/global epidemic and the 'pandemic' of violence against women. For all of us though, the changes wrought on society as governments attempt to curtail COVID transmission have created unexpected challenges to how we work, socialise and engage in academia and activism. We know that change can also bring opportunity. While our interactions across various spheres have been diminished or removed over the past 18 months, we have also found new means to re-create such interactions. As feminists, we may draw from the traditions of feminist utopian thinking (Johns, 2010) to see possibility in the breakdown of our traditional social spaces and interactions and imagine new worlds where old processes, dependent on patriarchal orders, may be replaced.

And yet, there is little evidence of this occurring presently. Despite some early hopes that wide-spread home-working might change the unequal gender dynamics of the private sphere, that recognition of women's unequal contributions to care might result in higher status and better pay for nurses, health care assistants and other professions allied to medicine and dominated by women, and that a crisis of this magnitude would create opportunities for policies and practices based on greater equality, none of this has materialised. As is so often the case, this emergency, as others before it, has instead led to the reinforcement of gender inequality across a number of indicators. Rather than a more gender equal world, we instead see higher rates of domestic violence, an increase in the already unequally high contributions to caring work by women, and a failure to advance gender equality in policies (Duvvury, et.al. 2021)

COVID alone, however, cannot be blamed for all of these failures. Across the globe there have been advances made by misogynist and racist ideologies that threaten to regress women's rights – a trend that began long before the first case of COVID-19 was detected. The desire to return to mythical 'origins' most commonly associated with ethno or religious nationalism, is now present across both the left and right political spectrum (see for instance Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). Attacks on the concept of 'gender ideology' seek to narrow the possibilities of progress towards equality, targeting women and trans people in particular (Correa 2017). Feminisms themselves, never a single coherent viewpoint, have struggled to find sufficient common ground to counter such challenges and have at times fallen into opposing ideological camps that do nothing to advance women's - all women's - position.

The conjuncture presents particular challenges - both methodological and ideological - to new and early career researchers. Covid-related restrictions – especially restrictive and long-lasting in Ireland through 2020 – drove students to digital research methods and removed the scope for fieldwork. This demanded levels of adaptability and creativity among students and presented particular challenges for qualitative research whose methods so often emphasise immersion in social settings. The authors in this volume found a variety of alternative responses to this challenge. Some (McMahon and Mangan) embrace the digital turn by researching online dynamics, an important site of study long before the pandemic. In a similar vein, Butler carried out close readings of literary and theoretical texts. Other articles (Savage, Kalelo-Phiri) present research that might have been conducted differently were it not for the restrictions associated with the pandemic. Instead of face to face interviews or immersions, these authors fell back on online data collection, to great benefit. As the nature of qualitative research changes with the passing of the first phase of the pandemic, these experiences will prove formative to new types of research.

In spite of, or indeed possibly because of, the uncertainties that cloud almost every aspect of life right now, students have continued to learn, researchers continue to research and a new cohort of graduates found the time and mental energy to produce the articles that feature in this second edition of Dearcadh: Graduate journal of Gender, Globalisation and Rights. Given these times, it is of no surprise that what unites these disparate articles is their shared desire to deepen their understanding of feminism and to explore its possibilities in an unequal world.

Articles in this edition engage with the meaning of feminism and the stigma that continues to surround gender equality activism and identity (Butler, Savage, Kalelo-Phiri), and investigate the role of technology, both in creating new identities and in facilitating gender-based violence (McMahon and Mangan). In these articles we see that the trajectory of gender equality is not straightforward or unidirectional with innovations and progress encountering or creating new challenges for achieving gender equality.

Grappling with the challenges of gender inequality in the 21st century, the changing face of feminism is one consistent theme. Both Savage and Mangan engage with post-feminism as a lens for understanding contemporary womanhood, specifically among young university-going women in NUI Galway (Savage) and self-labelled Dev_Girls, young women working in software technology (Mangan). Drawing on the work of Rosalind Gill, both authors reflect on the paradoxes of the struggle for gender equality in late capitalist liberal democracies. Savage explores the attitudes of young women to pop music and feminism, and the connections between these topics. Her anonymous survey revealed that whilst some respondents believed their music choices influenced their feminist beliefs, there is no clear correlation between

feminism and popular music. Savage shows how, via popular culture and pop music, post-feminist sensibilities simultaneously render feminism more acceptable to young women, and cheapen or commodify the work of feminism. Savage's research participants displayed a degree of awareness of these contradictions, and often demonstrated a nuanced engagement with both popular culture and political change.

Mangan's research with the 'Dev_Girls' addresses the competing identities faced by women working in the male dominated technology industry by analysing the role of Instagram in negotiating the self-representation of women as heteronormatively feminine, how this interacts with their identifies as software coders, and how this intersection can be challenged. In her explorations of the contradictions of 21st century feminisms, Mangan finds that postfeminist sensibilities promote the visibility of gender equality struggles in the tech sector, but paradoxically ultimately constrain the field of possibilities for the Dev_Girls, limiting them to engage with heteronormative femininity underpinned by neoliberal and post-feminist views. Contrary to Savage, Mangan's conclusions are pessimistic: while the Dev_Girls space on Instagram provides some limited scope for self-representation and even empowerment, it seems to actively restrict the possibility of wider-reaching transformation.

Clair Butler brings an important historic and literary perspective to the explorations in this issue of divisions and debates in feminism. In her article Indigenous Australian Women: Towards a Womanist Perspective, Butler recounts the problems of white anthropological appropriation of Indigenous Australian women's writing, and explores standpoint feminism from a variety of perspectives. Butler investigates the relationship between Dianne Bell's paradigms of 'Man Equals Culture', 'An Anthropology of Women', and 'Towards a Feminist Perspective' and the historical representation of Indigenous Australian women. Whilst Bell's paradigms provide a historical depiction of life for Indigenous Australian women in the 1980's through written accounts by Alice Nannup, and Rita and Jackie Huggins, Butler argues for the reinterpretation of these accounts drawing on Alice Walker's influential concept of womanism. She concludes that a womanist perspective differs from both mainstream and feminist perspectives by giving greater authorship to the individual.

The question of how to engage with a divided and sometimes divisive feminist movement also concerns Joseph Kalelo-Phiri's research paper on male gender equality activists. The title of the article captures the contradictions that frequently beset feminist activism: Kalelo-Phiri's male activists find themselves 'Opposed by men and rejected by women'. This article explores barriers to male involvement in feminist activist movements in order to further understand men's limited engagement, including the persistence of hegemonic and inflexible masculinities in Malawi, legitimised by a rigid understanding of patriarchy and gender equality. Using a qualitative research method, Kalelo-Phiri attributes the limited male participation in GEA to a desire to retain a privileged status in society, a lack of trust on behalf of female activists, and the sharp contrast between hegemonic masculinity and the qualities inherent to being a gender equality activist.

Like Kalelo-Phiri, Ellie McMahon's research into Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland engages with the pressing current challenges for feminist activists. McMahon's article explores the uses of digital technology as a tool perpetuating and facilitating intimate partner abuse against young women in Ireland. Drawing on a survey conducted by Ipsos Mori for the National Women's Council of Ireland, McMahon reports that 49% of women

surveyed who had experienced intimate relationship abuse experienced the abuse digitally. By exploring the multifaceted dynamics associated between abuse and digital platforms, the author illustrates the distinct issues related to this form of abuse which predominantly centre around a lack of accountability on behalf of the perpetrators, partnered with an unwillingness for victims to come forward due to stigma and assumptions that they will not be taken seriously. Activism, McMahon concludes, needs to turn towards legal protection regarding image-based abuse in Ireland, within the larger context of education and awareness-raising.

This collection of articles shows diverse authors making use of the tools of feminism to confront the extraordinary challenges of our time – and struggling to refit those tools for purpose. At a time when feminist ideas and methods are urgently needed, the broad collection of movements that fit under the title of feminism present their own difficulties. As our authors highlight, stigma affects people for acting in feminist ways or associating themselves with feminist positions; while within feminism, bitter disputes continue to rage, wave after wave. Disputes explored in this volume include the role of men in activism; the impact of white supremacy and racism; and ways of accommodating capitalism without being co-opted by it. Meanwhile, important work needs to be done, and in spite of the previously unimaginable barriers imposed by the pandemic, these authors have produced valuable research that provides new questions, priorities and directions.

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Too Into You: Digital Intimate Relationship Abuse Against Young Women in Ireland

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Abstract *Background: A* large proportion of young people's lives now takes place online where they pursue community, creativity and self-expression. However, as young people's intimate relationships move to the digital sphere, digital technology risks becoming a tool of abuse.
*Methods: A*n online survey conducted with 500 young Irish women and men aged 18 to 25 years old and four qualitative focus groups with young Irish women and men with varying levels of experience with intimate relationship abuse.
Results: 49% of young women aged 18 to 25 years old who had experienced intimate relationship abuse experienced the abuse digitally. The most common form of digital intimate relationship abuse experienced was harassment by phone, text, email or private message. Young women perceived digital technology to be a key tool of abuse in intimate relationships. It is seen as easy to perpetrate but difficult to address and seek help for because of 'internalised stigma' and the perception that such abuse is not taken seriously within society.
Discussion: Further in-depth research is needed to gauge the prevalence and nature of intimate relationship abuse perpetrated digitally. Although criminal legal protections have improved in Ireland in recent years, civil remedies are now needed particularly in relation to image-based sexual abuse. Education and awareness-raising that comprehensively reflects young people's lived experiences in terms of sex, relationships and technology are needed. These must be firmly rooted within the overall context of the gender (in)equalities that are part of young people's lives in and outside of the home.

Keywords: intimate relationship abuse, young women, digital abuse, online abuse, image-based sexual abuse

Introduction

Digital abuse in an intimate relationship can be defined as 'a pattern of behaviors that control, pressure, or threaten a dating partner using a cell phone or the Internet' (Reed et al, 2016). It is important to note and recognise that digital abuse is not in itself a form of abuse, but instead a tool that perpetrators may use to abuse their current or former partners or coercively control them. Abuse perpetrated in this way can have wide-ranging and devastating effects on victim-survivors, not least because digital abuse can seem inescapable and all-encompassing as young people's lives become ever more entwined with digital devices and the online world (Women's Aid, 2020). Digital intimate relationship abuse is also known as Digital Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse (DIPVA) (Hellevik, 2017; Hellevik, 2019), Digital Dating Abuse (DDA) (Hinduja and Patchin, 2020; Reed et al, 2016) and Cyber Dating Abuse (CDA) (Ouytsel et al, 2020). The term digital intimate relationship abuse is used in this study as the qualitative research findings showed some evidence indicating that the word 'dating' was not used in the context of young people's intimate relationships in Ireland.

Ouytsel et al, note that 'just as with other forms of bullying, dating violence is no longer limited to physical spaces' (2020, p.5157). More and more of young people's lives are moving into the digital sphere as they use the internet to find community, pursue passions and to connect with peers. Hinduja and Patchin note that 'much of adolescent development now takes place online, allowing youth to create, explore, produce, and define their identities and relationships through texting, social media interaction, multiplayer gaming, and related forms of connectivity' (2020, p.2). This has inevitably had an effect on young people's intimate relationships as 'the establishment, maintenance and/or termination phases of their intimate relationships also play out in the digital arena' (Lenhart cited by Hellevik, 2017, p. 193) and it is now recognised that digital media is a context wherein significantly harmful behaviours within an intimate relationship can take place (Reed et al, 2016).

Although there is a deficit in data related to digital intimate relationship abuse carried out in Ireland, there is some international data. A survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) found that 19% of Irish women aged 18 to 29 years old had experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15 with 11% having experienced cyberstalking since the age of 15. Another U.S. study found that nearly half of female high school students who reported experiencing sexual or physical abuse by a dating partner had also been bullied electronically (Vagi et al, 2015). In the U.K., one study found that 38% of the young people supported by Young People's Violence Advisors (YPVAs) or other specialist practitioners were identified as at risk of experiencing online intimate partner abuse. It was found that 96% of those experiencing or at risk of experiencing online abuse were female (SafeLives, 2015). Other research suggests young women are at a higher risk of intimate relationship abuse than young men. For example, in a systematic review of 30 quantitative studies based on associated factors related to 'digital intimate partner violence and abuse among youth' it was established that the majority of the studies in the review found that women were more likely to be victims of DIPVA [digital intimate partner violence among youth] (Hellevik, 2017). Other research also shows that

'digital media plays a central role in the victimization' of young women in abusive intimate relationships (Øverlien et al, 2020). This study aims to fill the gap in relation to Irish and European research on digital intimate relationship abuse perpetrated against young women.

Methodology and Methods

This article is based on research conducted by Red C Research and Marketing in conjunction with Women's Aid in Ireland. The raw data sets were reexamined within the context of this article. A mixed-methods approach was used in the form of an online survey and a number of focus groups. The original research that this article is based on examines all forms of intimate relationship abuse perpetrated against both men and women. The aim of the research was to gauge how young men and women perceived intimate relationship abuse, whether they had personally experienced it, knew someone who had experienced it, or had not experienced it at all. However, this article narrows the scope and offers a more in-depth analysis of the findings related to young women and digital intimate relationship abuse.

The rationale for this specific focus is based on three key factors: Firstly, the number of young women experiencing digital intimate relationship abuse was found to be significant in the original research and a more acute analysis of the findings was found to be warranted due to the gap in data related to the topic in Ireland but also within Europe. Secondly, although the results shown here are weighted, the final sample size for men is too low to make any accurate comparisons between young men and women's experiences, or to go into any great depth in relation to the experiences of young men and digital intimate relationship abuse. This is due to a small number of young men who said they had been subjected to intimate relationship abuse. The focus groups were mostly held with young women, with just one out of four focus groups conducted with men, and so the data in relation to young women is more rich both quantitatively and qualitatively. Lastly, focusing on abuse that is perpetrated digitally is timely as significant changes in the legal landscape in relation to harmful and offensive digital communications and image-based sexual abuse are now taking place in Ireland.

Quantitative Methods

Five-hundred 18 to 25-year-olds living in Ireland took the online survey from the 8th to the 15th of September 2020. The survey questions were designed collaboratively with senior staff at Women's Aid in order to draw on the organisation's decades of frontline experience working with victim-survivors of intimate relationship abuse. The data collected was then weighted across gender, region and social class to ensure a nationally representative sample based on the latest projections from the Central Statistics Office. The online survey was conducted through Red C Research and Marketing and was in no way visibly attached to Women's Aid. Survey respondents could answer anonymously or they could opt to include their contact details upon completion of the survey if they wanted to take part in the focus groups. The online survey consisted of 15 questions in total. Two questions were related to online abuse or abuse using digital technology. Table 1 below outlines the series of questions participants were led through if they said they had personally experienced digital intimate relationship abuse. See appendix 1 for background information provided to those who participated in the survey.

Question	Choice of Answers
Q.3a Did online/abuse using digital technology form part of the abuse that you experienced?	1. Yes 2. No 3. I don't know
Q.4a Which, if any, of the following describe the specific nature of online/abuse using digital technology you experienced?	1. Monitoring/stalking through online platforms 2. Harassment by phone/text/email/private message 3. Demanding access to passwords (e.g. phone, social media) 4. Hacking social media accounts and posting messages/materials 5. Taking images/videos without permission 6. Threats to share sexually explicit/intimate photos/videos 7. Actual sharing of explicit/intimate photos/videos without permission 8. GPS Tracking

Table 1. survey questions related to digital intimate relationship abuse

Qualitative Methods

The preliminary quantitative findings were then used as a basis for the focus groups. Also conducted by Red C Research and Marketing, the focus groups were recruited through the online survey and through the Red C Recruiter Network. Four separate focus groups were held: one with women who had experienced intimate relationship abuse personally, one with women who knew someone who had experienced intimate relationship abuse, one with women who had no experience of intimate relationship abuse either personally or through someone else and one with men, half of whom knew someone who had experienced intimate relationship abuse and half of whom did not know anyone or have any personal experience of the issue. The focus groups were also divided across class divisions. Table 2 below shows the breakdown of the focus groups.

Group	Gender	Age	Class Segmentation	Experience	Date
1	Female	18 - 25	ABC1	Knew someone who experienced intimate relationship abuse	13.10.20
2	Female	18 - 25	C1C2	Personally experienced intimate relationship abuse	14.10.20
3	Female	18 - 25	DE	No experience with intimate relationship abuse	14.10.20
4	Male	18 - 25	BC1C2	Half knew someone who had experienced intimate relationship abuse, half had no experience with intimate relationship abuse	15.10.20

Table 2. Description of focus groups

As with the survey, all participants were 18 to 25 years old and living in Ireland. The aim of the focus groups was based on four key themes: describing the kind of abuse that happens in intimate relationships, discussing intimate relationship abuse amongst young people, disclosure in relation to intimate relationship abuse, and a discussion around what drives intimate relationship abuse and what the barriers are to seeking help. The focus groups were conducted through Zoom and were facilitated by a member of the Red C Research and Marketing Team. All participants' cameras were turned off and they were given a pseudonym to protect their identity. See Appendix 2 for the discussion guide on digital intimate relationship abuse.

All research participants were provided with contact information for domestic violence support organisations for men and women after they had participated in the research.

Results

Quantitative Findings

If participants said that they had personally experienced intimate relationship abuse, they were then asked a series of questions related to that abuse. Table 3 below shows the results related to digital abuse. The base for this data set is ‘all personally experiencing abuse’. The data shows that 49% of women had experienced intimate relationship abuse online or using digital technology.

	Q1. Personally Abused Woman	Q5a. Relationship to abuser
	Yes - female	Female abused by partner
Unweighted Base	82	67
Yes	48%	49%
No	42%	39%
Prefer not to say	-	-
Don't know	10%	12%

Table 3. Findings for Q3a. Did online/abuse using digital technology form part of the abuse you/the person you know experienced?

In Question 4a. participants were asked to choose from a list to describe the nature of the online abuse using digital technology they had been subjected to by their partner. Table 2 shows the results of this question. The findings show that harassment by phone, text, email, and private message was most common with 47% of women having experienced this. Although a good deal fewer women had experienced this, many women also had their partners demand their passwords to their phone or social media accounts (25%). A significant number of women said they were monitored/stalked using online platforms (22%). A number of women also experienced image-based sexual abuse: 20% had images or videos taken without their permission, 15% said that their partner threatened to share sexually explicit or intimate images or videos of them without their permission and 17% actually had explicit or intimate images or videos shared with others without their permission. Other women had their social media accounts hacked into with messages or other materials posted by their partner (8%), 11% were tracked using GPS and 3% had spy software installed onto their digital devices.

	Female abused by male partner
Base	66
Harassment by phone/text/email/private messages	47%
Demanding access to passwords (e.g. phone, social media)	25%
Monitoring/stalking through online platforms	22%
Taking images/videos without permission	20%
Threats to share sexually explicit/intimate photos/videos	15%
Hacking social media accounts and posting messages/materials	8%
GPS tracking	11%
Actual sharing of explicit/intimate photos/videos without permission	17%
Using Spyware software	3%

Table 4. Findings for Q4a. Which, if any, of the following describe the specific nature of the online/abuse using digital technology that you experienced

Qualitative Findings

A key tool of abuse

Online abuse and abuse using digital technology was recognised by focus group participants as an effective and easy way to carry out intimate relationship abuse. However, it was described as a method of intimate relationship abuse that is difficult to escape and to address by seeking assistance and support in relation to the abuse. Intimate relationship abuse that occurs online or through the use of digital technology was cited as more commonly experienced and perpetrated by younger people in comparison by older people. Digital abuse was also noted as a particularly effective way of inflicting psychological or emotional abuse on a partner.

A Form of Abuse with No Reprieve

The 'always on' nature of digital technology and the internet was seen as particularly difficult as it gives victim-survivors less chance to escape the abuse as they may always be contactable even if they are not physically with their abusive partner. Creating fake accounts was seen as something that's very straightforward, easy to do and this gives a lot more opportunity for digital

abuse. Young women described this kind of abuse as 'constant', 'draining' and 'exhausting'. One young woman with firsthand experience of intimate relationship abuse using digital technology said that:

> *It can be particularly draining. You're always expected to be reachable, and if not you are doing something wrong.*

The Direct Messaging Function

When asked about the kind of platforms where digital abuse takes place, platforms with a direct messaging function were seen as the most likely platforms for this to happen. This includes Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and Whatsapp. The application TikTok was seen as more popular with those under 18 rather than the 18 to 25-year-old cohort that the focus groups are based on. The application Snapchat, however, was seen as a platform that could be particularly dangerous for those at risk of intimate relationship abuse. It's common, for example, for screenshots to be taken of nude images without the person's consent. It can also be difficult to capture evidence of the abuse, because of the way the app works. Snapchat 'stories' only last for 24 hours and then they disappear. The young women in the focus groups saw all-men Whatsapp groups as 'breeding grounds' for 'toxic', sexist behaviours.

Difficult to Address

Participants discussed that although having a diminished online presence would lessen the chances of experiencing intimate relationship abuse digitally, they did not see this as a viable option for young people in 2020. One young woman noted the pressure that can come from others to leave social media platforms if they are experiencing abuse:

> *I think people can be more dismissive of it too, why don't you just get off that platform?*

There was a feeling among participants that digital abuse is not something that is taken seriously culturally or within the legal system and many said that they would be reluctant to seek help if they experienced abuse in this way. One young woman noted that the 'internalised stigma' is higher when it comes to digital intimate relationship abuse and that this is a barrier to seeking help when it does occur. Another young woman noted that she felt that this kind of abuse just wasn't taken seriously.

Discussion

Prevalence

This research shows that of the young women in Ireland aged 18 to 25 years old surveyed who experienced intimate relationship abuse, just under half had experienced this abuse digitally. Those who had experienced abuse in this way found it particularly difficult to cope with, as it was difficult to escape from and perceived as risky to speak out about and seek help for, as they felt that there was a high chance that intimate relationship abuse using digital technology would not be taken seriously by those around them. However, the main aim of the research was to

examine intimate relationship abuse against young women in Ireland in all its forms rather than just digital abuse. Further research is urgently needed that gives in depth insight and analysis of the prevalence, nature and impact of digital intimate abuse. Research on this phenomenon is only in its infancy (Hinduja and Patchin, 2020, Hellevik, 2017) and 'as the majority of research on DIPVA is carried out in the U.S., an increased focus on this issue in European research is critical for the accurate identification of potential aspects unique to the European context' (Hellevik, 2017). Research on image-based sexual abuse in particular is needed to assess the specific patterns, harms and impacts related to this abuse in an Irish context. McGlynn et al note that research among groups such as 'minoritised, indigenous, migrant and refugee peoples, gender and sexuality diverse peoples, sex workers, and those with a disability, is vital to explore intersectional experiences of image-based sexual abuse in more detail' (2020, p.8). Research that targets young women under the age of 18 is also needed in relation to this tool of abuse. Research conducted by Hellevik (2019) on teenagers' personal accounts of experiences with DIPVA showed that the teenagers aged 15 to 18 years old who had experienced this form of abuse were subjected to harassment, control, monitoring and sexual coercion. The research shows that the abuse was multifaceted and had a severe impact on the teenagers' lives. Research into the pattern between intimate relationship abuse and digital intimate relationship abuse is also needed and it is such in depth analysis and examination of this phenomenon that should guide all prevention and protection strategies (Reed et al, 2017).

Protection

The young women that took part in the focus group section of this research felt that legal protection was lacking when it came to intimate relationship abuse perpetrated digitally and that abuse perpetrated this way would not be taken seriously. The Domestic Violence Act 2018 represented some positive steps towards protecting young women from digital intimate relationship abuse. It included, for example, abusive behaviours conducted by electronic means. When this research was conducted, however, the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 had not yet been enacted. On the 9th of February 2021, this Act commenced creating three new offences, two related to image-based sexual abuse and one related to 'grossly offensive communications'. The Act was widely welcomed, particularly by victim-survivors, their families and organisations supporting those affected by digital intimate relationship abuse. The Act introduces a number of positive steps in relation to digital intimate relationship abuse. It is an aggravating factor, for example, to be or have been in an intimate relationship with the victim-survivor. It is also a stand-alone offence to threaten to distribute intimate images - even if the images are not actually shared - and altered images, including those that have been Photoshopped, are included in offences related to image-based sexual abuse.

However, gaps in legislation remain, particularly in relation to image-based sexual abuse. Image-based sexual abuse can have significantly devastating and long-lasting effects on victim-survivors as images can be distributed widely at a rapid pace after the image has been initially uploaded. Therefore, civil remedies to have images removed are urgently needed and this should be made possible through the establishment of the Online Safety Commissioner, as

proposed in the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill 2019. The Bill should provide for fast and cost-free civil legal remedies (such as take-down orders) to have distressing and abusive images removed from online platforms quickly (Women's Aid, 2020). Jurisdictions with such remedies in place should be used as best practice examples. In Australia, for example, victim-survivors can report digital abuse to the eSafety Commissioner and they will provide assistance to have image-based abuse removed. The Australian eSafety Commissioner has a number of roles that include education and guidance, research and responding to complaints about illegal and harmful content (*eSafety Commissioner*, 2021).

Apps noted by research participants with direct messaging functions such as Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp, where intimate relationship abuse is seen as particularly easy to carry out, need to be sufficiently regulated and held to account in terms of the abusive behaviours that their product has become a vehicle for. Furthermore, the research participants show that they fear being asked why they don't remove themselves from such platforms if they are experiencing abuse. It should be recognised and accepted that it is not a viable solution, nor is it just, to ask young women to limit their use of or step away from social media. So much of young people's lives are now conducted on these apps and cultural attitudes that support such solutions endorse abuse perpetrated in this way and invalidate young women's experience of such abuse. Many victim-survivors do, however, shut down their accounts as a result of digital intimate relationship abuse and this can further solidify the isolation that such abuse engenders (McGlynn et al, 2020).

Prevention: education and awareness-raising

The research findings show that despite the high level of young women experiencing intimate relationship abuse digitally, the victim-survivors themselves find it difficult to recognise these abusive behaviours and to seek help because of the 'internalised stigma' that is often present and the perception that this kind of abuse is not taken seriously within society at large. Legal remedies (both criminal and civil) are an important tool, but they will never sufficiently protect women and girls from the myriad of abuse and harassment happening online and they should never be the sole strategy for achieving such protection. However, fortunately the law is not the only resource available; education and prevention campaigns are needed that highlight and address the gendered nature of such abuse. Ultimately, 'what is needed is education programmes that explore intimate relationships and the increasing use of technology, value sexual expression and autonomy, and emphasise and distinguish between consent and coercion' (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017, p. 48).

Sex and relationships education that accurately reflects young people's lives and includes clear-cut insights into the ever-changing digital terrain where young people conduct many aspects of their intimate relationships is needed. Hellevik notes that 'for policy-makers, a key component in the implementation of prevention and intervention strategies, should be a holistic perspective on young people's intimate relationships, sexuality and online proficiency, as these factors are 'interrelated' and 'as violence and abuse is more than specific acts and behaviours, a broader understanding on young people's intimacy and sexuality - beyond the mere mechanical

aspects of sexual intercourse - should form the basis for sexual education in schools and elsewhere' (2017, p.210).

Such educational initiatives should also be firmly situated within the overarching context of gender (in)equality, as young people experience it including gender roles and norms, beauty standards and body shaming and the use of pornography. All curriculums should include information and reflection on the intrinsic links between digital intimate relationship abuse and other causes and consequences of gender (in)equality such as unpaid care work, the gender pay gap and the underrepresentation of women and feminist ideologies in politics and other areas of leadership. This is key in order to challenge rigid gender roles and stereotypes as well as abusive behaviours that may be upheld in young people's homes. Research by Ouytsel et al, for example, conducted with secondary school students who were in romantic relationships showed that when they observed obtrusive and controlling behaviours by their fathers this was 'significantly and positively related to adolescents' perpetration of digital monitoring behaviours'. They note that prevention efforts are needed that focus on reducing the impact of gender stereotypical attitudes and the effect that witnessing controlling behaviours within the family has on the perpetration of cyber dating abuse (2020, p.5157 - 5158). In order to reduce the rate of digital intimate relationship abuse, prevention strategies are needed that target young people's attitudes towards gender roles, their use of digital media and understanding of sexuality and their ideas surrounding boundaries and what it means to be in a healthy intimate relationship (Hellevik, 2017, p.210).

Conclusion

This research shows that of the young women who have experienced intimate relationship abuse, just under half had experienced this abuse digitally. The majority experienced the abuse in the form of harassment by phone, text, email or private message, however, many also had their account passwords demanded from them and some experienced image-based sexual abuse and tracking and monitoring using spyware and GPS. Research participants found abuse perpetrated in this way to be particularly draining due to the 'always on' nature of digital life and the pressure to be reachable at all times. For these reasons it is also perceived to be difficult to escape from. The young women who participated in the research felt that this abuse was not taken seriously in society at large but also within the legal system and an 'internalised stigma' was expressed that presented as a barrier to seeking help in relation to the abuse. Further research is needed in this area to discover the prevalence and nature of intimate relationship abuse perpetrated digitally and to establish and implement appropriate prevention and protection strategies. The research should go beyond the scope of this study to include adolescents below the age of 18, it should examine the intersectionalities at play and should thoroughly investigate the harms and impacts of such abuse as well as the patterns between digital intimate relationship abuse and in-person abuse. Civil legal remedies are needed to protect young women, particularly in relation to image-based sexual abuse and education and awareness-raising that reflects the lived realities of young people's romantic, sexual and digital lives must play a key role in preventing abuse that is perpetrated in this way.

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Appendix 1. Background information provided to participants

***Topic**:* the role of online/digital technology abuse in intimate relationships.

Time allotted: 10 Minutes

Aim: to capture the broad experience of intimate relationship abuse using digital technology rather than collecting any specific accounts of such abuse.

Background

- Introduction to the research – why the work is carried out – to understand how to encourage those impacted to seek help.
- Explain format of groups – everybody except moderator has camera off, people are invited not to sign in with their real name, this is all to protect your identity. We have clients listening into the groups but they are not able to communicate with you. The group is recorded but this recording can only be used to generate the report and will be deleted by mid Nov.
- Explain recruitment – majority people recruited following a quantitative survey conducted and invited based on varying levels of experience on the subject. When talking about experience of intimate partner abuse please draw on any experiences you have but without giving direct examples to protect your own and others privacy. If,

following the group, you would like to talk, or feel you need support we will provide a number for this purpose.

Questions

1. Some people experience intimate relationship abuse online or through digital technology.

    b. What platforms do you think are most open to this kind of abuse and why?

    c. Which platforms are less open to such abuse and why?

    d. Is there any one specific platform where this kind of abuse is more likely to occur?

    e. Moderator to ask specifically about Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, TikTok and pornography websites.

2. How does intimate relationship abuse perpetrated online or using digital technology differ from intimate relationship abuse perpetrated in other ways?

    a. Are there ways in which such abuse is easier or more difficult to manage?

3. Our national survey found that 3 in 5 of those experiencing intimate relationship abuse, experienced the abuse online or using digital technology.

    a. Does that figure reflect the level of intimate relationship abuse experienced online or using digital technology that you would have perceived to have been present?

    b. What do you think would help someone who was experiencing this kind of abuse?

Thank you for your time

Support number for Women's Aid – 1800 341 900 also www.womensaid.ie for Instant Messaging Support Service

Support number for Men's Development Network – 1800 816 588

Appendix 2. Discussion guide section on digital intimate relationship abuse

The role of online/digital technology abuse? *10 min*

When talking about online/digital technology abuse we would like to capture the broad experience of this versus any specific account.

- Some people experiencing dating abuse/intimate partner abuse experience this online/digital technology.
    - What platforms do you think are most open to this kind of abuse? Why?
    - What are less open to it? Why?
    - Is there any one specific platform that is used more?
    - Moderator to probe on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, porn sites, WhatsApp, TikTok
- How does this means of abuse compare with others in your opinion? Why?
    - Are there ways in which it is harder or easier to manage?
- Our national survey found 3 in 5 of those experiencing abuse experienced online abuse.
    - Does this sound high/low to you?
    - What do you think would help someone having this experience?

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Opposed by men and rejected by women: the dilemma of male gender equality activists in Malawi

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Abstract Gender Equality Activism (GEA) encapsulates actions and strategies taken by people or groups to promote the equality of rights and opportunities between men and women (Stake, 2007). Little is known about men's engagement with GEA, particularly in Malawi, a country which promotes men's participation. Against this background, this paper discusses the motivations and barriers to men's participation in GEA in the Southern African country. The research is drawn from a qualitative study that broadly investigated men's experiences in GEA. Four men and three women, who are all gender equality activists, participated in this study. The findings do not only contribute to the limited knowledge on men's participation in GEA, but also expands the scope of application for the masculinity theories that underpin the study.

Key words: Gender Equality, Gender Equality Activism, Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinities, Patriarchal Dividend

Introduction

To attain gender equality, substantive actions are required, one of which is Gender Equality Activism (GEA). GEA consists of the strategies and initiatives by individuals or groups to bring about political or social change with a view to attain equality of rights and opportunities between women and men (Chattopadhay, 2004; Stake, 2007; Gilbertson, 2018; Connell, 2005). For a long time, GEA initiatives have been associated with women such that gender equality, which is GEA's ultimate outcome, has been conflated with women (Reeves & Baden, 2000;

Barker, 2000; Chattopadhay, 2004). On the other hand, men's participation in GEA has been observed to be low partly because men's behaviors and attitudes, which are underpinned by patriarchy, are widely problematized as a stumbling block to gender equality (Cornwall & White, 2000; Kimmel, 2005, Stake, 2007; Casey & Smith, 2010; Conlin & Heesacker, 2018).

Recently, nuanced thinking is reshaping GEA as men's position is being redefined to consider them not as enemies but as partners whose advantaged status is an opportunity for the advancement of gender equality (Bojin, 2012). Against this background, this research investigates the influencing factors for men's participation in Gender Equality Activism, which is an understudied area in Malawi. The research was motivated by my personal experience as one of the few men who are involved in gender equality work in Malawi. In Malawi, women not only drive GEA initiatives and activities, but they are also the majority of participants, in comparison to men. The search for answers and evidence to understand the factors that influence the few men who participate in GEA is the reason this research was undertaken. To achieve this, a qualitative approach was pursued in which interviews with four male and three female Gender Equality Activists in Malawi were conducted.

Context

Malawi is a Southern African country with a population of 17,563,749 people comprising 8,521,460 males and 9,042,289 females (NSO, 2019). It is one of the countries with progressive legislation on gender equality (MoGCDSW, 2019). It is party to most of the key international and regional instruments on gender equality such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the SADC Gender and Development Protocol, among others. At country level, these instruments have been domesticated into laws and policies including the constitution, the gender equality act and the national gender policy, among other pieces of legislation. These laws and policies provide a conducive environment for gender equality and gender equality activism, although no law or policy exists that specifically encourages men to participate in Gender Equality Activism. Furthermore, the existence of these laws and policies has not substantially reduced gender inequalities, which are still deep and wide in Malawi. For instance, only 65.9% of women are literate compared to 71.6% of men, only 23.3% of women are in decision making positions, and 41% of women experience either physical or sexual violence in comparison to 3% of men in Malawi (NSO, 2019; MoGCDSW, 2019). Because of this, Malawi ranks low, on number 142 out of 162 countries on the Gender Inequality Index thus reflecting gender-based inequalities in areas of reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity (UNDP, 2020).

Literature Review: Gender, masculinity, and Gender Equality Activism

According to Connell, gender involves the configuration of power relations between men and women in the context of socio-cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 2003; Connell and Messerchmidt, 2005). Gender differs from sex in that the former describes the way

in which the social practice in terms of what men and women do is ordered, while the latter relates to the biological characteristics which define humans as female or male (Connell, 1995). Gender helps us in understanding the different ways in which femininity and masculinity are valued. For instance, femininity, which describes the social expectations about how women should behave (ibid), is less valued than masculinity. This is because the attributes like nurturance and empathy, which are attributed to femininity, are associated with weakness and subordination to masculinity (Flood & Pease, 2005).

Defining masculinity, Connell states that it is the configuration of gender practices associated with the position of men in a structure of gender relations (2003, 2005, and 2014). The construction of masculinity is influenced by patriarchy which socialises men to be considered superior and to dominate over women (Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013). The advantage and expectation of benefits that men have which serves to maintain an unequal gender order is called the patriarchal dividend (Flood & Pease, 2005; Connell, 2014). Worth noting is that although masculine ideals are institutionalized through different structures, these are not simply adopted by boys and men, who negotiate with, and often contest, these norms throughout their lives (Forde, 2014). This is why masculinity is diverse; its patterns differ from one culture to another and in every culture multiple forms of masculinity exist (Connell, 1995; 2005; 2008). This prompts the use of the plural form to emphasize the multiplicity of masculinities and how they can change over time.

Masculinities in the Malawian Context

Connell (1995) postulates that in any culture there is hegemonic masculinity, a dominant type of masculinity which is idealized. It represents the most currently honoured masculinity which occupies the position of centrality in a structure of gender relations and whose privileged position helps to stabilize the gender order, especially the subordination of women (Connell, 2014, p. 6). Although hegemonic masculinity legitimizes patriarchy, it is only enacted by a few men, and at times may not exist at all (Connell, 2003). In Western societies, a straight, heterosexual and middle-class white male with characteristics of toughness, aggression and dominance over women is the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerchmidt, 2005; Connell, 2008). These characteristics are also indicative of hegemonic masculinity in Malawi. In vernacular, *mwamuna* is a term that is used to describe the traits of an ideal man who is heterosexual, married and with a stable income, among other attributes (Hayes, 2013; Kapulula, 2015). M*wamuna* is tough, physically strong, aggressive, violent and does not easily give up (Kapulula, 2015; NCA, 2016). A local adage *mwamuna salira,* which literary means 'a man does not cry' is a standard measure of manliness in Malawian culture. These traits are instilled in men through socialization agents like initiation ceremonies (Hayes, 2013).

While hegemonic masculinity relates to cultural dominance, Connell argues that this is contrasted not only with femininity but also with how it relates to complicit, marginalized, and protest masculinities (1995, 2005). A gender hierarchy is thus created among men, in which particular groups inhabit positions of power and wealth, while others occupy a position of subordination (Forde, 2014). Elucidating complicity, Connell (1995) states that these are masculinities which are constructed in ways that 'realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy' (p.79). These are the forms of

masculinity which do not challenge hegemonic masculinity because they directly or indirectly benefit from the patriarchal dividend. On the other hand, marginalized masculinities exist in societies where race and class are the ordering features of social life (Connell, 1995). This is the type of masculinity that cannot conform or derive the benefits from hegemonic masculinity, and it is enacted by men from minority groups and lower socio-economic classes (Connell, 2014). These men are marginalized due to, among other things, lack of financial opportunities and institutionalized racism (Ibid). Although race and class are not so pronounced in Malawi, marginalized masculinity can be linked to social status such as low income, tribe, and conditions like disability and unemployment. Men who belong to these groups are marginalized because they are seen as not portraying the dominance that characterizes hegemony.

Furthermore, Connell identifies protest masculinity. This type of masculinity is enacted by marginalised men as they attempt to compensate for their subordinate status by defying hegemonic masculinity and constructing alternative forms of masculinity (Connell, 2000 in Forde, 2014). More complex than merely adhering to a stereotyped male role reworked in the context of poverty, protest masculinity can be accompanied by respect for women and egalitarian views about the sexes and affection for children, which are perceived as feminine attributes (Connell, 1995). Any claims to power central to hegemonic masculinity are nullified by socio-economic weakness. Some men also construct positive alternatives to the hegemonic model, such as those who repudiate masculine norms (Connell, 1995). In Malawi, men who participate in programmes like reproductive health, whereby they escort their wives to access maternal services and take part in caring for children, would be deemed to enact protest masculinity (Aarnio, et al., 2009). This is a means of challenging the traditional beliefs of 'true manhood', which are associated with violence and aggressive behaviours. The social construction of gender and masculinity as described above has implications for men's participation in GEA.

Gender Equality Activism

Gender Equality Activism, as previously defined, is carried out through different strategies. One of the strategies is 'Male Champions of Change'. This is a strategy that is used to engage influential male leaders to take action in promoting gender equality through the redefinition of men's roles (MCC, 2020; Nolan & Hornbrook, 2019). This strategy is similar to the UN Women championed movement 'HeForShe' which also engages various groups of influential men to advance gender equality (Chisiza, 2019). Another strategy is 'SASA'; a Ugandan initiative which engages communities, especially men, to challenge social norms that promote violence against women and HIV/AIDS (Raising Voices, 2020). GEA also includes campaigns like '16 days of Activism against Gender-based Violence', which are used to call for prevention and elimination of violence against women (Connell, 2005; United Nations, 2020). Despite their foreign origins, these strategies have also been adopted for use in GEA in Malawi (Chisiza, 2019; MoGCDSW, 2019, MenEngage, 2020)

Men's participation in Gender Equality Activism is essential, not only to the attainment of gender equality, but also for the lives of men, their families and communities in general. (Chanta & Gutmann, 2002, Conlin & Heesacker, 2018). According to Ruxton and van der Gaag (2013), countries with the highest levels of men's participation in GEA are also highest in the World

Economic Forum's gender gap index (ie, they rank highly because their gender gap is small), compared to those with low levels of men's involvement in gender equality. It is further stated that men can contribute towards the development of a more gender equitable society because their participation promotes a culture of respect for human rights which helps in building a society in which both men and women are treated equally, thus ensuring peaceful coexistence (Kaufman, 2003; Kimmel, 2005, Scambor, et al., 2014). Jalmert (2003) further promulgates that GEA helps men to realize their vulnerability to the hegemonic masculinity script which leads to negative outcomes such as contracting diseases, early deaths and high rates of suicide. Not only this, the awareness that comes with participation in GEA also helps men to adopt less violent behaviors because they understand the negative effects of toxic masculinities on their lives and those around them (Flood, 2011; Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013; Scambor, et al., 2014). GEA therefore helps men to develop positive relationships with women, thus reducing the risks and harm that come as a result of unhealthy relationships.

In spite of these benefits, men's participation in GEA is low and this is attributed to a number of factors and issues. In her study, Connell (2005) observes that men do not participate in GEA because of fear of losing the patriarchal dividend. This is on the basis that GEA activities challenge the existing patriarchal order which benefits men more than women. In Europe, Ruxton & van der Gaag (2013) found that men do not participate in GEA because of fear of reprisals from society as they are seen not to conform to the masculine ideals. Moreover, it is also stated that some men do not participate in GEA because of the names that such activities use in different contexts. In the United States for example, Kaufman (2003), found that GEA activities are conflated with feminism; a terminology which men are not comfortable with, stating that it is stigmatizing on their part.

Considering the contextual nature of masculinities and gender equality issues, evidence on men's participation in different contexts, especially in developing countries like Malawi, is critical. However, Connell (2014) and Gilbertson (2018) observe that such evidence is difficult to obtain from developing countries because fewer studies have been conducted. Much of what has been documented largely presents the experiences of men's participation in GEA from the Western perspective (Connell, 2014). Gilbertson (2018) states that:

> We therefore know little about how and why men in the Global South get involved in gender [equality activism], how they view gender equality, and the assumptions that underpin efforts to engage men and boys (pp.2-3).

For this reason, this study is imperative because of its contribution to the limited knowledge on men's participation in developing countries. The focus on Malawi is unique in so far as evidence is concerned, as no study of this sort has been conducted and men's participation in GEA is actively promoted in Malawi.

Methodology

In conducting this study, a qualitative approach was used. This method was preferred because of the space it provides to the researcher to share in the understandings and experiences of

others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives (Gill, et al., 2008). The research also used semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data on men's participation in GEA. The interviews helped in providing rich sources of data on how people account for their experiences (Stewart et al., 2008). In addition, the flexibility of the in-depth interviews allows for the discovery of information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought of as pertinent by the researcher (Gill, et al.,2008, p. 291). For this reason, gender experts who have valuable knowledge and experience on the subject were interviewed using an interview guide incorporating open ended questions focusing on the study.

Participants

Purposive sampling strategy, also known as judgmental sampling, was used to select seven participants comprising of four men and three women to take part in the study. The seven were Gender Experts working with government and non-governmental organizations in Malawi. Purposive sampling helped in ensuring that those with relevant knowledge and experience participated in the study. The participants' ages ranged from 32 to 59 years while their experience in GEA in Malawi spanned from 8 to 25 years. All the participants were holders of master's degrees as their highest qualification. The diversity in age and experience was particularly useful as it helped in gathering multiple perspectives on the subject under investigation.

Data Analysis

In order to make sense of the data that was collected through interviews, this study used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data which involves the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns or themes within data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi, et al., 2013). In this case, data from interviews which were audio recorded were transcribed verbatim. An analytical framework with codes and subcodes emerging from literature and data was developed to help in data analysis.

Findings

Motivations for men's participation in gender equality activism in Malawi

The findings of the study revealed that there is a plethora of factors that motivate men to participate in Gender Equality Activism. The male participants pointed out personal experiences of violence, as either witnesses or victims, as one of the reasons for their participation in GEA. One male respondent said that:

> I grew up in a family where I witnessed my mother being battered and abused by my father until she decided to live on her own. This affected me because I eventually ended up being raised by a single mother (IH).

Additionally, it was revealed in the study that some men also become Gender Equality Activists because they have girl children whom they do not want to live in a world where there is violence and inequalities. One male participant said that:

> 'When I understood what gender inequality does and because I have a girl child; I think about the kind of future that I am creating for her' (SI).

On the other hand, the study also revealed that some men participate in GEA because they were once victims of violence. It is when such men open up and receive support that they participate in GEA in order to inspire other male victims to come forward. One female respondent remarked that:

> These [men] say, if I suffered like this, how many men are also suffering outside there? I mean men who are suffering in silence who do not know that they have spaces where they can seek help (EK).

Furthermore, the study found that men also participate in GEA because they want to be different from the majority of men who do not support gender equality. The male respondents reported that they are motivated to become involved in GEA because they want to be part of the solution to ending gender inequalities instead of being among those who resist or promote inequalities. However, the female respondents observed that some men participate in GEA simply because gender issues are now trending in Malawi, and as such they do not want to be seen as those who are backward.

Barriers impeding men's participation in gender equality activism in Malawi

The study found a number of factors that prevent men from participating in Gender Equality Activism. Most of the male respondents stated that misconceptions about gender equality is one reason they are discouraged from participating in GEA. It was found that gender equality is considered a foreign concept, intended to disrupt the patriarchal system, hence taking away the rights and privileges of men. Furthermore, both male and female respondents reported that stereotypes towards men who are gender equality activists also act as a barrier to men's involvement in GEA. The male respondents revealed that because of their participation in GEA, they are called names like '*chili pa akazi' or wopepera'*, which imply that they are not man enough. A female respondent concurred and stated that:

> At times these men (Gender Equality Activists) are laughed at by their fellow men who I have heard asking: 'are these men foolish? How can they be doing these things for women? (EK)

Linked to the stereotypes, the study also found that another barrier to men's participation in GEA is the dilemma of male gender activists in Malawi as belonging to groups of neither men nor women. The respondents reported that male gender equality activists face problems from fellow men because they challenge the beliefs and norms that give them privilege as a group in society. On the other hand, respondents stated that the male activists are not trusted by female activists who think that men are intruding in their space or coming to take over a women's agenda. SI, one of the male respondents said:

> The female activists do not really trust us as partners who want to bring about meaningful change. They think we are not sincere and that we cannot positively contribute towards gender equality because we do not experience the problems that women experience (SI).

Discussion

Men and Gender Equality Activism in Malawi: Challenging or reinforcing hegemony?

The myriad of factors constituting men's motivations for participating in GEA reveal two main perspectives. Firstly, participation in GEA is considered by men as a way of challenging hegemony in the context of masculinity in Malawi. Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant type of masculinity that is idealized in every society and is influenced by patriarchal socialization (Connell, 1995). The social construction of hegemony idealises men's dominance over women and promotes violent and aggressive behaviours (Connell & Messerchmidt, 2005). Participation in GEA demands men to embody characteristics that challenge hegemonic masculine ideals. As the findings indicate, men who become gender equality activists are supposed to condemn violence against women, report when they experience violence, and demonstrate that they are caring, loving and family people. These attributes sharply contradict and challenge the traditional expectations of an ideal man who is aggressive, violent and tough (Connell, 1995). These new traits that men who become gender equality activists are expected to display are in line with the characteristics associated with subordinated masculinities, as well as some protest masculinities. In this regard, men's participation in GEA can be seen by male activists as a means of developing new forms of masculinity to challenge those that are hegemonic.

Secondly, the underlying assumptions behind the motivations for men's involvement in GEA can be seen as men's silent way of reinforcing hegemony. In this regard, gender equality activism is a means of retaining men's privilege while promoting the subordination of women. This is a manifestation of complicit masculinities as argued by Connell (1995) and Forde (2014). By participating in GEA, men benefit from the patriarchal dividend as they retain power and status to themselves. For instance, when men show their support for women or come out as former victims or perpetrators, they are glorified and celebrated; a scenario which contradicts women's involvement. Men are seen as heroes and are rewarded, while women are not celebrated to the same extent for their participation in gender equality activism. Therefore, GEA is but a means through which men retain power and privilege through the advancement of issues that relate to women's lives in which they are glorified while subordinating women. This agrees with Mwiine (2019) who noted that the dispensation of gender equality has not effectively challenged men's power and privilege.

Opposed by men and rejected by women: the dilemma of male gender equality activists in Malawi

From the foregoing discussion, the findings further indicate the dilemma that male gender equality activists are confronted with in Malawi. By enacting traits and characteristics that are contrary to the dominant traits, male gender equality activists are often emasculated by their fellow men for departing from the ideals and expectations of an ideal man. They are discriminated against by fellow men for associating themselves with women. Similar findings were also recorded in studies from other accounts, which echo the existing literature on the challenges that inhibit men's involvement in GEA (Funk, 2008; Casey & Smith, 2010; Conlin & Heesacker, 2018).

On the other hand, the findings also indicate that men who become involved in gender equality activism face particular challenges from female activists who are supposed to be their partners or allies in striving to achieve gender equality. Men who are involved in GEA are not trusted by women who despise them because they are not capable of understanding the challenges that

women face, and hence not considered fit to be promoters of gender equality. This echoes Kimmel's (2005) argument about men's involvement in gender equality issues in which he observed that hostility from women is one drawback that affects men. Bojin (2012) further asserts that men are objectified by women because they are perceived to be in need of 'transformation' in order to become gender equality activists. She goes on to argue that as subjects, women are the initiators, change makers and the driving force of gender equality. For this reason, the male respondents stated that to be trusted, they need to prove over a period of time that they are indeed genuinely passionate about gender equality. On their part, the female gender equality activists stated that men need to be vetted and monitored before they are recognized as activists for gender equality. According to the female respondents, this it to prevent men from taking over their space and advancing their own patriarchal agenda. Mwiine (2019) raises similar concerns as she argues that, without careful consideration, men's participation in GEA strips women of their agency and power.

Conclusion

Men's participation in Gender Equality Activism is important to the attainment of gender equality in Malawi. As such, an understanding of the motivations and barriers to men's involvement in GEA is key. The results of the research indicate that participation in GEA is used by some men as a means of challenging hegemony. This is reflected in the behaviors and characteristics that men who are involved in GEA are required to enact. Their solidarity with women, caring for children and openness to declare that they were once victims of abuse are traits which are not considered part of the hegemonic masculine order. For men who become gender equality activists, enacting these traits is a way of challenging the dominant masculinities through the introduction of new behaviors which echo elements of protest masculinities (Connell, 1995). On the other hand, GEA is also seen as a way of reinforcing hegemony and male dominance over women. GEA provides a means for some men to invade a space that is considered the preserve of women. It is in these spaces that men continue to be celebrated as heroes and champions for advancing gender equality of which they are equal beneficiaries as women. Therefore, women feel disempowered because through participation in GEA, men do not only retain privilege and power to themselves, but also continue to maintain dominance over women.

The findings also show that gender equality activism can be a source of tension and conflict among men and between men and women. Men who become involved in activism are emasculated and stereotyped by fellow men who associate gender equality with women. Amongst their fellow men, the male gender equality activists are also side-lined and belittled because their actions do not portray traits of real men. On the other hand, men who participate in GEA also face opposition and rejection from women. Instead of considering them as partners, they are not trusted and are not considered transformed enough to promote gender equality. Therefore, the male activists have to prove their sincerity and commitment to gender equality which is often doubted and questioned by women. This leaves men who participate in GEA in suspense as they neither belong to groups of men nor groups of women, hence they are isolated.

Recommendations

This research has delved into the motivations and barriers to men's participation in Gender Equality Activism in Malawi from the perspectives of male and female gender experts. The study findings point to a number of things that need to be done in order to ensure men's participation in Gender Equality Activism in Malawi. To address issues of isolation among men, there is need for spaces where men who are Gender Equality Activists can use as platforms for sharing experiences, mentorship and reflection. In addition, there is a need for nuanced conversations on gender equality among men and women in order to address the misconceptions on gender equality which the study revealed as one of the key gaps. This can also be addressed through awareness and sensitization on gender equality issues. Additionally, to address issues of mistrust on the genuineness of male gender equality activists' participation in GEA, there is need to establish mechanisms for testing and validating their commitment and passion to gender equality. This can be done through established forums such as Men For Gender Equality, as is the case in other countries.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Indigenous Australian Women: Towards a Womanist Perspective

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Abstract This article discusses the historical presentation of Indigenous Australian women as depicted through the 1980 paradigms of Euro-Australian feminist and anthropologist Dianne Belle. While Belle's paradigms, Man Equals Culture; An Anthropology of Women; and Towards a Feminist Perspective, provide a comprehensive history of written accounts of the lives of Indigenous Australian women, such accounts are always written by someone else; an onlooker or outsider. The accounts are mainly written by white anthropologists, both male and female, and are based on a white perception. In this article, I argue for the establishment of a fourth paradigm: Towards a Womanist Perspective; one which focuses on the life writings of Indigenous Australian women themselves. I support my argument through an in-depth study of both Alice Nannup's *When the Pelican Laughed* (1992) and Rita and Jackie Huggins' *Aunty Rita* (1994). I discuss both autobiographies in the light of womanism, a concept separate to that of mainstream feminism. While feminism is necessary, it can unintentionally overlook the needs of some women, in particular, the needs of Indigenous women. In her book, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman* (2000), Aboriginal academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson states that unlike white women, Indigenous women have to deal with two patriarchies: that within their own societies and that of the overarching colonial power. I discuss this double patriarchy in the light of Alice Nannup's and Rita and Jackie Huggins' life writings and argue for a womanist-based approach to future academic study.

Key Words: Womanism, Indigenous Women, Double Patriarchy, Aboriginal Australia, Autobiographies

Introduction

Euro-Australian feminist and anthropologist Diane Bell spent the majority of her life researching the lives of Aboriginal women as well as advocating for their rights. She has also advocated for Aboriginal land rights. Some of her books include: *Daughters of the Dreaming* (1983), *Generations, Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters* (1987), *Law: The Old and the New* (1980) and *Religion (1984)*. In chapter two of her PhD (1980) and later in her book *Daughters of the Dreaming (1983)*, Bell outlines the approaches to the anthropological study of Aboriginal groups and their cultural practices. She categorises these approaches into three research paradigms: Man Equals Culture, An Anthropology of Women and Towards a Feminist Perspective (Bell, 1980).

A considerable amount of time has passed since the establishment of Dianne Bell's paradigms in 1983 and that space has brought with it great change. All of Bell's paradigms are based from the perspective of the outsider, the one looking in. In more recent years, however, Aboriginal women have themselves been writing about and documenting their own biographies and stories (Koskoff, 2014). Over the last four decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have published a wealth of literature from autobiographies to novels, poetry and plays. These publications include *Song of the Crocodile* by Nardi Simpson (2020; *Mullumbimby* by Melissa Lucashenko (2013); *The Boundary* by Nicole Watson (2011) and *Butterfly Song* by Terri Janke (2005).

Presently, in this article I will focus on Jackie and Rita Huggins' (1994) *Auntie Rita* and Alice Nannup's (1992) *When The Pelican Laughed.* In doing so, I hope to apply a fourth paradigm drawing on the theories of Hill Collins (1996), Moreton-Robinson (2013) and Walker (1981, 1983), one with a view from the inside, where Aboriginal women write about themselves. This insider view is based on Moreton-Robinson's (2013) Australian Indigenous women's standpoint theory. As I am myself an outsider, I hope to create a paradigm where women outside of Australian Aboriginal culture can work with Aboriginal women to give voice to their particular historical and cultural experience. I call this fourth paradigm 'Towards a Womanist Perspective', with a focus on womanism more so than feminism (Hill Collins, 1996).

Womanism

Womanism is a social theory which focuses particularly on present and historical struggles of black women. It allows Aboriginal women to break free from the imperialism they frequently experience via the concepts of Western feminism. Novelist and poet Alice Walker first coined the term womanist in 1981 in her short story *Coming Apart* (Walker, 1981). Since then, it has evolved as a theory and a concept through the literary works of Clenora Hudson Weems and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. Unlike feminism, the focus of womanist theory is on race and class-based oppression, as opposed to gender equality. Walker's (1983, p. 12) phrase 'Womanism is to feminism as purple is to lavender' suggests that feminism is a theory which is situated within the broader context of womanism.

Womanism also focuses on unity, in one sense the unity between women and men, but also the unity between all women black, white, red, or otherwise. With this united focus in mind, I argue that Rita Huggins and Alice Nannup took a womanist approach in their biographic writings. I will argue that it was the wish of Rita and Jackie Huggins and Alice Nannup to create unity between the Aboriginal and white community. Each of the women had the common goal of working towards the establishment of a mutual respect between Indigenous and white Australians. I suggest that this form of womanism acts as a Garma in writing; the unity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Hill Collins, 1996; Huggins, 1994; Liddle, 2014; Nannup, 1992; Suzack, 2010).

A Complex History

There is little historical knowledge of pre-contact Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tradition suggests that women held an important status in their community. Giving birth and rearing children was viewed as a position of respect. Children were raised primarily by their mother and were taught to behave well until they were old enough to learn the roles specific to their gender. The role of motherhood was not thought of merely in the biological sense, but rather was seen as a position of power; the power to look after others. Women were respected for their spiritual and mental strength; the spiritual and mental strength to carry-out the role of motherhood (Anderson, 2010; Hill Collins 1996; Kaberry 1939). Europeans had little, if any, understanding of this gender complementary system. During the time of the European invasion of Australia in 1788, European women had very few rights. They were merely viewed as possessions by their husbands and fathers and the Colonial powers extended this viewpoint onto Aboriginal society (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Smith et al., 2017). This was the beginning of the double patriarchy: Aboriginal women were already discriminated against within their own society because of their sex. While in one sense the gender complementary role systems respected Indigenous women as mothers, Liddle (2014) highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were often subject to polygamous marriages arranged from birth and subject to specific punishments designed only for women. These punishments are dependent on the law of each individual tribal group and often remain unspoken, as they are sacred (Ginibi, 1994). They were now also discriminated against because of their race and gender by a colonial power. This experience was also felt by other Indigenous groups, such as Native Americans and members of the First Nations in Canada. As a result, Indigenous women have become the most marginalised social group, even more so than Indigenous men (Suzack, 2010).

In her book, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman,* Moreton-Robinson (2000) highlights how the first wave of Australian feminism brought with it the attitude that women needed to be saved from the foul behaviours of men. The idea of feminism in this context veered more towards protection for women than emancipation. They thought they were literally saving Aboriginal women from the primitive nature of their own race and 'civilising' them for their own good. Unwanted male behaviour, such as drinking, gambling and predatory sexuality undermined civilisation and jeopardised the welfare of women and children. Feminist campaigns were focused primarily on the protection of women (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Although this was in itself an expression of masculinist society, in terms of the protectionist aspect, it was viewed by white women as a step forward for Aboriginal women. This viewpoint was extended onto Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander women. The sexuality of Indigenous women was policed and Aboriginal girls were separated from their families and brought up by white missions, where they learned to behave like white women. It was as though Indigenous girls were being 'saved' from the uncivilised nature of their 'native' cultures (Moreton-Robinson 2000; Smith et al. 2017).

Discussion

In response to this double patriarchy Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2013, p. 332), states:

> 'An Indigenous women's standpoint generates problematics informed by our experiences. Acknowledging that Indigenous women's individual experiences will differ due to intersecting oppressions. Produced under social, political, historical and material conditions that we share consciously or unconsciously. These conditions and sets of complex relations that discursively constitute us in the everyday are also complicated by our respective cultural differences and the simultaneity of our compliance and resistance as Indigenous sovereign female subjects.'

Moreton-Robinson (2013) discusses Australian women's standpoint theory as a methodological research tool. She does so by highlighting two previous research methods; Sandra Harding's feminist standpoint theory and Martin Nakata's Indigenous standpoint theory. Similar to Bell's third paradigm *Todwards a feminist perspective*, Harding's (2004) feminist standpoint theory suggests approaching sociological research from a feminist point of view. Moreton-Robinson (2013) argues that a feminist standpoint theory is not suitable for conducting research on the lives of Indigenous women, as feminist ideology is stemmed from capitalism. She stresses that the universities in the United States and Canada, where feminist theory has evolved, are situated on Indigenous lands; lands that were taken and used without any consideration for those that lived there. She suggests that feminism is based on the constructs of middle-class white society, such as land ownership. In contrast, Moreton-Robinson (2013) discusses Nakata's Indigenous standpoint theory. She suggests that Nakata's method is more suited to research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as it is based on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves. She does however, suggest that being a man, Nakata has universalised the Indigenous male experience as the norm. In order to tackle this, Moreton-Robinson (2013) suggests an Australian Indigenous Women's standpoint theory as a more effective method for research with Indigenous Australian women.

Keeping Moreton-Robinson's Australian Indigenous women's standpoint theory in mind, I consult the life writings of Rita Huggins and Alice Nannup. Both Indigenous Australian women whose life experiences have been very different, and yet the two have a shared experience of both an oppressive Aboriginal male dominant and also a white imperialist social structure. Alice Nannup was born on Pilbara Station in 1911 to Aboriginal mother Ngulyi and white father and station owner Tom Basset. Rita Huggins was born in a cave near Carnarvon Gorge in the ancestral home of the Bidjara Pitjara people where she and her family lived in a humpy until they were forced to move to Cherbourg Station. Both women were sent to work as domestic servants far from their families when they were just young girls.

In her book, *When the Pelican Laughed*, Alice Nannup (1992, p. 21) describes her background and childhood on Kangan station:

> 'Kangan was owned by an Englishman, Tom Bassett. I didn't know it at the time but he was my father, he was from Roebourne and he originally started out as a mailman. I see Kangan as my home because that's the main station I grew up on.'

She goes on to describe her mother and father and family background: 'My mother never told me who my father was but I knew he was a white man because I was fair like my grandmother' (p. 18); 'I'm Aboriginal, English and Indian, a real international person' (p. 20).

Rita Huggins (1994, pp. 7-8) describes her family background also:

> 'My born country is the land of the Bidjara-Pitjara people … also the land of the Kairi, Nuri, Karingbal, Longabulla, Jiman and Wadja people. In our land are waterfalls, waterholes and creeks where we swam and where the older people fished … the men hunted kangaroos, goannas, lizards, snakes and porcupines with spears and boomerangs. The women gathered berries, grubs, wild plums, honey and waterlilies, and yams and other roots with their digging sticks.'

Although Nannup's and Huggins's early childhood memories and family backgrounds are in stark contrast with one another, they do bear certain similarities. Both women share a clear concept of kinship and belonging. Nannup is proud of her mixed-race background and of the fact that she had so many grandmothers in the Mulba tribal sense. Huggins is proud of the land she comes from and the culture of her people. Unlike Nannup who was born on a mission station, Huggins was born free. It was some years later before Huggins and her family were taken and brought to Cherbourg station. Huggins (1994, p. 9) describes the day she and her family were taken:

> 'One winter's night, troopers came riding on horseback through our camp. My father went to see what was happening, and my mother stayed with her children to try to stop us from being so frightened. One trooper I remember clearly. Perhaps he was sorry for what he was doing, because he gave me some fruit, a banana, something as unknown to me as the Whiteman who offered it. My mother saw, and cried out to me, "Barjun, Barjun" (poison poison) … What was to appear next out of the bush took us all by surprise and we nearly turned white with fright. It was a huge cage with four round things on it which when moved by the man in the cabin in front, made a deafening sound, shifting the ground and flattening the grass, stones and twigs beneath it. We had never seen a cattle truck before. A strong smell surrounded us as we entered the truck and we saw brown stains on the wooden floor.'

When I say that Nannup was not born free, I simply mean that she spent the early years of her life in Kangan station. Mission Stations, such as Kangan were set up by religious individuals and organisations from the early 19th Century and latterly affected by Australian government policies resulting in the 'Stolen Generations' 1910s-1970s. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

were placed on these stations where they worked for little or no pay. They were housed together regardless of where they came from – peoples that would never have associated with one another up to that point – they existed together in a form of indentured slavery. They were Anglicised as well as Christianised. It seems from her writings that both she and her mother's status at Kangan was somewhat unclear. She describes her childhood there with her half-sister in a positive light: 'Ella and I had our own nanny goats, they were ours and the milk from them was just for us' (Nannup, 1992, p. 22). She describes the relationship between her and her father and that between her father and her mother. She appeared to have had a close relationship with her father Tom Bassett, the station owner. She was able to go up to her father's house, which would have been the main house of the station, to spend a night or so if she wanted to: 'About Tommy, I think my mother must have had a talk to him and asked if I could go up there from time to time, and that's what I'd do for some peace' (Nannup, 1992, p. 22).

She also describes her father's distress at her and her mother's decision to leave Kangan:

> 'One night her and Tommy were playing crib when I heard him break down and start crying. I was in bed and I didn't know what they were talking about, but I just buried my head because I didn't want to hear him cry' (Nannup, 1992, p. 37).

It is interesting to note that it was Alice's mother's decision to leave the station. In discussing her mother's relationship with her father, she describes how they would both play cards together at night: 'I remember they got on quite well together and they played a lot of cribbage. At night id [sic] hear them laughing and growling at one another, you know cheating and things like that' (Nannup, 1992, p. 25).

She does however state that her mother was only fifteen when she was born: 'She did tell me that she had me on Abydos station, she was fifteen and we left there when I was a baby' (Nannup, 1992, p. 18). She goes on to describe how they did not live in the same section of the houses as him:

> 'I don't think my mother was with Tommy because he had his own section of the place and we had ours. I think they must have come to some arrangement that she'd look after him and the house but they'd keep separate lives' (Nannup, 1992, p. 25).

She describes her mother's role in Kangan, how she would look after Tom and the other men: 'My mother used to cook for all the working men there, she used to go back and forth into Roebourne' (Nannup, 1992, p. 21). It is clear that there was a colonial patriarchy at play in Kangan, as there was at other stations throughout Australia. One can see glimpses of this system through Nannup's description of her childhood.

This form of colonial patriarchy is much more evident in Nannup's description of her removal from her mother through deceitful and forcible means. She describes how she and her sister Ella would have to hide as the scouts came around looking to remove mixed race children from their families:

> 'It was when we were back on Malina that the scouts started to come around. They were sent up from the Aboriginal Affairs in Perth to come and look for the half-caste kids. My mother would say, "The scouts are back so you'd better be careful," and she'd tell us to stay in the bunkhouse all day. She was working in the kitchen so she'd bring down a sandwich and a bottle of water and say, "If they come around, get under the bed and don't talk, just keep quiet"' (Nannup, 1992, p. 38).

She goes on to discuss how her mother was tricked into thinking that she would be returned to her when she was eighteen:

> 'I'm older, I often think back to this time and I think everything was arranged before we ever left the North. It was a cunning way to get me, to trick my mother by telling her I was going off to be educated, then brought back to be with them when I turned eighteen' (Nannup, 1992, p. 45).

Nannup not only experienced the imperialism of the white man, but also experienced the patriarchy within her Indigenous Mulba culture. She describes how her mother had to be married to a Mulba man, as the elders did not think it appropriate for her to work at Kangan without having an Aboriginal husband: 'that's how she met old Roebourne Ned. See the elders reckoned she shouldn't be living there without an aboriginal husband; that was the law' (Nannup, 1992, p. 21). Nannup also describes how her mother was confronted by a council of men for breaking Mulba law:

> 'It is law that when a woman's Nyuba (partner) dies she's got to have all her hair cut off to make herself ugly for someone else but mother didn't do this and she didn't explain why … we got to the meeting place and that evening they made a big fire and mother had to kneel down in a circle of men. They started asking her questions and rattling their spears and asking her in language (Mulba), why didn't you carry out the law? Mother wouldn't talk, she just knelt there quietly and they kept jabbing her in the leg … they said to her she thought she was white because she had Tommy behind her but mother didn't think that at all and she was very upset. Later that night the women came and cut Mothers hair off. She was allowed to keep it, of course because if anybody got a hold of it they could sing (curse) her with it' (Nannup, 1992, pp. 25-26).

Nannup (1992, p. 35) also highlights aspects of this male dominant social structure in relation to herself. She describes how the men made the decisions when it came to marriage; that a man would choose his wife by deciding who he would like as a mother-in-law:

> 'When I was born they gave me to an old man … it was never the old women that chose, it was only ever men. A woman used to walk about 4 or 5 yards behind her man, carrying a baby on her hip, a bundle of wood or something on her head, another bundle on her back, and have children walking along with her … while the man was walking along carrying a few spears. I tell you what, the men had it made.'

This male dominance was evident later in her life when Nannup was a young teenager working at Moore River. She highlights how it was only the men who were allowed to send notes to the women; that the women were not allowed to send notes, but were expected to respond to them:

> 'A boy wrote a note to me once saying he wanted to see me but I didn't want any part of it so I just ripped it up … well he grabbed hold of me by the neck and pushed me down onto the fence. He was nearly choking me and I couldn't get away. When I write notes to girls I expect an answer, he said and I could hear how angry he was' (Nannup, 1992, p. 74).

Rita Huggins had a similar experience of this double patriarchy. Firstly, she experienced the oppression of the *Migaloo*. She describes what her life was like for her and her family on Cherbourg Station:

> 'If we used our own language in front of the authorities we would face punishment and be corrected in the Queen's English … The authorities tried to take away all our tribal ways and to replace them with English ones … my parents Albert and Rose were given English names by their white station owners. In turn, my parents called their children: Barney; Clare; Margaret; Harry; Thelma; Rita; Violet; Jim; Ruby; Oliver; Lawrence; Isobel; Albert and Walter. It is known that at least the three eldest had tribal names as well as English ones, but we don't know any more what they were' (Huggins, 1994, p. 17).

She also describes her first job working as a domestic when she was only thirteen. She highlights how this work shaped her way of thinking for the rest of her life:

> 'My first job was from dawn until the late hours of the evening, a daily routine of cleaning, washing, ironing, preparing food and caring for the children … It is my background as a domestic that has in many ways shaped my whole life … There was no more schooling for me … I was only thirteen but they thought I'd had enough education' (Huggins, 1994, pp. 37-38).

Huggins (1994, p. 33) highlights how Aboriginal people had no choice as to when or where they would be working; that the authorities would simply decide that for them:

> 'In the late 1930s and the 1940s, control of Aboriginals' work was made law under the Queensland Aborigines' and Torres Strait Islanders' Preservation and Protection Acts of 1939-1946 which empowered the minister, acting through a system of superintendents and police, to enter employment contracts on behalf of Aboriginal people, to hold any funds they might have had, and to supervise spending. The Acts essentially legislated a system of enslaved labour'.

Secondly, Huggins experienced the patriarchy within her own family. She describes her father and his dominance over her and the rest of the family: 'Dada had a volatile temper which would erupt into full-scale fury and war when stirred … His word was law and we dared not speak back or challenge him' (Huggins, 1994, p. 22). Another aspect of the double patriarchy was

experienced by Rita and her daughter Jackie in the 1990s when they went to retrieve Rita's records from the authorities. The authorities had kept records of Rita regarding her childhood in Cherbourg, all of her children and on every job she had had up until the 1970s. Jackie was not even allowed to turn the pages of the written records herself: 'When I first made enquiries about seeing my mother's file, I was made to watch across a huge desk as two white public servants turned the pages' (Huggins, 1994, pp. 4-5).

In her article, Celeste Liddle (2014) calls herself a womanist. She states the importance of the publication of the life writings of Aboriginal women. Jackie Huggins also describes this as a means of breaking a double fold of silence:

> 'The writing of this book (*Auntie Rita*) was an attempt to reclaim the history of our people. To do this is to encounter a double fold of silence. Each fold is of the same cloth – two centuries of colonisation. There are the acts of violence that attempted to alienate (with varying degrees of success) black people's access to knowledge of their own culture and its history; taking people from their lands, separating children from their parents, insisting on the surrender of traditional languages and customs and the adoption of European ways' (Huggins, 1994, p. 4).

Moving Bell's paradigms

Through the publication of their life writings, both Rita Huggins and Alice Nannup reclaim and preserve their history in a womanist way. Their writings provide non-Aboriginal people with a greater understanding of the historic and current positions of Aboriginal people. Both books reflect a non-bitter attitude towards the white coloniser. Huggins (1994, pp. 3-6) proclaims:

> 'Much has been done to me and my people that we find hard to talk about. One of the things that amazes people is that we have managed to survive without a huge amount of outward bitterness.'

Similarly, Nannup (1992, p. 20) states: 'You hear people run down the English but I never do, because that's a part of me, just like having Indian blood'. Life writings of those, such as Alice Nannup and Rita Huggins, not only act as a preservation of Aboriginal history, language and culture, but call for a stronger relationship between Indigenous and white Australians. Their lack of bitterness makes space for a longing to be recognised by white Australian society; to build a relationship of mutual respect between cultures. Their biographies provide a glimpse into Aboriginal culture, historic and present day, that cannot be captured through a feminist standpoint.

In this article, I have highlighted the research paradigms of renowned anthropologist Dianne Bell as outlined in her 1983 book *Daughters of the Dreaming*. These paradigms are entitled 'Man Equals Culture', 'An Anthropology of Women' and 'Towards a Feminist Perspective' (Bell, 1980). Based on the theoretical research of Hill Collins (1996), Moreton-Robinson (2013) and Walker (1983), I suggest a fourth paradigm: 'Towards a Womanist Perspective'. This new paradigm focuses on the writings of Aboriginal women themselves. I therefore make reference to the life

writings of both Rita Huggins and Alice Nannup arguing the complexity of the double patriarchy at work in both their lives: the patriarchy of the male dominance within their own families and cultures and that of the imperial white man. I make this argument through Aileen Moreton-Robinson's Aboriginal Woman's standpoint theory and by discussing Huggins's and Nannup's different experiences of the double patriarchy in their respective lives. A Womanist perspective also calls for a relationship between white and Indigenous women: a friendship and an understanding for one another.

I conclude by arguing that Aboriginal women's life writings not only preserve Aboriginal culture and history, but also create a greater understanding and respect for Aboriginal women and their perspectives. I argue that these biographies are written through a Womanist perspective, as they declare no bitterness towards white Australians. I have found that through their biographies, Huggins and Nannup call for a better relationship between white and Indigenous Australian women; one not of an imperial Feminist perspective, but rather one of a Womanist understanding, and one of mutual cultural respect. This article is part of that relationship given that I as a white woman have the ability to work with the life writings of these Aboriginal women.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Exploring Young Women's Attitudes towards the Feminist Movement and Popular Music Artists' Claims to Feminism

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Abstract The last decade has seen a marked increase in public visibility of feminism. Numerous factors have contributed to this; not least the growing number of celebrities aligning themselves with the feminist movement. This has led to a shift in the way feminism is perceived in the public eye, having gone from being a taboo subject that celebrities routinely avoid and distance themselves from, to becoming increasingly trendy and popular. This article focuses on a cohort of celebrities who have been particularly vocal about their views on feminism in recent years - female pop artists with a large fanbase of young women.

This study explores young women's attitudes towards the feminist movement and these popstars' endorsements of feminism. It examines what effect, if any, they have had on young women's views about feminism. This research was carried out among female and non-binary students of NUI Galway using an online survey. Considering the difficulties the feminist movement has experienced in its attempts to reach young women in the past, this study makes a contribution to existing research on young women's engagement with feminism and elucidates the role of celebrities and pop artists.

Key Words: Feminism, Young Women, Celebrity, Pop artists, Stigma

Introduction

In the late 2010's, feminism experienced a bout of popularity quite unlike any in recent history. It was voted 'Word of the Year' in 2017 by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as it generated 70 percent more searches on their website that year than the year before (Merriam-Webster, 2017). It is no coincidence that, at the same time, celebrities were increasingly making it known that they supported the feminist movement (Gill, 2016; Hoskin, Jenson & Blair, 2017). Not only have they played a central role in bringing greater public attention to the subject of feminism, but they have also shaped ongoing debates around how feminism is understood as we move into the 2020's (Gill, 2016; Lawson, 2018).

Celebrities who have been particularly vocal about their views on feminism include well-known pop artists like Beyoncé. As her target market consists mainly of young women, many of her fans may be quite new to feminism, with previous encounters limited to negative stereotypes found in the mainstream media (Beck, 1998; Zeisler, 2016). Young women, thought to be apathetic and indifferent towards feminism, were referred to as 'postfeminist' by the media at the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century (Beck, 1998; Griffin, 2001; Aronson, 2003). The recent growth of public visibility and celebrity advocacy of feminism has, however, led to changes in the way the movement is portrayed and how young women are positioned in relation to feminism in the mainstream media (Gill, 2016).

Popular feminism, as it has become known, differs from other strands of feminism in several ways: not least that it is widely accessible across the digital landscape, particularly on social media. Therefore, it is not confined to niche groups or academia (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Most notably, and in stark contrast to other forms of feminism, it is liked, accepted, and possibly even admired within popular discourse (Banet-Weiser, 2018). While multiple strands of feminism continue to exist, such as radical, queer, and post-modern feminism, 'popular' feminism receives, by far, the most attention within mainstream public spaces (Hoskin, Jenson & Blair, 2017).

This raises the question: What are young women's thoughts around the subject of feminism in 2020? Furthermore, what are their views regarding the recent emergence of popular feminism in the last decade? Has listening to pop artists publicly claiming feminist identity affected their attitudes towards feminism? These are some of the questions that will be explored in this article, highlighting the potential for celebrity feminism to impact young women's views on the feminist movement, along with its limitations.

Literature Review

Young Women and Feminism

The most widely agreed upon definition of feminism is that it is a movement for the political, social, and economic equality of men and women (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000). Interest in and openness to the feminist movement has varied throughout the years in line with the broader social and political context. Different generations of women adopted and applied feminism to their lived reality, creating various 'waves' of feminism. During the 80's, 90's and into the 00's, young women were largely thought to be uninterested in the feminist movement and were considered by the media to be 'postfeminist', or to be 'done-with' feminism (Aronson, 2003). This created tension between the older generation, or 'second wave' feminists, and young women, who, it was claimed, did not appreciate the gains of their elders which they benefited from and did not seek further change (Aronson, 2003). Despite this, the late 80's and 90's witnessed a large number of young women reclaiming feminism, subsequently rejecting the notion that they were 'postfeminist' and giving rise to the 'third wave' of feminism (Kinser, 2004).

Third wave feminism differed significantly from the second wave, not least because it ensued from the immense social change achieved by the second wave (Kinser, 2004). While second wave feminism was characterised by activism, a collective struggle for equal rights and the rejection of commodity culture as a form of protest, third wave feminism was much more personal, focusing on individual expression and celebrating diversity (Mayhew, 2001). Intersectionality was central to its thinking and, as a result, many strands of feminism began emerging at that time (Winston *et al.*, 2012). Among them were 'Girlies', who reclaimed things considered stereotypically feminine that were shunned during the second wave such as knitting, nail polish and the colour pink (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). The concept of 'girl power' also arose at this time, celebrating female empowerment and independence, with British pop band 'The Spice Girls' the most widely recognisable embodiment of this (Munford, 2015). The legacy of these sub-factions continues to influence how feminism is understood today, particularly in mainstream media and popular culture.

Friction between different generations of feminists highlights the turbulent nature of young women's relationship to feminism. Such was the conflict that it was commonly referred to as the 'generations wars' in much of the literature (Budgeon, 2001). Despite young women leading the resurgence of feminism with the third wave, there remained a fear that most young women were indifferent to and disconnected from the women's movement (Griffin, 2001). Historically, research found that, rather than identify as feminists, young women tend to express feminist sentiments without labelling them as such (Renzetti, 1987; Aronson, 2003; Rudolfsdottir & Jolliffe, 2008). Recent studies uncovered a more complex picture, however, with young women reporting multi-faceted and often polarised attitudes towards feminism.

A poll conducted by the Fawcett Society in 2015 found 18-24-year olds the most likely group of women to identify as feminists, while simultaneously being the most likely to oppose it (Olchawski, 2016: 10; Fawcett Society, 2016: 14). In addition, women aged 18-24 were the most likely group to report not knowing what feminism stands for, with a quarter of women in this age group reporting that 'women and men are equal now' (Fawcett Society, 2016: 12; Olchawski, 2016: 8). This highlights why generalising and making claims about young women as one homogenous group is highly problematic (Griffin, 2001; Wilson, 2005). Another study done in

2019 by the Young Women's Trust proved more hopeful, with two-thirds of women aged 18-24 years reporting that they identify as feminists (Young Women's Trust, 2019). These studies show the wide ranging and often differing views young women hold towards feminism.

Media Representations of Feminism and Young Women

Media portrayals of the feminist movement are at the root of many of the challenges it continues to encounter, with the focus often centred on the supposed flaws of individual feminists, thereby stigmatising women who associate with it (Beck, 1998; Zeisler, 2016). Beck argues that the media's stereotyping of feminists as lesbians or 'dykes' has been highly effective at scaring young, heterosexual women away from feminism (1998: 143). The media's historically negative stereotyping of feminists has certainly impacted young women's willingness to associate with the women's movement.

Recent media representations of young women's relationship to feminism, however, could not be further from those of the late 20th and early 21st century. Gill (2016) describes this in her ~~piece about the October 2015~~ edition of the free London Evening Standard magazine, released to coincide with students' return to university. 'New (gen) fem' was the headline, and, underneath, it read 'Neelam Gill Top Girl: In My Industry Women Earn More'[1] (Gill, 2016: 610). Articles included 'Today's Gender Warriors' and 'How To Date A Feminist' (Gill, 2016: 610). These articles reflect a shift within the mainstream media. Feminism has gone from being a repudiated and stigmatised identity, to becoming increasingly 'cool' (Gill 2016: 611; Hoskin, Jenson & Blair, 2017). This also signifies the continued existence of a postfeminist sensibility in which feminist values are both co-opted and depoliticised by the media, thus allowing them to be capitalised on. Gill (2007) notes common features of this sensibility including an emphasis on individualism, empowerment, and choice, along with consumerism. These are also significant features of 'popular' feminism.

Celebrity Feminism

In the last decade, increased interest around feminism arose that was quite unique to this generation. Factors that contributed to this included the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent austerity cuts, Donald Trump becoming President of the United States in 2017, and the emergence of the '#MeToo' movement (Bibby, 2017; Rivers, 2017; Lawson, 2018; Banet-Weiser, 2018). These instances, among others, made it harder to ignore the persistence of sexism and the continued need for feminist activism as we progressed into the late 2010's. The growth of social media in the 2000's was also of major significance, as it enabled the instant dissemination of ideas and views among internet users, as exemplified by the #MeToo movement founded on

[1] [1] Neelam Gill is a fashion model, no relation to the author cited.

Twitter (Lawson, 2018). Some have argued that widespread internet access and the subsequent rise of social media sets the feminist activism of the '10s apart from other eras of feminism, indicating a 'fourth wave' (Cochrane, 2013; Rivers, 2017).

This shift in the public's attitudes towards feminism was also evident in celebrities' feelings on the topic. Hamad & Taylor (2015) describe the media's struggle to keep up with the number of high-profile celebrities who began openly identifying as feminists in the early to mid-2010's. Perhaps the best-known example relates to world-renowned music artist Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, who, in 2013, included a sample from author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's viral TED Talk 'Why we should all be feminists' in her song '***Flawless' (Zeisler, 2016). In addition, at the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards, she performed with the word 'FEMINIST' emblazoned in giant white letters behind her (Zeisler, 2016). Also around this time, Taylor Swift, another popular music artist, began publicly calling herself a feminist (Zeisler, 2016). Harry Potter actor Emma Watson became the ambassador for the UN's 'HeForShe' campaign in 2014, and her speech encouraging men to get involved in feminism went viral (Zeisler, 2016; Gay, 2014). Countless other celebrities declared their affinity with the feminist movement during this period, fuelling a media frenzy over feminism's newfound popularity.

This celebrity trend of publicly claiming a feminist identity has created new feminist visibilities across the media landscape, replacing negative stereotypes with the likes of Beyoncé and Emma Watson (Gill, 2016; Lawson, 2018: 10). The widespread recognition that comes with fame puts celebrities in a position of incredible public influence, particularly in relation to young women as they are perhaps more likely to keep up with the latest celebrity trends and are a target demographic of pop artists (Colley, 2008). Studies have shown that young people today are more civic-minded, hold more progressive political views, and possess a stronger desire to affect change than previous generations (Stone, 2009; Parker & Igielnik, 2020). In her study, Becker (2013) found that students were receptive towards celebrity advocacy, particularly when the celebrity is well-liked and their motives for undertaking this advocacy are considered credible. Celebrities' newfound readiness to affiliate themselves with the feminist movement is also understood to be a defining feature of what some writers call the fourth wave (Rivers, 2017).

The phenomenon of 'celebrity feminism' is not a new trend, however, and was first coined by Wicke (1994: 758), who observed that 'the energies of the celebrity imaginary are fuelling feminist discourse and political activity as never before' (in Hamad & Taylor, 2015: 124). Shortly after, Skeggs (1997: 140) remarked that 'a great deal of feminism is mediated through celebrities'. The term 'celebrity feminism' is used to refer to those whose fame is founded on their feminist identity, such as Gloria Steinem, along with those who adopted the feminist label after they became famous (Taylor, 2014). These 'celebrity feminists' greatly contribute to 'the kinds of feminism that come to publicly circulate' and, thereby, receive varying degrees of cultural legitimation, making them crucial to popular understandings of feminism (Hamad & Taylor, 2015: 126).

Real vs. Popular Feminism

The response to this recent wave of celebrity feminism from feminist writers has been, at best, mixed. Zeisler (2016: 128) suggests that celebrity feminists such as Emma Watson are celebrated by the media because they represent a marketable, media-friendly version of feminism. She highlights the media's focus on celebrity engagements with feminism as a means of legitimising the movement and making it more palatable to the masses, rather than challenging systems that perpetuate inequality, such as the film and music industry, where most of these celebrities emanate from (Zeisler, 2016: 126). She argues that focusing on individual celebrities portrays feminism as an identity to be claimed rather than a collective movement based on activism, bypassing the need to raise awareness of systematic oppression and inequality (Zeisler, 2016). Rather than asking who stands for feminism, she contends that we should look at how they stand for it (2016: 137). Gay (2014) also points out that Beyoncé would likely be the only 'face' of feminism for many, which could lead to the belief that feminism 'begins and ends' with her. She is critical of those who remain uninterested in feminism until a young and attractive celebrity raises the issue (Gay, 2014). Like Zeisler (2016), she refuses to celebrate 'popular' feminism, which she believes lacks substance and distracts from the work of 'real' feminism (Gay, 2014).

This distinction between so-called 'real' feminism and 'popular' forms of feminism features in most criticisms of celebrity feminism, which has been accused of diluting feminism down to its most agreeable form, even misappropriating it at times (Hamad & Taylor, 2015). However, as Hamad & Taylor point out, these criticisms presume there is an 'authentic' feminism that exists beyond its celebrity manifestations (2015: 125). They argue that the media has become a central site for discursive struggles over what constitutes feminism, and this has ideological and cultural implications for feminism that must be considered (Hamad & Taylor, 2015: 126). They caution media and cultural analysts against assuming this relationship is inherently negative for the feminist movement and suggest that feminism and celebrity culture intersect in ways that can be simultaneously productive and unproductive, with constraints and possibilities (Hamad & Taylor, 2015: 125).

Hobson (2016) also challenges critics of popular feminism that liken it to 'feminism-lite'. She highlights the tendency within feminist scholarship to believe that traditional, academic feminism is the only 'true' feminism (Hobson, 2016). She maintains that celebrity feminism is more than a 'gateway' and has the potential to develop into a legitimate and informed international movement for the next generation of feminists (Hobson, 2016). The likeness between this debate and generational disputes between second and third wave feminists are striking, with some second wave feminists accusing the third wave of 'discarding the essence' of feminism (Buckley, 2006: 13). This was based on the misconception that there was once a stable feminism against which emerging forms of feminism are unfavourably measured (Henry, 2004 in Buckley, 2006).

The celebrity feminism this study is concerned with relates to that of popular music artists. Lhamon (2007: 1) describes pop music as a catch-all for 'sticky sounds, inauthentic identity, and commercial crazes' (in Cable, 2017: 7-8). Perhaps this association with 'inauthentic identity and commercial crazes' rouses the suspicions of feminist and cultural analysts when it comes to pop artists' claims to feminism. Griffin's (2001) reminder to tread carefully when speaking about

young people and be mindful of dominant representations of youth as 'troubling', and young women as shallow and naïve (Anderson, 2018), is useful here. There is a tendency to dismiss or devalue popular culture and it is worth considering whether we do so on its own merits or simply because of its association with teenage girls (Anderson, 2018: 157).

Methodology

Research Method & Aims

To investigate the influence of commercial female pop artists on female students' attitudes towards feminism, I undertook exploratory quantitative research by means of an online questionnaire survey. This allowed me to access a large cohort of people in a short space of time and was convenient for participants (Bryman, 2012). Because questionnaires are useful for measuring a wide variety of unobservable data, such as people's preferences, attitudes, and beliefs, it suited the research objectives (Bhattacherjee, 2012: 72). The aim of the study was to inquire into the attitudes of female students aged 18-35 years towards feminism and whether their beliefs were influenced by their music preferences, particularly if they listened to contemporary popular music.

Survey Design

The survey consisted of thirteen structured questions, three of which were demographic in nature. An open comments box at the end allowed participants to share their thoughts on the subject matter. These proved a valuable source of qualitative data, contextualising and providing insight into participants' responses. The survey aimed to explore students' attitudes towards feminism and their music choices. As the research was specifically interested in the influence of commercial female popstars who publicly claimed a feminist identity on participants' views towards feminism, a list of artists was specified and participants were asked to choose the ones they liked, if any. The artists all received differing levels of attention at some point in their career regarding their beliefs about feminism, with all of them publicly identifying as feminists.

Requirements for taking part - listed at the beginning - specified that respondents should be students in Ireland between 18 and 35 years old who identified as either female, trans-women, or non-binary. Young men were not included in the study as I was particularly interested in young women's attitudes towards feminism. Including young men would likely significantly alter the research as previous studies found women and men's views often differ greatly on the topic, with women generally being more receptive to it (Leaper & Arias, 2011: 487). Also, one of the central concerns of the research is the influence of commercial female pop artists on

attitudes towards feminism. These artists typically appeal to young women rather than young men, so it was my belief that a separate study concerning the attitudes of young men towards feminism would be better suited to explore the topic.

Participation was also limited to those between 18 and 35 years old. Under 18-year olds were excluded for ethical reasons and, because the study is concerned with young women's views on feminism, the maximum age for inclusion was 35 years old. The wide age range allowed for comparison between different age groups to highlight any variations in the responses of younger and older participants. Finally, participants had to be students in Ireland for ease of distribution and due to practical constraints, such as time restrictions. Before distributing the survey, it was piloted with three volunteers. Their feedback allowed me to identify and remove unnecessary questions and refine some of the answers. This resulted in a more inclusive, user-friendly survey.

Sampling, Data Collection & Analysis

The survey was distributed via the NUI Galway Students' Union weekly newsletter email, thereby utilising convenience sampling. Most responses were recorded on the first day, and by the second day, over one hundred students had taken part. The survey ended after two weeks, having received one hundred and fifty-two responses. After invalid responses from people aged over 35, males, and non-students were deleted, the sample size stood at one hundred and thirty-eight. The survey was carried out on 'SurveyPlanet' (www.surveyplanet.com). I chose it for ease-of-use and convenience as it did not limit the number of questions users could include. Responses to each question were displayed visually, making the data easy to understand.

Using Microsoft Excel, I completed a statistical analysis of the data, employing a technique called descriptive analysis. This involved describing and summarising the

results and presenting the data in a way that allowed patterns to emerge (Ali & Bhaskar, 2016; Laerd Statistics, 2018). Along with providing basic information about the variables in a dataset, descriptive statistics uncover the relationship between variables (Ali & Bhaskar, 2016). A content analysis was used to examine participants' comments. This is the 'careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material' to identify the patterns, themes, assumptions, and meanings it contains (Lune & Berg, 2017: 182). First, initial themes in the comments were identified, such as expressing feminist stereotypes and critical engagement with pop artists claiming feminist identities. This allowed for the identification of broader patterns present in the data, such as the ways in which participants distinguish between different forms of feminism (authentic, popular, moderate or extreme), in addition to identifying the limitations of celebrity feminism.

Results Analysis & Discussion

Demographic Breakdown

All participants in the survey were students of NUI Galway. All were female apart from five who identified as non-binary. The number of participants based on their age is presented in Table 1. It shows that most participants were under 25 years, and the mode age was 20 years old.

Age	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35
Participants	10	22	35	22	14	8	8	5	3	1	0	1	0	2	2	2	1	2

Table 1: Number of Participants based on Age (in years)

Young Women's Attitudes Towards Feminism

The survey results provided a good overview of the beliefs of a non-representative sample of female students of NUI Galway in relation to feminism. A strong understanding of feminism was evident, with the vast majority defining it according to its dictionary definition. Only two participants defined it as 'a group of women who don't like men and think women are better than men' and one thought it was 'a historical movement that fought for women's rights and is no longer around'. One participant reported not knowing what feminism is, with a further thirteen respondents describing it as a combination of all three options provided. Some participants found these options quite limiting and unrepresentative of the diversity within the women's movement, with one commenting '*…the feminist movement is too broad to be defined by the statements listed. The range of thinking and beliefs is hugely diverse…*'. This demonstrates that these students have a well-developed understanding of feminism.

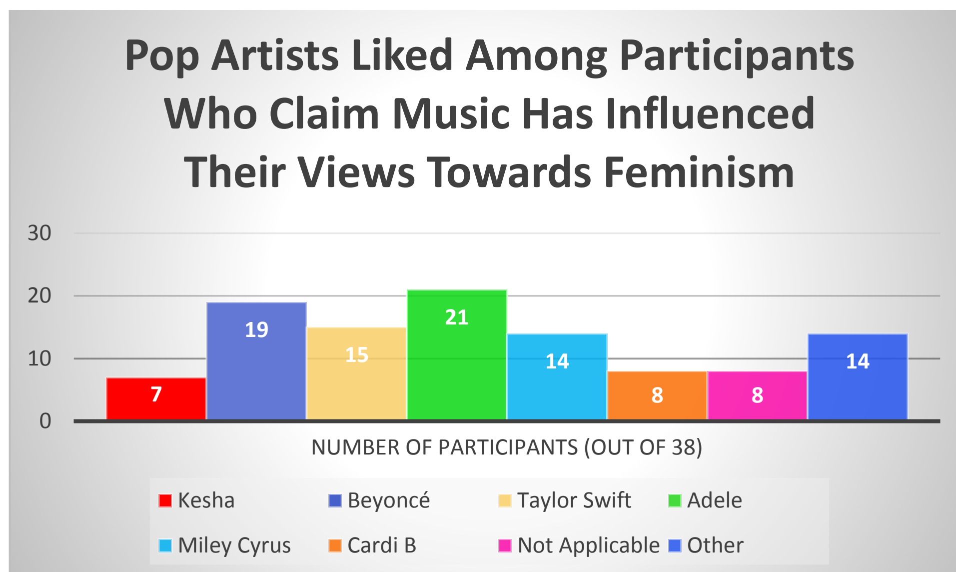
Furthermore, 85 percent of those who took part in the survey agreed with the concept of feminism and 78 percent identify as feminists. This tells us that there is a high degree of support for feminist principles among this cohort, and many are happy to associate with the feminist movement. In addition, 14 percent of students said they believe in gender equality but do not agree with feminism while 17 percent agreed there is a need for greater gender equality but did not consider themselves feminists, with 4 percent choosing 'no answer' when asked if they were a feminist. This tells us that a small number of students who took part in the research resist feminist identification despite agreeing with feminist principles. The 'I'm not a feminist, but…' phenomenon, also known as the 'Feminist Paradox', has been widely documented in research on women's views on feminism, with a much greater proportion of participants typically falling into this category in previous research (Renzetti, 1987; Aronson, 2003; Rudolfsdottir & Jolliffe, 2008; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Hoskin, Jenson & Blair, 2017).

One study determined that women's identification with feminism could be placed along a continuum in which 'some women call themselves feminists, others reject the label 'feminist' but support its principles, while some reject feminism altogether' (Taylor, 1996 cited in Aronson, 2003: 906). This continuum is evident in this study, with a high number of respondents identifying with and supporting feminism and a very small proportion rejecting it outright. Some participants were highly critical of the feminist movement despite recognising the importance of gender equality. Anti-feminism or rejection of feminism was evident in some comments. For example, one participant claimed: '*…gender equality is important no doubt, but this feminist movement just puts hard-working women at risk of discrimination because of the expected uproar they could cause if they are feminists…'*. Another student wrote: '*…to clarify, I am not an extreme feminist or "feminazi". As much as I believe in equal rights… I do not wish to be associated with what most people see as crazy men-hating women…*'. This suggests that negative stereotypes and stigma towards feminism persist despite recent progress.

Also evident in the survey results was the widely held belief in the continued relevance of feminism to the present day, with only a small proportion concerned that it may be slightly outdated. This challenges past media constructions of feminism as being irrelevant to young women (Scharff, 2009). Most of the students surveyed believe feminism is still very relevant to today's world - even some of those who disagreed with the feminist movement considered it just as applicable to the current day as ever. Also, 30 percent of participants did not think feminism was stigmatised. This reflects wider social change in which feminism has become less taboo and occupies a more mainstream, visible space in society than in the past (Gill, 2016; Zeisler, 2016). Interestingly, those who actively stigmatised feminism by holding negative views about feminists or distinguishing between moderate and 'extreme' feminism all agreed that feminism was stigmatised and was not considered 'cool'. This supports Leaper and Arias' (2011) finding that endorsing feminist stereotypes negatively affects young women's willingness to associate with feminism.

Pop Artists' Impact on Young Women's Attitudes Towards Feminism

While most participants felt that their choice of music had no influence on their attitudes towards feminism, over a quarter, or 38 respondents, reported that it did. Most students liked mainstream pop music and were fans of several artists on the list provided, as well as specifying a wide variety of artists they liked in the 'other' category. Among participants who reported music had influenced their beliefs about feminism, Adele was the most popular artist, with over half of them listening to her music. Half of them listened to Beyoncé, and both Taylor Swift and Miley Cyrus were liked by over one-third of participants whose choice of music had an influence on their attitudes towards feminism. Just over 20 percent liked Cardi B and Kesha was the least favourite artist among this cohort of students.



All except four of the participants who said music had an influence on their beliefs about feminism agreed with the concept of feminism and considered themselves feminists. Only two participants who reported music had an influence on their attitudes towards the feminist movement questioned the relevance of feminism, with the remaining thirty-six agreeing that it was just as relevant today as ever. Also, almost a quarter of these participants felt there was little or no stigma around feminism anymore. This is consistent with the broader results which show that 30 percent of all participants felt feminism was not stigmatised, which may indicate a shift in the level of stigma towards feminism (Hoskin, Jenson & Blair, 2017). This perceived lack of stigma could be one of the reasons behind participants' willingness to associate with the feminist movement, with previous studies often putting the high number of participants who fall into the 'Feminist Paradox' down to the persistence of stigma around feminism (Rudolfsdottir & Jolliffe, 2008; Leaper & Arias, 2011).

While the recent surge of pop artists claiming a feminist identity has likely contributed to this shift, this study does not provide sufficient evidence to attribute reduced stigma around feminism to these pop artists. Over three-quarters of participants who reported that their music preferences impacted their views on feminism believed feminism was stigmatised, and many students who like pop artists that have publicly voiced their support for feminism also reported the persistence of stigma around feminism. There are also other factors that likely contributed to this shift in the level of stigma around feminism, such as the integration of feminism into mainstream public discourse and other high-profile figures, aside from pop artists, who have been vocal in their support of feminism (Gill, 2016; Rivers, 2017).

In addition, over half of all participants chose 'music/celebrities' as one of the sources from which they learned about feminism, indicating a proportion of respondents who said their music choices had no effect on their beliefs about feminism still learned about the feminist movement through music and celebrity culture, at least to some extent. This tells us that they

do not have to like the artists specified to pick up on the messages they send out to the public. Even participants whose music preferences had no influence on their attitudes towards feminism acknowledged the power of music to influence listeners and its potential to convey a feminist message. Although their music choices may not have influenced their attitudes towards feminism, they contributed to what they know about feminism. This illustrates the importance of the kinds of ideas, whether direct or indirect, that are conveyed through music.

Criticisms of Pop Artists' Endorsements of Feminism

Several students were discerning of popular music artists that claimed feminist identities. Some believed the feminism they promoted was artificial and discriminatory, as expressed in the following comments:

> *…the female music artists listed have helped to popularise… feminism among young girls but their branch is usually an elitist and exclusionary feminism that serves wealthy women.*

> *…while the likes of Beyonce and Miley Cyrus… have helped to popularize feminism, it generally stays at a superficial and commercial level. What they promote is usually a neoliberal, consumeristic feminism that is focused on… 'girl power'… for financial gain…*

> *…celebrities have to a degree turned feminism into a 'trend' and… mainstream feminism (…featured in pop songs) is often not very inclusive to all types of women (in terms of race, sexual orientation etc)… I don't enjoy… music… in which I feel feminism is being used as a trend or in an inauthentic manner to sell products…*

This demonstrates young women's awareness of the contradictions inherent in many celebrity claims to feminism, their ability to critically engage with pop music, and to

question the conflicts of interest that underlie many pop artists' representations of feminism. It also challenges the notion that young women are mindless consumers of pop music, passively observing and absorbing sexist images without recognising them as such (Robinson, 2008). Ultimately, while there was some acknowledgement that the pop artists specified may have contributed to the formation of a more accessible version of feminism and helped to legitimise the feminist cause among the wider public, many respondents were suspicious of these artists' newfound feminist identities, leaving no indication that these specific artists had influenced participants' engagement with feminism.

Influence of Other Artists on Young Women's Views of Feminism

Finally, it is important to note the variety of popular artists students listened to, as listed in the 'other' category; some of whom may have impacted students' attitudes towards the feminist movement. Hozier and Lady Gaga were credited by participants as conveying positive messages about feminism and gender through their music. Respondents also listed various other artists they liked, demonstrating the wide range of contemporary pop artists students engage with. Many reported their music choices had impacted their beliefs around feminism, highlighting the different ways music can influence listeners' attitudes towards the women's movement. Artists do not have to publicly claim a feminist identity to affect how their fans view feminism – by questioning instances of gender inequality in their music they are raising awareness of feminist issues.

Also, the importance of mainstream pop stars who do not strictly conform to gender and other social norms was emphasised by one student who commented:

> *…messaging in pop song lyrics is really important. The target audience are… largely adolescent, who are trying to mould an identity for themselves. I think the artist's lyrics and popstar persona subconsciously shape their developing mindset and identity to a significant degree. This is why it's important to have mainstream stars like Lizzo, Charli XCX, Billie Eilish, etc., having different and not entirely 'conformist' lyrics, body-types, sexual orientation and styles in their music. It offers young people an array of messages and styles to consider whilst they develop their own perspectives and preferences.*

In addition, eight participants who agreed that their music choices had affected their attitude towards feminism did not listen to pop music and liked other music genres. This accounts for over 20 percent of participants who claimed their music preferences had an influence on their views around feminism. Some attributed their feminist beliefs to artists who were better-known in previous decades and whose claims to feminism were perceived of as more authentic than today's pop artists'. These included Annie Lennox, Joni Mitchell, The Dixie Chicks, Patti Smith, and Lauryn Hill, among others. While these artists may not have been as vocal about their support for feminism as some of the commercial female pop artists specified in the survey, they sang about their own issues and struggles as women and thus were perceived of as more authentic, 'real' feminists who had shown this through their songs rather than by adopting a feminist identity.

Conclusion

In exploring the beliefs of young female students of NUI Galway regarding feminism in 2020, this study found an overwhelmingly positive attitude among the participants towards the women's movement. It also added to what is known about the potential for young women's music preferences to influence their views towards feminism. While a preference for the music of female pop stars who had publicly claimed a feminist identity could not be linked to support for the feminist movement among the respondents, over a quarter of students surveyed

reported that their music choices had some influence on their beliefs about the feminist movement. These students listened to a wide variety of music; some liked the female pop artists specified along with other pop artists, while others preferred alternative music.

Furthermore, the research revealed that the level of stigma attached to claiming a feminist identity has shifted to some extent, and that celebrity endorsements of feminism have contributed to changes in the broad cultural attitude towards feminism. While this seems like a positive development, some students raised concerns about the authenticity of certain celebrities' claims to feminism. They expressed reservations about pop artists' recent change of heart toward the feminist movement as they felt it represents a narrow, exclusionary form of feminism. It is clear from this that the participants of this study neither wholly dismissed pop artists' manifestations of feminism, nor consumed them uncritically (Rivers, 2017).

Further research on this topic would benefit from expanding the sample size to include female students from other universities in both Galway and other parts of Ireland. This would allow the researcher to explore possible variation in the views of female students in different parts of Ireland and in different universities. In addition, obtaining more detailed demographic information, such as what year students are in and what they are studying, would improve the research in numerous ways. Not only would it reveal how representative the research is of the wider female student population, it would also give a better sense of the significance of different factors related to their student status on their views of feminism, such as whether students who are further on in their education, for example 3rd or 4th years, are more supportive of feminism.

Another recommendation for future research in this area would be to include young women who are not in education and occupy a broad range of social positions in terms of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on. This would be much more representative of young women in Ireland and would contribute to a better understanding of the significance of young women's backgrounds on their attitudes towards feminism. Also, it may be of benefit to conduct interviews with participants to get a more nuanced insight into their views on the subject as the depth of information obtained in this study was limited due to its quantitative design. Finally, further research into the views of young men in relation to feminism and the factors that have influenced their beliefs, including the effect, if any, of male celebrities voicing their support for feminism would be a welcome addition in this field.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Dev_Girls: Gender constructions and competing identities through self-representation on Instagram

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Abstract Advances in software development are increasingly shaping the world around us with new software technologies giving global technology corporations the power to predict our behaviour and influence our decisions. The world of software development remains a male-dominated space and despite efforts to address the gender imbalance in this field, women's participation has been on the decline.

This paper examines the potential of social media as a space where gender/technology norms and relations can potentially be challenged, by analysing the Instagram self-representations of a cohort of women studying and working in the software field, the Instagram community Dev_Girls. The research is guided by three central research objectives. The first two objectives are to examine how the users of the Dev_Girls site construct gender through their self-representations and how they negotiate between potentially competing subjectivities as both women and 'women in technology', and how they negotiate between their feminine identity and their (traditionally masculine) identity as software coders. The third and final research objective examines how these self-representations interact with norms and relations within gender and technology.

This paper finds that the Dev_Girls site has given its users a level of empowerment in the form of new visibility as young women in the male-dominated technology industry, but this empowerment is limited by the constraints of social media, which prizes representations of heteronormative femininity over other forms of visual representations (Duffy, 2017, pp. 103; Carah and Dobson, 2016). This paper finds that the Dev_Girls community represents an expression of the values of neoliberalism and post-feminism which young women in contemporary society are expected to embody, values which restrict any real potential to offer a more diverse, challenging, or transformative narrative of what it means to be a woman in today's software industry.

Keywords: Gender equality, STEM, Technology, Social Media, Postfeminism

Introduction

'Most women in the Bay Area are soft and weak, cosseted and naive, despite their claims of worldliness, and generally full of shit'
(former Facebook product manager Antonio García Martínez, *Chaos Monkeys: Obscene Fortune and Random Failure in Silicon Valley*)

'What would you do if you weren't afraid?'
(Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In*)

Technology has changed the world in which we live so dramatically that it is almost unrecognisable from the world in which our parents and grandparents lived. Developments in modern technology have led to unprecedented changes in how we live; from how we receive and consume information, to how we shop, and how we engage with each other. These dramatic shifts have been driven by technology giants such as Google and Amazon and by 'visionaries' such as Apple founder Steve Jobs or Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, whose motto 'move fast and break things' came to define an era where 'innovation' and 'disruption' took precedence over any potential social and political costs (Ganesh, 2018).

While technology continues to race forward at breakneck speed, the participation of women in the development of technology continues to fall behind, particularly in the field of software development. Today, the data and information systems which run the world are controlled by software, from global financial systems to the applications we use at home on our smartphones, and so it is difficult to overstate the role in which software plays in shaping our lives. Increasingly our decisions are shaped by software algorithms, such as those embedded in social media applications like Facebook and Instagram, which determine the information we get to see based on our traits and our behaviour (Warner, 2018). In this context, the underrepresentation of women in the field of software development is not only an economic issue, in that it has been linked to the perpetuation of the gender pay gap (Berakova, 2017; Stansell, 2019; Belgorodskiy et al., 2012; Segovia-Perez et al., 2019; European Commission, 2019) but it also leads to important questions around the social, cultural, and political implications of a world running on software which has been developed primarily by only one half of the population.

The aim of this research is to understand if social media sites such as Instagram can provide a space where gender norms and stereotypes of women and technology can be challenged or disrupted, or if social media is a platform where gender norms and stereotypes of women and technology are reproduced and reified.

Literature review

The following paragraphs will outline the key debates in the literature which are salient to the research objectives which this article endeavours to address.

Gender and technology

Technology's gender problem

A professional sector where the gender gap has stubbornly persisted is the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Globally, only 30 percent of females enrolled in higher education choose a STEM-related field of study, and there are significant gender differences between disciplines, with more women choosing health and welfare studies and natural sciences, compared to disciplines such as information and communication technology (ICT) and engineering, which remain heavily male-dominated (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2017). The gender gap is even more pronounced within the ICT sector, which includes software development. It is concerning that while women are increasingly choosing other STEM related careers, female participation in the ICT industry is on the decline (Mueller, Khuong Truong and Smoke, 2018).

Why it matters: the implications of a male-dominated software industry

The impact of women's underrepresentation in ICT fields in terms of perpetuating economic inequalities and the gender pay gap has been well documented (Berakova, 2017; Stansell, 2019; Belgorodskiy et al., 2012; Segovia-Perez et al., 2019; European Commission, 2019). However, questions around the social, cultural, and political implications of a world running on technology that has been developed primarily by men are less well-researched. Banet-Weiser (2018, pp. 130) highlights that technology companies are increasingly becoming the centre of financial, political, and cultural power, emphasising the importance of feminist attention to the subject. Furthermore, software increasingly shapes and influences our daily decisions, and it has been found that inherent biases in the form of sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination, can be embedded in the algorithms which determine how we are categorised, the type of information we receive and the type of advertising we are targeted with (Bolukbasi et al., 2016, Wagner et al., 2015).

The 'inherent' masculinity of technology

In contemporary terms, technology has come to be defined primarily within the sphere of industry and the military, or as 'the tools of work and war' (Wajcman, 2009) and is viewed as an inherently masculine domain. Mainstream narratives on the history of technological developments render the contributions of women largely invisible. In this world, man is the creator, the visionary and the innovator, and women's relationship to technology ranges from incompetent user, passive beneficiary, to helpless victim of a relentless masculine drive to dominate the world through technological advancement (Wajcman, 2001; Wajcman, 2009).

Theoretical debates on gender and technology

Since the 1970s, feminist scholarship on technology has evolved into divergent schools of thought, with the very nature of gender, technology and how they interact with each other becoming primary sites of contestation (Faulkner, 2001; Wajcman, 2001; Wajcman, 2009). Borrowing from the categorizations put forward by Faulkner (2001), contemporary scholarship on technology can be grouped into three broad areas: women in technology, women, and technology, and 'gender and technology'

Women in technology

The first category of scholarship is primarily concerned with women's low participation in the production of technology and seeks to overcome the issue through a combination of socialization, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination policies and is predominately situated within a liberal feminist tradition (Wajcman, 2009). This approach is built upon a vision of technological determinism, where technology is a positive, fixed, and inevitable force, independent of social, cultural, and political influences such as gender (Yansen and Zukerfeld, 2014; Adam, Howcroft and Richardson, 2004). Here technology is not the issue, but it is women who are 'missing out' on opportunities available to them as a result of their motivations, perceptions, and choices.

Women and technology

The second approach is primarily concerned with the impact of technology on women, as receivers, consumers, and users (Yansen and Zukerfeld, 2014). Here we find highly dichotomous views ranging from the dystopian to the utopian, with technology viewed either as a tool of masculine domination imposed on women as a mechanism for their subjugation, or as a tool of emancipation to be harnessed by women, opening up opportunities for gender to be transcended in the cyber world (Wajcman, 2001; Haraway, 2000, pp. 51).

Gender and technology

More recent research has moved away from positions of essentialism and technological determinism by recognising that there are no fixed gender binaries in relation to the production of or engagement with technology and takes a poststructuralist view that technology is socially constructed, or co-produced, alongside gender (Faulkner, 2001; Wajcman, 2001; Wajcman, 2009). Gender is an integral part of the social shaping of technology, and technology plays a key role in the shaping of society, meaning one cannot understand gender without reference to technology and vice versa (Faulkner, 2001).

Postfeminism, neoliberalism and technology

A postfeminist sensibility

Over the past two decades, the term 'postfeminism' has emerged as an important feature of contemporary feminist analysis, while remaining a strongly contested term within this space (Gill, 2007; Gill, Kelan and Scharff, 2017; Riley et al., 2017). Debates around postfeminism centre primarily on where it is situated ideologically and how the 'post' in postfeminism should be understood (Gill, Kelan and Scharff, 2017) and can be understood as an epistemological break, a historical shift, or a backlash against feminism itself (Gill and Scharff, 2011, pp. 3).
Gill (2007) argues that each of these contesting understandings of postfeminism are problematic, as they fail to identify the specific features of postfeminism, thereby making it difficult to apply postfeminist theory to any particular cultural or media analysis with any rigour. In particular, they fail to account for the developing complexity of media content (Riley et al., 2017). These issues have led to a fourth understanding of postfeminism, put forward by Gill (2007), who argues that postfeminism is best understood not as a theoretical perspective, nor as a historical shift, nor as a straightforward backlash, but rather as a sensibility. According to Gill (2007) these characteristics include the idea that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring, and discipline; a focus on

individualism, choice, and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference.

The 'entanglement' of postfeminism

A key characteristic of a postfeminist sensibility is the ethos that 'all battles have been won' and the idea of the 'pastness' of feminism, framing differences in the experiences of men and women as a matter of individual 'choice' rather than as the result of continuing structural inequalities of gender (Gill, 2014). However, rather than disavowing feminism entirely, a postfeminist sensibility represents the 'entanglement' of both feminist and antifeminist themes (Gill, 2007). McRobbie (2004) describes the 'double entanglement' of postfeminism, where gender inequalities are reified, paradoxically, by drawing on selectively defined feminist values such as empowerment and female liberation.

Central to a postfeminist sensibility is the making and remaking of subjectivity (Riley et al. (2017), Gill and Scharff, (2011, pp. 8), Gill (2008). Gill (2008) argues that it is not only required for contemporary women to look attractive but a 'compulsory (sexual) agency' has become a prerequisite for subjecthood itself. The body is presented both as a source of women's empowerment and as a site of constant self-monitoring, self-surveillance, and self-improvement, in order to conform to narrow, normative representations of female attractiveness. There has also been a shift in contemporary society from women being viewed as passive objects of the male gaze to being active agents in the presentation of their own sexuality, choosing to represent themselves in a seemingly objectified manner, as a means of expressing their sexual liberation (Gill, 2008). In this context, sexual objectification is no longer done to women by men, but rather becomes an expression of women's free will and a celebration of themselves as active subjects, signifying a new disciplinary regime where the external male gaze becomes internalised (Gill, 2008).

Neoliberalism and a postfeminist sensibility

These new types of subjectivities reflect not only a postfeminist sensibility but also the prevalence of neoliberal values, where feminist ideals of liberation are intertwined with values which celebrate individualism, consumerism, and the achievement of beauty through work on the body (Riley et al., 2017). Young women are often seen as the key beneficiaries of the neoliberal world order, as argued by Harris who writes that 'new ideologies about individual responsibility and choices also dovetail with some broad feminist notions about opportunity for young women, making them the most likely candidates for performing a new kind of self-made subjectivity' (Harris, 2004, pp. 6). The pressure, therefore, is put on young woman to live up to an idealised notion of the 'CanDo girl', the living embodiment of neoliberal and postfeminist values of individualism, resilience, and self-belief, who can be identified by their commitment to career success, their belief in their own capacity to succeed, and their display of a consumer lifestyle (Harris, 2004, pp. 13).

Social media: A tool of empowerment?

Social media has democratised the creation and production of media content and as a result it offers a space where gender representations can potentially be shaped in different ways (Caldeira, De Ridder and Van Bauwel, 2018). Self-representation gives the social media user the power to

challenge and play with gender stereotypes and represent their gender identities in non-traditional ways. Rocamora (2011) writes that personal fashion blogs 'constitute an ambivalent space, a space that echoes the position of women in contemporary society'. The ambivalence inherent in social media means that women can control and create their own content which celebrates their sexuality and femininity, thereby giving them a sense of empowerment, but these images can also be transformed into objectifying and degrading material through male commenting, editing and redistribution (Davis, 2018).

Duffy (2017, pp. 103) argues that social media's claims towards the democratization of representation and diversity are viewed as 'dubious at best' by feminist scholars and highlights the 'narrowly defined aesthetic structures' of the top bloggers, who are 'young and overwhelmingly Caucasian or Asian'. Carah and Dobson (2016) further illustrate this point by highlighting that visual 'hotness' or 'heterosexiness' remains 'the most valuable form of social currency for young women' and point to traits of hegemonic femininity – 'slimness, large breasts, curvaceousness, white tanned skin' - which prevail in the postfeminist era and which are reflected in social media images. These arguments run counter to the prevalent narrative of social media as a site of 'realness', 'authenticity' and 'relatability' (Duffy, 2017, pp. 104). This narrative is further contested by the commodification of the personal images on social media, through self-branding, giving rise to the ironic condition of 'authenticity' being leveraged as a tool for self-branding (Khamis, Ang and Welling, 2017). The sense of empowerment, freedom and self-expression is contradicted by the prevalence of capitalist and neoliberal values of consumerism and consumption.

An 'economy of visibility'

Within the context of popular feminism, 'visibility' has shifted from a political act or a means to achieve an end, to becoming the end in itself, which Banet-Weiser describes as popular feminism's 'economy of visibility' (Banet-Weiser, 2018, pp. 21). It is the *visibility* of categories such as gender and race which matters, rather than the structural foundations on which they are built. For example, in an economy of visibility, the wearing of a t-shirt bearing the slogan 'this is what a feminist looks like' can transform the logic of what it *means* to be a feminist into what a feminist *looks* like (Banet-Weiser, 2018, pp. 25). Despite the claims of popular feminism to be about female 'empowerment', in an economy of visibility, empowerment is often achieved through a focus on the visible body, which has now become the 'commodifiable body' (Banet-Weiser, 2018, pp. 25).

The technology industry: The issue with 'leaning in'

Contemporary debates around solving the issue of women's underrepresentation in the software industry are increasingly being shaped by these neoliberal values and a postfeminist sensibility, which can be found within online media, women's magazines and best-selling books such as 'Lean In' by Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg, one of the software industry's most high-profile women (Harvey & Fisher, 2014; Rottenberg, 2013; Kim, Fitzsimons and Kay, 2018). Messages of 'empowerment' to women to take control of their careers by taking a seat at the table place the responsibility on individual women to overcome their internal barriers in order to solve workplace gender inequalities and endorse solutions which require women to change themselves, rather than requiring organizations or management to make any substantive changes to address these issues (Kim, Fitzsimons and Kay, 2018). These discourses have become part of what has been described

by Gill, Kelan and Scharff (2017) as a 'postfeminist common sense', which 'simultaneously recognizes feminist insights yet repudiates the need for change, a common sense that exculpates organizations and locates responsibility with women'. Women working in the technology industry are expected to embody many of these same neoliberal and postfeminist values by taking individual responsibility for overcoming any barriers that may hold them back, while dominant structural inequalities within the technology industry remain largely unacknowledged (Richterich, 2020).

Increasingly women in the technology sector are using online communities to connect with other women (Schindler, 2019), and hashtags such as #womenintech have become popular on Instagram (Instagram, 2020c). This raises some important questions that have not yet been fully examined in the literature. How are women working in the technology industry using the technology of social media to represent themselves? Does social media offer them a space where they can challenge the inherent masculinity of technology, or are they constrained by prevailing forces of neoliberalism, postfeminism and the economy of visibility? The next section will endeavour to address these questions in the context of a particular online community for women working in the software industry, specifically Instagram's Dev_Girls community.

Research Methods

The overarching aim of this paper is to explore Instagram as a space where prevailing norms and stereotypes of gender and technology can potentially be challenged, disrupted or (re)constructed. To this end, three core research objectives have been identified:

- To understand how gender is constructed by members of the Instagram community Dev_Girls through their visual and textual self-representations.
- To examine the ways in which these users are negotiating between potentially competing subjectivities as both women and 'women in technology'.
- To explore the ways in which these self-representations interact with traditional norms and stereotypes of gender and technology.

Given the focus on themes such as femininity as a bodily property, a shift from objectification to subjectification and the sexualization of culture, the analysis framework will be heavily influenced by two seminal bodies of scholarship which are concerned with visual representations of femininity. The first is Laura Mulvey's theory of the 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975) and the second is Goffman's work on 'gender display' (Goffman, 1976). The analytical framework of this paper has incorporated a number of Goffman's gender display visual codes, namely feminine touch, stance, expression, and licensed withdrawal (Goffman, 1976).

The research methods employed by this study are modelled on previous research by Smith and Sanderson (2015) and leverage a mixed methods approach, constituting a content analysis of visual representations and a separate thematic textual analysis. The content analysis was applied to the photographs posted on the Dev_Girls Instagram page while the thematic analysis focused on the captions attached to these posts. This research is based on analysis of the images and captions

which were posted on the Dev_Girls Instagram page during a two-month period, from 1st September to 31st October 2019.

Findings

The content analysis of the photographs, captions and comments from the research sample uncovered three broad themes: 'normative, Western femininity', 'the hard-working', 'Can-Do' girl', and 'femininity and technology'.

Normative, Western femininity

A striking feature of the visual analysis is the prevalence of representations of normative standards of female attractiveness within the Dev_Girls photographs, such as whiteness, slimness, and typically 'Anglophone' facial features (Shields-Dobson, 2015, pp. 70). The analysis clearly identified that the Dev_Girls users are primarily attractive, young, and overwhelmingly white. Of the 'selfie' photographs analysed, the majority included multiple visual codes which corresponded with Goffman's research on gender display, including the 'ritualization of subordination' (Goffman, 1976, pp. 40) and 'licensed withdrawal' (Goffman, 1976, pp. 65). The majority of the 'selfie' photos feature visual codes of submission including canting poses[2] and feminine touch[3], and in almost half of the 'selfie' photographs the subjects' gaze is averted. In the majority of the 'selfie' photographs (66 percent), the subject is pictured as being passive, in that they are not participating actively in the situation, recalling Mulvey's argument that women are often depicted as a passive object to be looked at (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 62). In many of the Dev_Girls images, the subjects appear to be unaware that they are being looked at by the viewer, implying their complete trust in and submission to the situation. A significant number of the 'selfie' photographs have been taken from behind, which gives the impression of a sense of voyeurism. Here there is a strong sense that the viewer is spying on the subject, placing them in a particularly vulnerable and submissive situation. The subject is seemingly unaware of the viewer's eyes on them and is comfortable, sensing no threat. Despite the Dev_Girls having ownership and agency in their self-presentation, these visual codes of passivity and submission are present, suggesting an internalisation of the external male gaze where the Dev-Girls chose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner, as a means of expressing their free will (Gill, 2008).

The hard-working, 'Can-Do Girl'

The second theme which emerges from the textual analysis is the theme of hard work as a means of realising one's goals and achieving success. An analysis of the captions reveals that the users of the Dev_Girls page regularly work long hours, often into the evenings and weekends, and spend their free time focusing on self-management and self-improvement. The analysis does not reveal this labour to be a negative factor in the subjects' lives, but rather a means to better productivity

[2] A body or head 'canting' pose is a further indicator of subordination and submission, where the subject is photographed in a pose with the level of their head lowered relative to that of others, including the viewer of the photograph (Goffman, 1976, pp. 46).
[3] Goffman describes women more often than men, pictured using their fingers and hands to touch objects or to touch themselves, which he describes as 'feminine touch' (Goffman, 1976, pp. 29)

and achieving desired results. Hard work and long hours are a necessity in order to get the work done and the resultant sacrifice of leisure time is deemed acceptable. Continuous self-improvement is another key factor, particularly professional self-improvement through learning and the captions further reveal a focus on self-motivation and general self-improvement. A love of their work as coders or programmers is also evident from the analysis.

The textual analysis reveals that the users of the Dev_Girls site display many characteristics of the typical 'Can-Do Girl', the living embodiment of neoliberal values such as entrepreneurialism, individual responsibility, and self-belief (Harris, 2003, cited by Banet-Weiser, 2018, pp. 28). The research subjects reveal themselves to be highly motivated and ambitious and they represent themselves as responsible for their own success.

Femininity and Technology

A significant feature of the Dev Girl photographs is the ubiquity of the laptop, workstation, or computer screen, which features in almost every image. The vast majority (98 percent) of the 'self' photographs feature at least one of these devices. In one way this is not a surprising feature as the Dev_Girls community is made up of women who work or study in the technology sector. Nonetheless, a reading of how these artefacts are positioned within the context of the self-representations of users of the Dev_Girls site leads to some notable findings in the context of gender and technology.

In the majority (60 percent) of the 'selfie' images, the subject is pictured passively with their laptop or workstation, meaning they are not interacting with or working on these devices. However, a closer inspection of many of these photographs reveals that these images do not simply represent an attractive, feminine subject but also feature lines of computer code on a screen, presumably written by the subject of the photograph. As with many science and engineering disciplines, software coding is often viewed as a masculine pursuit (Faulkner, 2000). Therefore, negotiations between femininity and masculinity become evident when analysing a group of photos where the subject is pictured with their laptop turned towards the camera and their computer code is visible on the screen. The visual codes of normative femininity are still clearly evident, but the laptop shows lines of computer code, a more masculine element which contrasts with these images of femininity.

Another collection of photographs further illustrates these negotiations between femininity and masculinity: those which feature the subject working at their laptop or computer. Again, these images represent a level of normative femininity, however they represent a much less gendered image of the subjects. These images represent a visual subjectivity that is not usually visible in mainstream media representations of gender and technology, that of young women actively engaged in their work in the technology space.

A number of the photographs which appear on Dev_Girls site feature comments from what appear to be male Instagram users[4]. These comments are often disparaging, negative or mocking in nature and provide some insight into the challenges which are faced by women in the technology space. These comments illustrate the conflicting and paradoxical subjectivities which the research subjects have to navigate within the Dev_Girls community. On one hand, there is an expectation for them to embody traits of sexual desirability, to satisfy the male commenters' sexual fantasy of the 'cute cybergirl'. However, the subjects are also derided, dismissed, and patronised when they represent themselves as 'too' sexy or 'too' feminine as this leads to disbelief in their ability to be 'real' software coders.

Discussion

Gender constructions in the Dev-Girls community

The visible body is the primary means of self-representation by the users of the Dev_Girls site and the primary means through which they construct their gender identity. The overwhelming majority of the images represent women who are white, attractive, and young. While overtly sexualised imagery was not found, the images nonetheless represent a strongly gendered visual subjectivity. Through their styling, the photos represent a type of beauty that is presented as 'real' and 'relatable', but which in reality is performative and represents a homogenous and limited image of beauty, with diversity and difference remaining unacknowledged. Central to the gendered visual representations of the Dev Girls is their 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 62), with the body styled, packaged, and presented as a commodity to be looked at and admired. This is a notable finding as the Dev_Girls community is ostensibly a community for women, rather than for men, suggesting an internalization of the 'male gaze', where objectification is no longer done by men to women, but rather is considered an expression of free will and agency by women themselves (Gill and Scharff, 2011, pp. 8).

While the findings reveal that the majority of the 'selfie' images reproduce traditional gender stereotypes, this does not tell the entire story, as within the research samples another subjectivity can be found - that of the female technology professional. These photos represent an image that is in contrast with traditional gender norms and stereotypes, that of a young woman employed in the field of technology, pictured actively focused on her work. It is important to highlight that these images are not the majority, nor are they gender-free, as they remain bound within the narrow confines of normative Western beauty. Nonetheless, there is agency and an alternative subjectivity evident which can be viewed as a disruption to the traditional gender stereotype of the attractive, passive female.

Another means of gender construction within the Dev_Girls community is the prevalence of the hard working 'Can-Do Girl' (Harris, 2003, cited by Banet-Weiser, 2018, pp. 28). Of particular note is the absence of gender inequality in the software industry as a topic for discussion on the

[4] It should be noted that there is no definitive way to ascertain the gender of the commenters, however for each negative comment the Instagram profile was checked and based on this check the commenters appeared to be male.

Dev_Girls community, a community of women engaged in this industry. As 'Can-Do Girls', it can be argued that the users of the Dev_Girls site view overcoming any barriers they encounter as their individual responsibility, to be addressed by working harder to fit in, rather than as a result of structural inequalities in the technology sphere (Kim, Fitzsimons and Kay, 2018).

Negotiations between 'femininity' and (masculine) 'technology'

Within the Dev_Girls community, a high value is placed on 'femininity', as evidenced by the prevalence of visual self-representations of normative attractiveness and the popularity of these images within the community. However, there are negotiations at work between this femininity and an alternative subjectivity, that of the (traditionally masculine) software coder. These negotiations take on several forms, the first is situated within an essentialist perspective, where the users of the Dev_Girls site retain their inherent femininity through visual representations of normative attractiveness, which are then coupled with images of technology, such as a laptop or computer. Negotiations between femininity and (masculine) technology are particularly evident in the images where the laptop or computer screen is turned towards the camera and the lines of computer code are visible. The laptop and code are not simply employed as accessories in these images, as there is clearly a desire to show the computer code, representing the users work to the viewer. While these images often portray visual representations of normative femininity, this is offset by the presence of the computer code, the product of software engineering, a traditionally male-dominated pursuit (Faulkner, 2000). Within these images a new, ambivalent subjectivity is formed, echoing the theory of social media as an 'ambivalent space' (Rocamora, 2011) where the demands of the male gaze are satisfied but a space is carved out where attention can also be drawn to one's technical work. Images of the users at work on their laptops further highlight this new, ambivalent subjectivity, making visible a representation that is not usually visible in mainstream media, that of young women at work in the technology space, while still highlighting the limits placed upon women who must represent themselves in a narrow and limited way so that this visibility can be achieved.

The challenges faced by users of the Dev_Girls site in negotiating between 'feminine' and 'technical' subjectivities can be seen in the disparaging comments written by male commenters. These comments illustrate the sometimes hostile and misogynistic response faced by women who enter the technology space, a kind of 'toxic geek masculinity' (Banet-Weiser, 2018, pp. 132). Within these comments lies a contradictory message: it is 'sexy' for women to be interested in technology, but they cannot expect to be taken seriously as 'real coders' if they present themselves as 'too sexy'. Here again the ambivalence of social media is brought to the fore, the users of the Dev_Girls site are 'empowered' by the ability to self-represent on social media and use this 'freedom' to craft a new subjectivity, that of a young woman working in the technology industry. These women are rewarded with visibility and popularity for their visual expressions of normative femininity. Simultaneously and paradoxically, these women then find themselves at the mercy of a culture of surveillance, where they are subject to male commentary which is mocking and demeaning (Davis, 2018)[5].

[5] It should be noted that the negative commentary represents a small number of the overall comments on the Dev_Girls site.

The Dev_Girls community and gender/technology norms and stereotypes

"You cannot be what you cannot see" is one of the key messages of the 'Girls who Code' initiative, an organization which focuses on closing the gender gap in computing (Girls Who Code, no date, b). This statement reflects the notion that more women could be encouraged to enter the field of software development if they could see role models already working in the field that they could relate to. The Dev_Girls community represents a new kind of role model for young women, previously not visible in mainstream media, that of a young woman enjoying her work in a highly skilled, high tech industry. Through their visual representations the users of the site are providing an alternative subjectivity to the traditionally masculine computer coder, that of the young female computer coder. Though essentialist in nature, the underlying message of the Dev_Girls community, that you can be both a developer and a girl, is a message which represents a disruption to the norm. However, the potential for the Dev_Girls community to challenge gender norms in technology by presenting an alternative subjectivity is dramatically lessened by the prevalence of visual representations of heteronormative femininity. Rather than challenge and disrupt, these self-representations serve to reify and reproduce traditional gender stereotypes of women as objects to be looked at.

In summary, the interactions between the self-representations of the Dev_Girls community and gender norms and stereotypes can be described as contradictory, paradoxical, and ambivalent in nature. Women in this community are empowered on one hand to claim visibility for themselves but disempowered by the forces of neoliberalism and postfeminism which allow for only a selective type of feminism and resistance to be expressed. The users of the Dev_Girls community are unique in that they are women working in a male-dominated profession, but success or failure in this field hinges only on their individual motivation and determination, while structural inequalities in the field remain unacknowledged In many ways the self-representations on the Dev_Girls community attempts to challenge or disrupt gender norms, but these attempts can be characterised as toothless in nature, as there is little evidence of any real attempt to break out of social media's narrow and restrictive sensibilities and present a compelling and genuinely empowering new narrative for women in technology.

Conclusion

Women in the software industry face many challenges, including sexism and a male-dominated culture, but the responsibility for dealing with these issues often falls on the shoulders of the women themselves, rather than being recognised as structural issues which need to be addressed at a macro level by organizations or policymakers. These barriers can be seen within the Dev_Girls community, where male resistance and a form of toxic geek masculinity is expressed through disparaging and sexualizing commentary. It is possible that these barriers are holding the women of the Dev_Girls community back from self-representing in any way that could be considered truly transformative. It could be argued that these young women have gained entry to this male dominated world but have embodied the notion that their presence has to be balanced by self-representations which are unchallenging, unthreatening, and appealing to the male gaze.

Despite the opportunities offered by communities such as the Dev_Girls site to empower its users to craft an alternative narrative around what a software programmer looks like, this paper questions the truly transformative capacity of the Dev_Girls site. While the users of the site have expanded the representation of a software programmer beyond the traditional 'male geek' stereotype, this new representation remains almost as narrow and homogenous, thus limiting the potential of the site to act as a disrupting or challenging force. A sense of empowerment can be seen in the form of new visibility, shared community, and a sense of achievement as women in the technology industry, but this empowerment is limited by the constraints of social media, which prizes representations of heteronormative femininity over other forms of visual representation by women. This research finds that the Dev_Girls community represents a perfect expression of the values of neoliberalism and postfeminism which young women in contemporary society are expected to embody, values which restrict any real potential to offer a more diverse, challenging, or transformative narrative of what it means to be a woman in today's software industry.

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