3

Documenting Harassment, Sexism, and Misogyny in Digital Feminist Spaces

In 2005, New Yorker Thao Nguyen snapped a photo of a man masturbating while sitting across from her on the subway. After getting little support from police, Nguyen uploaded it onto the popular photo-sharing site Flickr, to warn the public and shame the perpetrator. Not long after, the *New York Daily News* published the picture on its front page. Inspired by Nguyen's efforts to challenge such behavior, a group of seven residents started a website called Hollaback!, which, according to cofounder and executive director Emily May, invited members of the public to share personal stories of "street harassment" and eventually, "map" them using GPS-based technology. Over 10 years later, Hollaback! identifies itself not merely as a website where the public can document experiences of harassment in public spaces, but as a "movement" that relies on a network of local activists to "better understand harassment, to ignite public conversations, and to develop innovative strategies to ensure equal access to public spaces" (Hollaback! 2016). Local Hollaback! chapters now operate in 84 cities, in 31 countries, and in 19 different languages. The 2014–2015 annual report documents the popularity of the movement, boasting over 40,000 Facebook fans and 17,500 Twitter followers. Over 11,000 stories have been shared on Hollaback!'s digital platforms since the movement's inception, with roughly 1,800 stories being collected each year (Emily May, email to author, February 15, 2018).

Over the past decade, Hollaback! is just one of many digital feminist campaigns that has been created and employed to document and disclose various experiences of sexism, misogyny, and rape culture. Although Hollaback!, along with Everyday Sexism, Who Needs Feminism?, and #BeenRapedNeverReported have achieved high levels of visibility within mainstream culture, we in fact know

Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture. Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller, Oxford University Press (2019). DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190697846.003.0003

very little about how the public use and disclose experiences to these sites (for exceptions, see Dimond et al. 2013; Fileborn 2018). For example, while we might assume that as an anti-street-harassment movement, Hollaback! provides a place to share stories of "street harassment," what sorts of behaviors does this entail, how are disclosures "curated" (Fileborn 2018), and who is most likely to contribute to this site?

Drawing on a qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis of 784 pieces of digital content from four case studies: Hollaback! (n=159), Everyday Sexism (n=175), Who Needs Feminism? (n=150), and #BeenRapedNeverReported (n=300), this chapter provides one of the first attempts to analyze these popular feminist campaigns by asking: what experiences of harassment, misogyny, and rape culture are girls, women, and some men disclosing on feminist digital platforms? The statistics generated from qualitative content analysis provides insight into the kinds of abuse women and girls experience in their day-to-day lives, but also the types of experiences that are seen as legitimate to post, and the kinds of *voices* most heard on these platforms. As Wånggren (2016) notes, "Storytelling is not neutral, but requires an ongoing evaluation of whose stories are given the dominant place" (11). Our analysis also allows us to determine the types of posts/voices/information *not* included in these platforms, highlighting issues of access and privilege in doing digital feminist activism. This is significant in helping us understand not only what modes and practices of engagement these platforms are offering their users, but also what types of topics, discursive strategies, and affects are foreclosed.

In addition to providing one of the first accounts of *what* experiences of harassment and abuse girls, women, and some men share on these sites, we reveal the "slipperiness" of these sites, and how they are often used in unexpected ways. As a result, we use the data from this chapter to develop an argument we carry throughout the book—namely that digital feminist activism is far more complex and nuanced than one might initially expect, and is used in a multitude of ways, for many purposes, drawing on a range of different conventions or "vernacular practices" (Gibbs et al. 2015). Taking a cue from Zizi Papacharissi (2016), our findings highlight why scholars should stop assuming social media and digital platforms will produce the same results within different social movements, and instead pay close attention to uncovering various nuances in how these movements unfold, connect, and operate over time across digital spaces.

The chapter begins by providing background information on the four case studies we analyze in this chapter, before teasing out connections and differences between them.

Hollaback!

Hollaback! is a nonprofit organization that seeks to end street harassment and "develop innovative strategies to ensure equal access to public spaces" (Hollaback! 2016). Among our case studies, Hollaback! is unique because of the multiple means through which users can share experiences of street harassment—through textual descriptions of their encounter, "mapping" their harassment via a GPS-based app, or uploading photos of their harasser or place of harassment. When we conducted the analysis, the website was organized by six drop-down menus: Home, Research, About, Resources, Take Action, and Donate.[1] Thus, while this chapter focuses on personal testimonials and how these stories function to digitally document sexual harassment, we want to emphasize that the Hollaback! site also functions to educate the public about street harassment, disseminate research, and promote the nonprofit organization's various initiatives. These include their HeartMob platform, which provides support for those experiencing online harassment, and The People's Supper, which provides safe spaces for marginalized communities to share personal experiences of violence in the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election. Nonetheless, the website's original mission of sharing stories of gendered street harassment to *problematize* it, and make its ubiquity *visible,* is what the organization is best known for, and forms the bulk of their digital content.

Upon entering the site at the time of our data analysis, users could find a home page featuring the most recent submitted testimonials of street harassment. Organized in a reverse-chronological blog-style format, stories range in length from a few sentences to several paragraphs. Below each post are widgets to share the stories via a range of social media platforms, including Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook, as well as an option to leave a comment. Significantly, there is also a button that reads "I've Got Your Back," which enables users to engage in "click-based expressions of care" (Rentschler 2017, 576). A figure below the button displays the number of times in which it has been clicked. The button is a unique design affordance of the Hollaback! site and could be considered a key means of showing and quantitatively documenting the existence of "listening publics" (Lacey 2013), which increase feelings of connectedness and solidarity with others (Dean 2010a; Papacharissi 2015). As it is a movement that seeks to end harassment in public spaces, we were interested in analyzing what experiences of harassment contributors share to the site, and how they shape or are shaped by platform architecture, affordances, and vernaculars. Our sample was drawn using systematic random sampling of posts from January, April, and August each year between 2006—when the blog went live, and 2015, when we carried out the research. Retrieving every fifth submission, our search yielded 159 posts.

Who Needs Feminism?

In 2012, the Who Needs Feminism? campaign was launched. Initiated by 16 students enrolled in the "Women in the Public Sphere" course at Duke University, it aimed to problematize the negative associations with the word "feminism." In addition to displaying posters around Duke's campus, the students used the popular microblogging site Tumblr to post photos of themselves holding signs explaining why they need feminism. According to cofounder Ashley Tsai, the campaign emerged because of the ways the class felt passionately about feminism, but "couldn't really talk about it outside of the classroom because no one even knew what the word feminism meant, or they completely misunderstood what it meant." Since 2012, there have been over 5,000 submissions to the original Who Needs Feminism? Tumblr site, and over 60 other universities worldwide have started their own Who Needs Feminism? campaigns and separate websites (see for example, UK Feminista 2014).

Tumblr is a microblogging site that both "curates" and "remixes" content produced by others, and prioritizes visual images, making this photo-sharing project an excellent fit for this platform (Kanai 2016; Ringrose and Lawrence forthcoming). As Alexander Cho has argued, Tumblr is a platform that trades in affect (2015). Although it makes use of the written word, there is "something else" being circulated through the "felt register of suggestive imagery, one of intimation, assemblage, intensity and aesthetic" (44). Submissions to this site are presented in reverse chronological order, and each submission displays the number of "notes" associated with each post. In this case, notes include the number of times the submission was commented upon, reblogged, or "liked." Typical submissions range from several hundred to several thousand notes, indicating the extent to which content is widely shared, and presumably, affective.

One of the main conventions that define this site is the ways participants use signs to articulate their need for feminism. This is part of Tumblr's visual meme culture, where an artifact is produced to narrate and document an event or experience—in this case in the form of a sign held up in front of the contributor. The sign itself is the focal point of most photos. Many are highly stylized, and make use of different colors, sizes of print, bold, italics, and underlining of key words. Amy Dobson (2015) has explored the development of "pain memes" on You Tube as part of a visual culture where stories of abuse are narrated through flash cards rather than speaking the event. This is the narrative form that takes place on Who Needs Feminism?, where short passage script relates the experience through the visceral means of the handcrafted sign. In many ways, this follows a long tradition of feminist craftivism that enacts activism through

traditionally feminized crafts such as drawing, sewing, and knitting (Bain 2016; Kelly 2014). Here, the artful potential of the sign is evident via the use of texture, color, and embellishments. The material aspects of the sign and stylistic aspects create new forms of vernacular signage practices, which convey emotion and affect, which we argue elsewhere are important for making sexual violence both *knowable* and *felt* within our contemporary digital media landscape (Mendes, Keller, and Ringrose submitted). The affective registers of Tumblr are highlighted in the number of "notes" each post contains, compounding the feelings of support one receives as the image is reblogged through the Tumblr network.

Unlike other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Tumblr posts contain no personal profiles and are usually anonymously authored. This is a key affordance of the platform in that the possibility of anonymity invites engagements where anonymity may be preferred. Consequently, Tumblr has become a platform that is particularly popular with marginalized groups, including people of color, queer communities, and girls and women. This also includes youth (especially youth who are part of these marginalized groups), many of whom are looking for digital spaces where they are "safe" to explore identities and ideas that may be unwelcome elsewhere (Cho 2015; Thelandersson 2014; Warfield 2016). As Who Needs Feminism? is organized in reverse chronological order, we began our data collection on March 15, 2015, and retrieved every third submission until we had collected 150 posts. The last submission was dated May 24, 2014.

Everyday Sexism

In 2012, 26-year-old British feminist Laura Bates launched Everyday Sexism in response to the dominant postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009) suggesting that sexism is a thing of the past. The project collects personal testimonials of diverse experiences of sexism, including workplace harassment, sexual assault, body shaming, catcalling, and gender stereotyping, documenting these stories in reverse-chronological order on its website. Visitors to the site submit their own experiences through a submission box on the homepage, via email, or Twitter (#EverydaySexism). Published stories, which can range in length from one or two sentences to several paragraphs, are accompanied by selected "tags" that describe where the incident of sexism occurred, such as "workplace," "home," "public transport," or "university." Contributors can also create their own tags, which categorize the incident beyond place; examples include "boysareperverts," and "courage." While submissions are written

and published with the assumption that they'll be read by a larger audience, Everyday Sexism does not publish comments and contains no widgets to share posts to other social media platforms. In this sense, unlike other initiatives such as Hollaback! or Who Needs Feminism?, affective intensities and connections fostered on this site are not readily visible or quantifiable. Instead, as we will discuss later, participants engage in unique vernacular practices whereby the affective intensities and connections are visible only within the discursive fabric of the testimonials themselves.

Like the founders of Hollaback! and Who Needs Feminism?, Laura Bates never expected Everyday Sexism to become popular, due in part to her lack of funding and means to publicize the project "beyond my own Facebook wall" (Bates 2014, 16), Yet, to Bates' surprise, the site collected more than 1,000 entries from all over the world within its first two months. And although it was originally established to "record daily instances of sexism" (Bates 2014, 18), it soon became a place where women were sharing cases of "serious harassment and assault, abuse and rape" (Bates 2014, 18) because, as Bates noted, there wasn't anywhere else for people to share such experiences. Organized in reverse chronological order, Everyday Sexism, like Who Needs Feminism? lacks an archive. Instead, users can scroll back in time to previous "pages," which typically list between 10 to 15 entries. We began our data collection on June 6, 2015, and going back 10 pages at a time, we selected every third entry, yielding a total of 175 posts. The last submission was collected on April 14, 2014.

#BeenRapedNeverReported

In the fall of 2014, the #BeenRapedNeverReported hashtag began to trend on Twitter after allegations of sexual violence by prominent Canadian radio host Jian Ghomeshi emerged (see chapter 6 for further discussion of this hashtag). Initiated by two Canadian journalists, the hashtag publicly responded to suggestions that Ghomeshi's accusers were lying because they did not immediately report his acts of sexual violence to the police. Contrary to a myriad of myths around sexual violence and the ways a "typical" or "legitimate" victim should respond, the hashtag sought to document the reasons that women do not report sexual violence. In the coming days and weeks, many girls, women, and some men used the hashtag to share their own reasons for not reporting their assaults, creating an archive of 8 million tweets that document the prevalence of sexual violence. Using a designed algorithm, we randomly selected 300 tweets using the #BeenRapedNeverReported hashtag from November 2014 and March 2015, the period in which the hashtag was most active.

What Experiences Are Being Reported

Although all four of our case studies in some way seek to challenge rape culture, given their different areas of focus, our analysis of 784 pieces of digital content showcase the diversity of experiences shared within and between these digital campaigns. For example, as a movement that seeks to end harassment in public spaces, it was no surprise that our entire sample of Hollaback! posts related in some way to "street harassment." In a similar vein, posts to Everyday Sexism revolved broadly around issues of sexism and discriminatory practices, but also tackled body shaming, policing, and other forms of violence. Despite the fact that Who Needs Feminism? was not focused on one particular feminist issue, the overwhelming topic addressed was violence against women. Although there is no doubt that some of these campaigns invite certain types of experiences, the next section will tease out some of the most prominent issues addressed across our four campaigns, arguing that even within feminist platforms, some issues or experiences are seen as more legitimate to post than others. In addition to paying attention to dominant vernacular practices, the chapter also highlights some of the unexpected and "slippery" ways these platforms were used, highlighting how conventions can change over time.

STREET HARASSMENT

With the exception of #BeenRapedNeverReported, "street harassment" was an experience shared by many contributors across the case studies. Although it might be easy to assume "street harassment" is a monolithic practice, both academic scholarship (see Vera-Gray 2016b) and our own analysis reveals the complexities in the public's understanding of this practice and what it entails. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Liz Kelly's (1988) continuum model of sexual violence, all types of street harassment should not only be considered harmful, but as forms of violence. When we took a close look at submissions to Hollaback!, we found participants shared a wide range of practices including being "catcalled," groped, verbally abused, stalked, followed, or blocked; or witnessing obscene gestures such as masturbation and flashing. By far, "catcalling" was the most common practice reported here (n=74 or 47 percent of Hollaback! posts), which included wolf-whistling, "lip smacking," "kissy noises," horn-honking, comments such as "hey baby," or attempts to strike up a conversation with women in public spaces. As many contributors detailed, these behaviors were frequently combined with comments about appearance, or sexualized "banter" about what the perpetrator would like to do to recipients. As one anonymous person wrote:

> I was walking to my school's student union when a man who appeared to be another student accompanied by his friend started following me and yelling things at me like "Ay yo gurl, lemme lick your butt." And they both laughed at me when I would turn back to look at them. I didn't know how to respond so I didn't say anything and kept walking till I got inside. It made me mad that I couldn't feel comfortable on my own campus.

Although "catcalling" is often regarded as harmless banter, or seen as a compliment, it is clear from this submission above, and many more like it, that such behavior creates deep discomfort, anger, and feelings of being unsafe, even in institutionalized spaces such as university campuses. Scholarship has shown that these deep feelings of anger and frustration can be powerful motivators in encouraging online disclosure in the first place (Fileborn 2017).

While behaviors categorized as "catcalling" were the most prevalent recorded in our Hollaback! sample, contributors also documented a range of other practices including obscene gestures (flicking of tongues); men rubbing or exposing themselves to women in public spaces (n=38, or 24 percent); being followed, blocked, or cornered (n=32, or 20 percent); or being "leered at" (n=24, or 15 percent). What is particularly significant is that victims rarely experienced just one type of harassment, as demonstrated in this post:

> I was getting a tram back home during rush hour and felt something touching me from behind. I turned to see a man looking me straight in the eye and decided to move away from him. Moments later I feel it happening again but now the tram was so cramped I couldn't move away. I turned my head and the same man had followed me and was groping me again. I didn't know what to do as he smirked at me when I began to panic.

Here, the contributor notes the ways she was groped and followed, pointing out the ways her assailant was seemingly amused by her response, and presumably the knowledge that there was little she could, or would, do. As discussed in the literature review, scholars have paid attention to the role of entitlement in rape culture—where men not only feel they have a right to access women's bodies but feel confident they can access them without fear of consequence (Mendes 2015). In this submission, the man was not deterred by the victim moving away but followed her and continued to grope her despite being aware that his actions were unwanted. This behavior is symptomatic of a rape culture, which was evident in a vast number of posts.

Although Hollaback! was certainly the platform in which various forms of "street harassment" were shared, it was by no means the only one. For example, street harassment was commonly used as a reason that feminism was deemed necessary in Who Needs Feminism? submissions. As one contributor shared, "I need feminism because when I was 12 a man followed me on the street whilst touching himself on a motorbike. My dad said it was my fault for dressing too revealing. I was wearing JEANS and a JACKET!" In a similar vein, Everyday Sexism is replete with testimonials of street harassment, from men shouting, "Got a nice pair!" to a woman as she cycled into work, to others challenging the idea that catcalling is reserved for women who dress provocatively, noting, "I often get cat called on the streets, wearing normal everyday clothes. Jeans, t-shirt, trainers." While harassment in public spaces was a common concern, so too was the issue of violence against women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

When looking across our sample, we noted that violence against women was the single most commonly reported experience being shared among our case studies (n=229, or 29 percent of total). Experiences of violence were shared in many diverse ways, in part, influenced by various platform affordances. For example, the platform architecture of Hollaback! and Everyday Sexism, which encourages the public to "map" their experiences, and "share *your* story of sexism," are likely to have shaped vernacular practices of sharing specific, personalized, "incident accounts" (Bletzer and Koss 2004) of sexual assault and violence. Sharing her incident account on Hollaback!, Christine recalled, "I have been masturbated at on the A and F trains and once on the Q, a man sat next to me, actually grabbed my hand and placed it on his erection." In addition to providing written testimonies of their experiences, some Hollaback! contributors made use of the photo-sharing capabilities, and either uploaded photos of men who attacked or harassed them, or in some cases, of places where they were attacked or abused (Figure 3.1).

While this level of detail was typical among Everyday Sexism and Hollaback!, we noticed that in addition to providing these personalized experiences of sexual assault, contributors to Who Needs Feminism? in particular, and #BeenRapedNeverReported to a lesser extent, also shared *other people's* experiences of sexism, harassment, and violence. Although we recognize our study is by no means representative, we were surprised to note that only 15 percent of our #BeenRapedNeverReported sample (n=45) shared personal experiences of sexual assault. This low figure may be due to the shame and stigma victims of sexual assault or harassment continue to experience. Instead, talking *generally* about violence may be a less risky strategy for those who want

HOLLA ON THE GO: IN TRANSIT

A few weeks ago, a car full of men followed my car for 15 minutes in stop and go traffic. I didn't think to snap a pic, so last night when the same thing happened, I got this. This car had 3 men in it with a woman driving. They stared at me while at a red light, then started screaming at me and holding up pictures of women in lingerie or less.

Figure 3.1 Image from Hollaback post. Author screenshot. Copyright permission granted by Emily May of Hollaback!

to participate in wider discussions about rape culture without letting friends, family, or acquaintances know about their experiences. As one Baltimore native wrote on Who Needs Feminism?: "I need feminism because three of the last four homicide victims in my city were women. (Be safe out there, Baltimore)." By highlighting forms of violence directed toward other women, this contributor was able to identify violence against women as a serious issue, while using her voice to speak for those who cannot. Although it is unclear whether this contributor has experienced violence herself, Who Needs Feminism? nevertheless opens up space for those who wish to add their voice to the conversation of why feminism is necessary, without the "risk" of having to disclose personal experiences.

SEXISM

The third issue most commonly addressed was that of sexism or gendered discrimination—a topic that varied in prominence across our case studies. Unsurprisingly, sexism was regularly discussed in submissions to Everyday

Sexism whose purpose is to "catalogue instances of sexism experienced on a day to day basis" (Everyday Sexism n.d.). Importantly, our analysis of 175 posts from the site demonstrates the multifaceted ways this term is interpreted or understood. This includes stereotypes about "appropriate" gender roles or "natural" abilities and ambitions (n=49, or 28 percent), sexually suggestive comments and propositioning (n=39, or 22 percent), discrimination at work (n=19, or 11 percent), and body shaming comments (n=9, or 5 percent). When thinking about who the instigators of sexism are, common responses included male peers, classmates, co-workers, customers, and employers. As one school-aged girl shared, a group of boys asked her if she was "giving away free blow jobs" when walking down the hall to class. Another participant recalled being called a "slag" by a stranger "because I looked like I wanted his cock in my mouth," while someone else shared her experience of being followed by a van of boys and asked if she wanted "to fuck." In other cases, strangers did not ask, but *told* women what they would do to them. As Louise posted, "A man at Leicester train station shouted I will fuck you up your pussy as I walked by today."

Although most of the submissions dealing with sexism referred to sexism against women, our analysis provided some insight into the ways these issues were also experienced by LGBTQ+ communities. For example, within Who Needs Feminism?, four submissions (3 percent of total) addressed discrimination directed to trans communities or those who do not conform to traditional gender binaries. To wit, one contributor writes, "I need feminism because transgender individuals face twice the national unemployment rate." Several LGBTQ+ contributors shared experiences of hate crimes, including abusive comments such as being called "dirty lesbians" or "lesbo." As one contributor to Hollaback! shared, "I was called a faggot in front of Randall Library at UNCW."

What is clear from analyzing data from our case studies in general, but Everyday Sexism in particular, is that girls and women experience sexism and harassment not only from strangers, but from friends, family members, peers, bosses, customers, and colleagues as well. Although lone "strangers" are identified in most cases (n=63, or 36 percent), groups of strange men (n=25, or 14 percent), male co-workers (n=15, or 9 percent), peers at school (n=14, or 8 percent), and acquaintances and friends (n=11, or 6 percent) were also identified as perpetrators. And while the exact location of sexism was "unclear" in 14 percent of all Everyday Sexism submissions (n=25), this level of detail was documented in many submissions. Looking through the data, 26 percent of all submissions (n=45) took place particularly in public spaces such as parks or the street (n=45, or 26 percent). As Sarah shared:

> I was walking home from a bar in West London on Saturday night. I was wearing black jeans, a top, a leather jacket, and sandals. As I waited alone at some traffic lights, I heard applause break out outside a bar just behind me, and a man shouted "WHAT AN ARSE, THAT IS AN ARSE!," whilst other men whooped and clapped. I didn't turn around, I was too upset and felt that responding would achieve nothing. Instead I just crossed the road, embarrassed and blushing, and continued on my way home, feeling vulnerable and degraded.

As is clearly demonstrated here, a dominant discourse in rape culture and lad culture (Jackson and Sundaram 2015) suggests that sexual harassment is simultaneously complimentary and playful banter that does no real harm.

How Do Participants Engage with the Site?

Now that we have highlighted some of the key issues being discussed across these platforms, we will pay closer attention to *how* participants use these platforms and engage with these sites. Taking a cue from critical technology studies, we attend to emerging vernacular practices, which we argue have been shaped by platform architecture, affordances, and conventions (see also Harvey 2015; Star 1999), which work to simultaneously encourage and discourage certain narratives from particular groups of people. In following sections then, we argue that *doing* digital feminism does not merely involve sharing an account of a discrete experience, but often setting the scene, explaining their responses, calling out oppressive practices and structures, asserting their agency or vulnerability, and attempting to forge affective connections and solidarities among readers, making the most of what's technologically available. Digital feminist practices then, are far more complex than one might intuitively imagine, and are shaped by the "materiality of the design of digital networks" (Harvey 2016, 11), which in turn shapes emerging conventions, and curatorial and vernacular practices.

Setting the Scene

One vernacular practice that became particularly apparent in Everyday Sexism, Who Needs Feminism?, and Hollaback!, was the ways contributors did not merely share their experience, but took time to set the scene for the reader. This involved practices such as providing information about where and when their experiences took place, by which perpetrator(s), how the contributor

responded, and if anyone witnessed it or intervened. As Fileborn (2018) argues, this is part of the "curatorial" process of disclosure in which participants make careful decisions about what to disclose to whom, and how the narrative is constructed. Although some of these practices can at times be found within #BeenRapedNeverReported, we argue that Twitter's character limit encourages contributors to prioritize discreet "facts" over the detailed descriptions in the tweet itself. That being said, participants sometimes found ways around the character limit. At times this involved using thread-style posts in which the disclosure spilled over several tweets, but more commonly included hyperlinks to other content such as blogs, where rich and detailed descriptions were often found.

Here, we begin to articulate our argument that the architectural and technological affordances made possible on Twitter, Tumblr, blogs, and bespoke websites lead to different articulations of sexism, rape culture, and sexual assault. Yet, although the precise details of what was included may vary across the case studies, the fact that participants often included information, such as where or when the event took place, suggests scene setting is indeed an important rhetorical practice—albeit one that serves a myriad of purposes. For example, these details were at times used as part of "safety work" (Kelly 1998) to warn other women of "hot spots" to avoid, and thus serve a pedagogical function to keep other women safe. At other times, we argue that by including information not only on their experience, but how they reacted, victims attempt to forge affective connections and solidarities, and at times, reframe themselves from being a passive victim who is powerless to act, to an active agent who challenges such behaviors.

WHERE EVENTS TAKE PLACE

When looking across the data, location often played an important part of the narrative and emerging vernacular practices across certain platforms such as Everyday Sexism and Hollaback! Although these platforms did not explicitly ask participants to share this information, we can infer by the detailed descriptions that *where* the experience took place was an important part of the story for many contributors. Identifying the location was particularly important for Hollaback!, which in 2010 introduced its GPS mapping app, allowing people to pinpoint exactly where their harassment took place. Hollaback! is also our only case study whose website is distinctly organized according to geographical lines, and participants are encouraged to submit stories to their local Hollaback! chapter. In contrast, while location was at times part of the narrative in submissions to Who Needs Feminism? and #BeenRapedNeverReported, these were often more generalized (at a friend's

house, at a party, in a nightclub), showcasing that while it has become a convention to mention broadly speaking where the event took place, the platform architecture does not encourage a vernacular practice of identifying precise locations. For example, Who Needs Feminism? was more interested in getting people to think about why feminism was needed *in general*, rather than focus on why it was needed in specific spaces. In a similar vein, while location was rarely mentioned in #BeenRapedNeverReported tweets, information about *when* it took place was an important rhetorical strategy to showcase the extent to which sexual abuse has historically been hidden, and thus highlight the need for this hashtag.

WHEN THE EXPERIENCE TAKES PLACE

Although temporality was not something we initially expected to analyze, nor was it always possible, it became clear when we read through most of our case studies that people were not simply reporting on *contemporary* experiences, but were sharing, often for the first time, historic experiences that took place months, years, or even decades before. As Marion wrote on Everyday Sexism, "I am an 83-year old woman who could tell you incidents that have happened to me from the time I was in 2nd grade in school, through high school, at work, and even recently, believe it or not." Although it is likely that people have felt empowered to speak these "unspeakable things" (Penny 2014) in response to high-profile investigations around powerful individuals and institutions (the Catholic Church, Bill Cosby, Jimmy Saville, Jian Ghomeshi, Harvey Weinstein), the emergence of new media technologies, and specific campaigns, including our four case studies, have also provided networks of support and solidarity necessary for finding one's voice. Although *when* the event took place was not an important part of each submission, it was a part of many, which we argue was one technique used not only to "set the scene," but to *make visible* the historic pervasiveness and invisibility of sexism, harassment, assault, and rape culture. When describing historic instances of sexism or abuse, many submissions began with context such as "A few years ago" or "When I was x age." For example, as Amy began:

> When I was 11 (now 18) I was touched under my knickers by my sister's boyfriend, who was then 16. He began the 6 months of assault by hugging me randomly, which I simply thought of as a show of innocent affection. It was when he began grabbing me when I was alone and kissing me violently that I began to get scared. As an 11-year old, I had no idea about the concept of sex, so I didn't say anything, I also had no idea that in the UK, this constituted a sexual assault.

Contributions such as this are significant for highlighting the vulnerability of many victims, and their lack of language or frameworks through which to understand their experiences. So, while this girl intuitively *knew* that the attention she experienced was wrong and "scary," she neither fully understood its sexual undertone and illegality nor was she immediately able to articulate it.

While historic cases of abuse, assault, and sexism were found across all four platforms, they were perhaps most prominent in #BeenRapedNeverReported, which is somewhat ironic given the ways Twitter has been praised for its immediacy, allowing the public to communicate in real time (see Gerbaudo 2012). As Mary shared, "Passed out @ party. 30years later @ school reunion a guy tells me he assaulted me @ that party. I never knew. #BeenRapedNeverReported." As with #BeenRapedNeverReported, contributors to Who Needs Feminism? rarely shared immediate experiences, likely because submissions to this site were the most labor intensive, requiring participants to handcraft, photograph, and upload a sign. Nevertheless, here, and as we will discuss further in chapter 6, we can see how despite the platform design that enables real-time updates, the narrative convention was to showcase the ways girls, women, and some men indeed kept hidden their experiences of sexual assault, often for prolonged periods. We argue that highlighting the historic nature of their experience was central in challenging dominant beliefs that sexism, misogyny, rape culture, or sexual assault have only recently emerged as a problem.

So, while highlighting the historical nature of their experience was an important part of the narrative for many, we concurrently see many people capitalize on platform affordances that enable them to quickly respond to their experiences. This was particularly evident on Hollaback! and Everyday Sexism—the former of which has an app that makes sharing stories easy, simple, and immediate. The latter also encourages users to share experiences via the hashtag #EverydaySexism. Here, it is common to see posts begin with statements such as "this morning," "today," "the other night," or "last Friday." Sharing her account four days after the event, one anonymous contributor wrote:

> My latest incident happened on Saturday, Dec. 30th, passing by construction site on 3rd Ave. and 10th St. I felt "the leer" and gave the worker the benefit of the doubt simply by nodding and looking away. He proceeded to say creepily, "Oh, fuck, that's a pretty pussy. Do you take it in the ass?" I just kept walking and shaking my head.

By prefacing the post with "my latest incident," the contributor makes clear that the experience she recounts is not unusual but is just one of many recent

encounters. Indeed, research has shown that the "banality" of street harassment in women's everyday lives means it often only becomes "worth" disclosing if there was something particularly noteworthy or unusual about their experience (Fileborn 2018). Furthermore, drawing from the work of Liz Kelly (1988), we argue that the inclusion of details such as the date and precise location of violence functions as a pedagogical tool for others, as "safety work," warning women about potential "danger zones," spaces or times in which they should be wary or take special care (see also Fileborn 2018). Indeed, if women learn that there is construction taking place at a certain spot, others might learn to either brace themselves for harassment, or take an alternative route. Although the intention might be to help other women, it is important to be mindful about the extent to which such preventative measures in fact exclude women from some public spaces (as they *choose* to withdraw), or construct racialized "geographies of fear" that have material consequences for how those areas are then policed, valued, and regulated (see Rentschler 2017).

While providing information such as when and where sexism, harassment, or violence takes place, another significant vernacular practice to emerge is the ways contributors included details of their *response* to the incident, be it physical, mental, or emotional. These detailed responses are part of wider strategies that serve several functions: (1) to showcase (potential) harm, (2) to showcase their agency, and (3) to solicit affective solidarities among readers through shared affective responses (anger, sadness, fear, bitterness, confusion) in the hope of bringing forth social change.

The Impact of Their Experiences

What is evident when reading through all 784 posts is the ways many of them are emotionally laden—that is to say, these posts do not merely recount instances of harassment, sexism, or reasons feminism is necessary, but they often share a range of emotions, reactions, and affects that accompany their experiences. As Bianca Fileborn (2017) argues, documenting the emotional harms of practices such as street harassment is a deliberate curatorial strategy used by participants to challenge notions that such practices are "minor" or not harmful, and to encourage "appropriate response" from readers (Fileborn 2018). For instance, anger, sadness, hurt, and incomprehension were typical in disclosure statements across all four case studies, although it should be noted that these emotions were conveyed with different degrees of intensities. Across our data set, participants made various use of capitalization, bolding, and exclamation marks, and, depending on the platform, different colored text to highlight key words,

feelings, or views. While this practice could be found across the case studies, it was particularly evident on Who Needs Feminism? Hosted on Tumblr—a platform that prioritizes visual aesthetics, most signs found were highly stylized, making use of different colors, size of print, bolding, italics, and underlining of key words. As one participant on Who Needs Feminism? shared (Figure 3.2): "I need feminism because I'm used to cat calling. I've been getting cat called since I was 9 fucking years old!"

With 827 "notes" that include comments, reblogs, and "likes," it is clear this submission struck a chord with readers and produced a range of affective responses. The anger and level of intensity is evident here with the underlining of certain words used as semiotic tools to convey emphasis, as well as the use of profane words such as "fucking." Anger itself is named in another Who Needs Feminism? submission that read: "I need feminism because when my dad told me that once he hit my mom, she didn't understand why it made me angry." Here the contributor proclaims and qualifies her feeling as one of anger at her mother normalizing physical abuse from her father. By sharing this post, she also calls upon the readers to recognize her father's actions as wrong, and to feel her anger, thus forging affective solidarities with other readers.

Figure 3.2 Image from Who Needs Feminism? Author screenshot.

FEELING FEAR

While anger was one common reaction across the four case studies, a number of other emotions such as fear were also visible. In addition to *feeling* fear, participants also discussed its accompanying *physical* reaction of freezing. Posting on Everyday Sexism, one contributor not only explained how she was groped while waiting for a bus, but how she froze with fear and was thus unable to defend herself from the man's advances:

> I panicked and froze, he continued to move his hand but I was still unable to speak or move, I could hardly believe it was happening. He continued to grope me for what felt like forever and although I could feel tears prickling in my eyes I was still unable to defend myself more than to slide away slightly and try and try to defend myself with my bag.

Although it is commonly believed that in times of crisis, the body kicks into "fight or flight" mode, the reality is that, particularly for women being assaulted, a common response is for them to freeze (Lordrick 2007). As psychologists note, when one party freezes, the other often takes this as a sign of "consent to the assault (whether verbal, physical or sexual)" (Lordrick 2007, 6). When victims look back on their assault, psychologists also note the ways that those who freeze frequently berate themselves for not doing more to stop or prevent it (Lordrick 2007; Lordrick and Hosier 2014). This mismatch between what they believe they *should* have done and what they *did* sadly contributes significantly to "post-trauma victim guilt and shame" (Lordrick and Hosier 2014, 89), which is evident in many submissions. When recounting her experience of being "violently groped" at a busy train station in London, Suzanne shared her response, both in the aftermath and in the long run:

> I shouted after him but I was so shocked and scared I didn't know what to do and just got on the train to go home. . . . For ages I felt scared and intimidated and travelling to and from work became incredibly hard for me. I felt unclean and disgusting. Even 10 years on, I can still recall perfectly the feeling of him assaulting me.

As we have demonstrated, shame is a particularly salient dimension of rape culture. Here for example, notions of uncertainty and disgust emerge—with contributors talking about feeling "dirty" and "impure." It is not always clear if the disgust they face is directed toward their attackers (for the assault) or themselves (for not doing more to prevent, stop, or report it). That Suzanne continues to feel "unclean" and "disgusted" 10 years later demonstrates the potency and

intensity of these dimensions of sexual shame surrounding sexual violence, and the way that sharing the experience may provide the only way to interrupt and reconfigure these affects.

PHYSICAL RESPONSES

In addition to freezing, contributors shared a range of other *physical* reactions to their experiences. These ranged from confronting their harasser, running away, giving dirty looks, and calling for help. In recording these responses, some participants felt it necessary not only to show the ways they had been victimized, but the ways they were fighting back against harassment, misogyny, sexism, and rape culture, even only if in their own small ways. Perhaps sharing this information was also to challenge the idea they were helpless victims, and a means of regaining agency and control over their situation.

While participants' reactions were often physical in the sense that they challenged abuse, others discussed the *physical impact* their experiences had on them. This involves feeling sick, crying, getting stomach aches, and being left speechless. In other cases, participants used physical metaphors to describe their feelings: one contributor to #BeenRapedNeverReported talked about feeling unable to "choke out" her own story of being sexually abused. Others talked about "gut-wrenching" experiences. These examples point to the ways such experiences have a range of affective implications—emotionally, physically, and mentally (see chapter 6 for further discussion). As a result, it was of little surprise that participants addressed how various experiences impacted their everyday lives—whether this involved taking precautionary measures when walking home alone, avoiding certain places, changing their wardrobe, or even quitting jobs.

THE IMPACT OF HARASSMENT ON PARTICIPANTS' EVERYDAY LIVES

As a rhetorical strategy, many contributors talked about the impact of harassment on their everyday lives, likely to challenge the cultural scaffolding of abuse that renders some practices more problematic than others (see Gavey 2005). The impact of harassment was evident in submissions where women shared their persistent distrust in strange men. One contributor shared her fear of a man who was trying to help change a flat tire, while another shared how her fiancé refused to allow her to jog alone at night in case she is assaulted. Yet another woman explained how she regularly crossed the street to avoid groups of men.

When looking across our data set, we find these various contributions provided compelling evidence of the ways women's lives have been impacted by their experiences of harassment. In her 2007 book *Full Frontal Feminism,* Jessica Valenti popularized the idea that all women live on a "rape schedule" where they restrict or alter their lifestyles to avoid male violence, abuse, and assault. Using this concept, we argue that digital feminist campaigns provide ample evidence of how harassment, abuse, sexism, and misogyny often have long-lasting impacts on victims, who alter their lives, routines, behaviors, and schedules as a result (see also Vera-Gray 2016a). Posting on Everyday Sexism, Joanna shared how her 19-year-old daughter quit her job as a cashier after being continually harassed and propositioned by customers. Sharing her story on Hollaback!, Afton explained how she quit her job as a street sign holder after being constantly harassed (and pelted with food when she didn't respond). Numerous contributors also recalled the ways they avoid certain places or take different routes to escape harassment. For example, posting on Everyday Sexism, 17-year-old Amelia recounted how she now takes a longer route to school to avoid a building site. Taken together, the data presented collectively challenges those who might argue that "banal," "low-level" practices as catcalling or sexist comments are trivial, and instead evidences how they harm women, prevent them from entering or fully participating in the public sphere, and as a result, limit their ability to lead a full life (MacKinnon 2007; Vera-Gray 2016a). Furthermore, we argue that by showcasing the impact of rape culture on their everyday lives, participants are attempting to raise the public's consciousness and forge affective solidarities necessary to challenge these taken-for-granted norms.

While collectively showcasing the harm of such practices was one common strategy, others took to these platforms to explicitly call out sexism and provide more in-depth analysis of oppression.

Calling Out Sexism and Analyzing Oppression

In recent years, scholars have noted the ways tech-savvy feminists use digital technologies to facilitate a "call out culture" of sexism, harassment, and misogyny (Fileborn 2017; Horeck 2014; Lawrence and Ringrose 2018; Rentschler 2015; Thrift 2014). This call out culture was also evident within submissions across our case studies, but this vernacular practice was most evident in submissions to Everyday Sexism, likely enabled by both the platform architecture that enabled longer submissions, and the site's raison d'étre of making sexism visible. Here, we argue that sites such as Everyday Sexism were not simply used to *share* stories

of sexism, but to *challenge* the idea that we live in an equal society, and to better *understand* the ways that inequalities, misogyny, and patriarchy operate and their intended outcome. As a result, many of the stories submitted across our case studies generate a sensibility and a conceptual framework with which to interpret these experiences as both unacceptable and changeable.

When thinking about the strategies used to call out sexism or rape culture, rhetorical techniques were often used, such as asking questions about how fair and equal our society really is. Posting on Everyday Sexism, Noreen shared how she had "lost count" of the number of times she was forced to "quickly change the direction I was taking, run away or rummage for keys as a makeshift weapon when walking alone." On one occasion, she noted how a group of men laughed as she avoided them and asked: "Why is the practice of rape avoidance by all women accepted as normal if we live in an equal society?" The use of this rhetorical question encourages feminist consciousness-raising among other readers, inspiring them to question how such practices could really exist if we lived in an equal society, free from patriarchy. In this way, Noreen challenges the dominant postfeminist sensibilities that state that feminism is dead, redundant, unnecessary, or passé (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Negra 2009), encouraging readers to make political their personal experiences in a rape culture (see also Fileborn 2017).

While asking such rhetorical questions was one tactic used to highlight the existence of sexism, others were blunt in their declarations. Recalling how a female classmate was wolf-whistled during a student government campaign speech, one contributor stated:

> Those boys had the audacity to whistle at her like she was an object only there for their desire. It's the simple acts of blatant sexism that bother me unbelievably. Serious harassment, such as rape, is of course a huge problem but that will never truly end until the everyday acts end.

When looking at the language used, we see that contributors to both Everyday Sexism and Who Needs Feminism? were not shy about using the term "sexism," and situating their experiences (or the experiences of others) firmly in this fame. As one contributor to Who Needs Feminism? explained, "I need feminism because whenever I try to explain it to a male friend he'll tell me that sexism isn't real, that women are whiny bitches, and that it's the same as misandry."

Aside from employing specific words such as "sexism" and "sexist," other contributors demonstrated their feminist consciousness by making use of popular feminist humor and words such as "mansplaining." This term can be traced back to an essay by Rebecca Solnit, who in 2008 penned an article titled: "Men Who Explain Things." Here, Solnit recounts the patronizing ways men constantly

explain things to women, with the assumption that they know very little. Using this term, Roz submitted a post to Everyday Sexism stating: "Some army guy just mansplained what NATO was. Thanks, man, I know." Roz here is contributing to wider discussions about the ways men condescendingly assume women have little knowledge *because* they are women, and at least within this contribution, responds sarcastically by saying "Thanks, man, I know." While these submissions explicitly recognize and identify sexism and inequality, and at times use popular feminist concepts, not all go so far as to theorize *why* sexism, or mansplaining exists, or how they maintain male power and privilege.

ANALYZING SEXISM

While it would be disingenuous to claim that these more nuanced analyses of sexism and patriarchy are the norm, there were a range of submissions within our sample that indeed provided such analyses. For example, after being subjected to a torrent of verbal abuse by a man on a train, one Everyday Sexism contributor did not simply identify her experience as "harassment" but labeled it "misogynistic," and a form of "gendered abuse":

> Got called a "fucking patronising slag" by a drunk middle-aged commuter on an East Coast train last night after mildly objecting to his loud and obnoxious insistence that the young woman sitting next to me was in his seat. He was revealed to be incorrect and shuffled off down the train, but what alarmed me was how automatic and unthinking his misogyny was, and the underlying assumption that young women, even if they are, unlike him, sober and in possession of the facts, must defer to older men or else be called "patronising." I'm incredibly angry that such gendered abuse continues to be accepted by so much of the population. I think (and hope) that this white middle-class businessman would have thought twice before abusing a stranger in language that discriminated on the basis of race, ethnicity or sexuality, but I'm angered that such misogyny is apparently so acceptable.

This contributor vents her frustration at how, unlike racist or homophobic comments, which are generally seen as socially taboo, sexist comments are considered socially acceptable.

Submissions such as the one previously mentioned demonstrate the ways some contributors have long been aware of sexism and possessed conceptual tools to identify and analyze it. Perhaps more interesting are contributions that showcase how these various feminist platforms, particularly Everyday Sexism and Hollaback!, played a crucial role in raising their feminist consciousness (see

also Fileborn 2017). This "aha" moment, or what Ahmed (2017) might refer to as a feminist "snap," in which readers realized their experiences were in fact "sexism" and not just "normal behavior," was evident in a handful of Everyday Sexism submissions, such as that by 23-year-old bartender Aimee. Writing in 2014, Aimee shared how it was the act of reading stories on the Everyday Sexism website that helped her recognize as sexist behaviors she regularly encountered. As she explained: "Until I read this website I didn't even class as what behavior I was put through was Sexism." However, after reading many contributions, she reflected:

> There was so many things I have read and now realize was just Sexism. But as I've grown up it's just been seen as normal behavior, or seen as a joke and not to be taken seriously. Attitudes towards females are now just being shrugged off and classed as "jokes." Well that's enough for me. No more Miss Nice Woman.

Aimee's revelation supports findings that show that reading and sharing experiences of sexism helps problematize experiences contributors had previously considered a normal part of life (Dimond et al. 2013). For Aimee, this change happened "both cognitively and emotionally" (Dimond et al. 2013, 7). The change was cognitive because Aimee was able to identify her experience as sexism, and emotionally because she realized she no longer had to accept it as "normal" or "funny" behavior and she could refuse to continue to play "Miss Nice Woman." This cognitive awareness of gender inequality, sexism, and misogyny, and the ways that participants "found" feminism via these digital platforms is significant and will be elaborated upon in more depth in chapters 4, 5, and 6, via in-depth interviews.

So far, this chapter has highlighted some of the key topics and vernacular practices that have been developed among our four case studies. The rest of this chapter seeks to better understand *who* contributes to these highly visible, mainstream feminist campaigns.

Privileged Voices?

Although the internet has undoubtedly created new spaces for marginalized voices, particularly feminist ones (see Keller 2015; Mendes 2015; Mowles 2008; Shaw 2012), we were interested in exploring the diversity of voices and experiences shared on these platforms. For instance, to what extent were these accounts dominated by young, white, middle-class, heterosexual women? Or, do they provide spaces in which men, BAME groups, older, non-cis,

members of the LGBTQ+ communities feel they can also participate in and share their experiences? This issue is particularly important given that several of the organizers we spoke with for Hollaback!, Who Needs Feminism? and Everyday Sexism clearly articulated the intersectional nature of oppression, and their desire to create safe spaces for marginalized groups and communities to share their experiences (Bates 2014). For Hollaback! in particular, questions about race and privilege were raised in response to an independently produced video, *10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman*, which went viral in 2014. The video, which was not commissioned, produced, or distributed by Hollaback!, listed the organization as a place the public could turn for more information on street harassment (May 2015). In the video, a white middle-class woman walked through the streets of New York, while being discreetly filmed. The video was heavily critiqued for featuring mostly black and Latino men (see Meyerson 2014). While Hollaback! issued a response to the video encouraging the public to recognize the intersectional nature of harassment (Hollaback! 2014), this incident, and others like it, indicates the extent to which the experiences of white middle-class heterosexual women continue to occupy privileged spaces within feminist organization and activism and the need for an intersectional analysis (see also Fileborn 2017; Hackworth 2018; Rentschler 2017; Salter 2013).[2]

As a result, across all four case studies, we attempted to quantify the gender of each contributor. In most cases, the gender was determined via the participant's name (if available), while other times the person made mention of female body parts (breasts, "cunts," "pussies"), or attire (wearing skirts, dresses). In several cases, however, many contributors explicitly identified themselves as a man, woman, or nonbinary person. For example, as one anonymous contributor on Everyday Sexism shared:

> Got through to the final stages of interviews for an exciting new job. After the final stage I get a call from the HR department telling me they loved me, but they are concerned that I am a mum to a young child and therefore would not be able to stay after hours if required. Would they ask a man that?

Similarly, sharing her story on Hollaback!, Lisa recounted a man yelling "Boo!" right in her ear when walking past him and then asked, "Why? Because I'm a young woman, Asian, by myself??" And within Who Needs Feminism?, one participant displayed her gender when being catcalled on a busy bus, "I'm a 16 year old girl and not a piece of fucking meat."

Looking across the data, we see that women are the overwhelming contributors to these sites (n=631, or 80 percent of all posts). However,

although men's voices were less common, they were easy to identify because they often highlighted their gender explicitly, perhaps to demonstrate the ways that harassment, sexism, and abuse also happen to them. Tweeting with the hashtag #BeenRapedNeverReported, Jean-Paul wrote, "ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! As a man who has been #raped, I needed to add my support to this." Another Hollaback! contributor published his story under the pseudonym "Threatened man," and shared an experience of having his bum slapped and being told, "nice ass baby," when walking past a group of women. Although the reader might assume the participant was male because he was assaulted by a group of women, he still consciously marked himself as a (threatened) man in this submission.

While it was at times common for women to also explicitly mark out their gender, we argue that men or gender non-conforming individuals are particularly prone to this vernacular practice in order to highlight the ways these issues are not unique to women, but impact other groups as well. Male contributors emphasized the ways they too experience catcalling, and other forms of sexism such as being groped. Writing on Everyday Sexism, one male preempted his testimonial by declaring: "I am a male professional working in financial industry (quite strange that I am here huh). I am also a victim of everyday sexism. Seriously!" It is significant that within this contribution, the man felt his words alone were not enough, and deployed other rhetorical tools such as exclamation marks, and words such as "seriously" to convince the reader of his legitimacy. By noting the "strangeness" that his voice is used on this platform, the man also reinforces the ways sexism is often perceived as a women's issue, and his desire to challenge this normative assumption.

Men at times also used their contribution to highlight the ways hegemonic masculinity is harmful for those who do not conform. As one participant on Who Needs Feminism? shared (see Figure 3.3):

> I NEED FEMINISM BECAUSE, as a male, I've always been told to "be a man" when I didn't fit into society's definition of masculinity. As a result, I've never felt like a "man," and I've never felt "good enough." I need feminism because gender stereotyping is detrimental to everyone. I'm a man because I identify as one, not because society says I am (or that I'm not), but I need feminism because I'm a PERSON FIRST, MAN SECOND.

Yet, despite concerted efforts made by campaigns such as Who Needs Feminism? to engage men within these platforms, our four case studies are overwhelmingly populated by women's voices. While we are loath to claim this as problematic, particularly given the historic and persistent exclusion of women and their

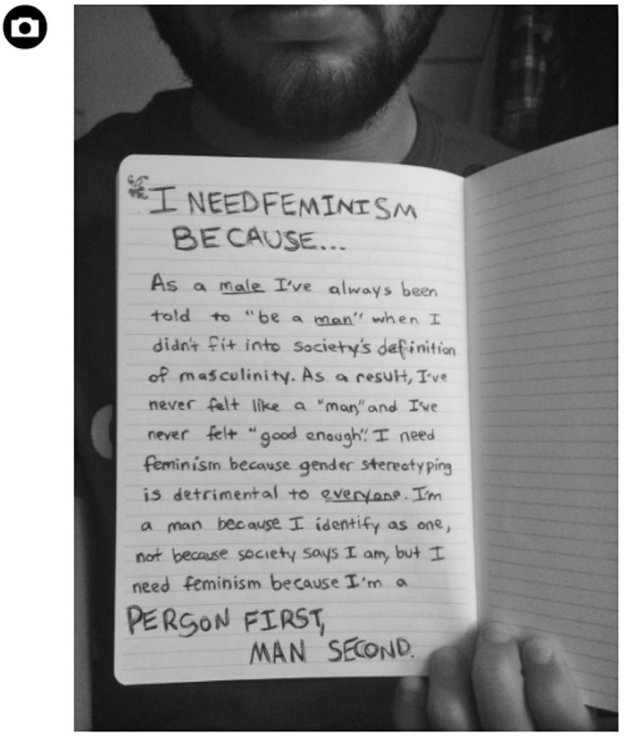

Figure 3.3 Image from Who Needs Feminism? Author screenshot.

experiences from public life, men also suffer from rigid gender roles, and they too need safe spaces to share their experiences.

PLATFORMS FOR WHITE, CIS-WOMEN?

In the case of Hollaback!, Who Needs Feminism?, and Everyday Sexism, we were interested in trying to ascertain racial identities and sexuality of contributors. For example, with Everyday Sexism, we caught a glimpse at the sexuality of the poster by recording instances of homophobic comments directed toward contributors (n=2, or 2 percent of total). While by nowhere near a perfect measure of a participant's sexuality, that so few posts share homophobic or transphobic comments indicates that Everyday Sexism is not necessarily a space these communities turn to for support, raising questions about where such spaces might exist. Although Everyday Sexism was not designed to seek out experiences from particularly marginalized groups, Hollaback! was (Pasarell 2013), due to the high proportions of harassment directed toward women of color and the LGBTQ+ communities. For example, Hollaback! Baltimore

organizer Melanie Keller discussed the ways the blog was a space where people could share their stories, "specifically women and LGBTQ folks." Keller discussed in detail the way Hollaback! Baltimore developed a "Safer Spaces" program that provides training for employees at local bars and cafes on how to make these spaces harassment free, particularly for LGBTQ+ communities, and pledges to take reports of harassment seriously. Those who complete the program are then given a unique poster to display so that the public, particularly "queer folk … know they can come in."

Yet, despite their best efforts to make public spaces safe for LBGTQ+ communities, only 3 percent (n=5) of all posts in this sample shared experiences of being harassed because of their nonconforming sexuality or gender identity, suggesting this constitutes a *non-dominant* platform vernacular (Warfield 2016). When included, these experiences ranged from standing up to transphobic comments, being deliberately called the wrong pronoun ("he" instead of "she"), and two lesbians being incessantly asked to kiss for a group of men. Within Who Needs Feminism?, transgender participants accounted for only 3 percent of our sample (n=4), although it should be noted that LGBTQ+ and transgender discrimination were raised in a range of other submissions as *reasons* that feminism was necessary. For example, one participant named a range of people, who, due to their race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, were discriminated against, stating "reproductive justice, transgender anti-discrimination, racial justice, LGBT equality and reform of the criminal justice system—are all feminist issues!" While research on storytelling has generally noted that those whose stories do not conform to dominant narratives often feel silenced (Goering 1996), without speaking to these communities, it is difficult to identify if this is the case here, and is something we encourage future researchers to explore.

Although we were interested in determining the racial identity of contributors to these sites, this proved to be challenging. Largely this difficulty was due to the nature of the campaigns we studied, which solicited written accounts. Within these narrative testimonials, people rarely mentioned their ethnicity unless it was entwined with their experiences of sexism or harassment. Sharing her story of being catcalled on Hollaback!, Jen noted the ways her harassment by a group of men was not just gendered, but racialized as well. As they told her: " 'Girl I am gonna f*ck you with some chopsticks.' I'm half Chinese, and was appalled that this brat had added racism onto the growing pile of sexual harassment."

Assessing the race or ethnicity of participants also proved to be a challenge, in part due to problems of reading these signs by visual cues alone. As a result, as with gender and sexuality, we attempted to ascertain this information via discursive markers, which were few and far between. In fact, the earlier example with Jen from Hollaback! was one of the few clearly defined examples where racism

was explicitly intertwined with sexism. While we must be careful not to make normative assumptions that just because race or ethnicity weren't mentioned, the participant must have been white, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that online spaces reproduce unequal power structures and dynamics that make up offline life (see boyd 2012). Other scholars have noted the ways that diversity continues to remain a problem within feminist digital spaces (Fileborn 2017; Fotopoulou 2016; Harvey 2016; Keller 2013). Despite this, the growth of "Black Twitter" (Brock 2012; Sharma 2013), or trans twitter hashtags such as #TransLivesMatter, #SayHerName, and #BlackGirlMagic, challenge the "persistent harmful centering of whiteness in activist and feminist organizing" (Fischer 2016, 768), and deserve our critical attention. Although our analysis has been able to demonstrate the ways BAME and LGBTQ+ narratives constitute *non-dominant* vernaculars among our case studies, it fails to tell us why this might be the case. We therefore encourage researchers to pay attention to the design of digital spaces, and how these might encourage "invisible inequalities" to persist (see Harvey 2016), as well as the experiences of marginalized communities to better understand their particular vernacular needs (see Fileborn 2018; Warfield 2016).

Slippery Feminism

Finally, we want to highlight one of the more unusual, and surprising findings relating to how these various campaigns were used. When we began to design our coding schemes, we were surprised by the "slippery-ness" of some campaigns, and how they were "hacked" (Warfield 2016) or used in a number of changing and unexpected ways. For example, around one-quarter of the #BeenRapedNeverReported tweets in our sample were not from individuals sharing personal experiences of (not reporting) their assault, but from both non- and for-profit organizations seeking to gain attention through the popular hashtag. Tweeting about the Canadian current affairs program *The Agenda,* one staff member wrote, "We had a great panel last night on @TheAgenda on #BeenRapedNeverReported. Available to stream now." Another woman produced eight tweets within our sample (3 percent) directing the public to her YouTube channel, where she conducted interviews with women and men who have been victims of sexual abuse. One such example read, "If you truly want to get well, there is no going around your feelings and memories. #BeenRapedNeverReported." In a similar vein, four submissions on Who Needs Feminism? (3 percent) were from a group initiating a Kickstarter campaign for a feminist magazine called *Parallel.* Writing:

> Do you see yourself reflected in the media you consume? Parallel magazine is all about providing an alternative to the airbrushing and the shaming, the heteronormativity and the gender binary we're dealt as the only way. Life through a feminist lens, by women, for women.

Digital feminist campaigns could also be seen as "slippery" for shifting over time as different users respond to current events and adapt the campaigns for their own purposes, which may or may not correspond with the original intentions of its creators. For example, Laura Bates (2014) has written about her surprise at the ways the public used her site not merely to address "low-level" forms of harassment, but "serious" cases of violence and assault. Indeed, longer-term analysis of these campaigns might usefully highlight if, or how, they morph over time, or respond to other contemporary events.

For example, in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandal, many people have concurrently used #BeenRapedNeverReported and #MeToo, thus connecting two related, but separate movements. For example, on October 22, 2017, Dolores wrote: "#MeToo Raped at 18 a virgin. #BeenRapedNeverReported." People also took to Everyday Sexism in the wake of the scandal to report on their (often historic) experiences of abuse, at times crediting the Weinstein's fallout in their decision to post. Alison, for example, recounted how despite explaining to her manager at work how her male colleague constantly talked about sex, commented upon women's bodies, or who he would like to "shag," the manager never took any actions. As Alison continued, "Yesterday I was discussing the Harvey Weinstein case with my ex-manager and we discussed this man again. She told me that she now realizes she was wrong for allowing him to behave like that and not challenging him."

Our research also demonstrated slipperiness in vernacular practices over time. For example, as the Who Needs Feminism? project changed from an offline campaign in which posters were displayed around Duke University's campus, to an online campaign available to the public, we see a change in vernacular practices. Contributors were initially photographed smiling, or with a neutral expression, holding up the sign with their face in full view. Over time however, it has become common for contributors to "hide" behind their signs (n=68 or 45 percent of total), or to capture only the sign itself (n=62 or 41 percent of total). Despite Tumblr's prioritization of the visual, via these practices, contributors have developed additional means of preserving some sense of anonymity within an often-hostile digital landscape. A full view of the contributor's face was visible in only 20 posts (14 percent of total), perhaps in response to the backlash and online abuse directed to those who have taken part. Within our sample, most cases where the full face is in view, the expression is serious, angry, or concerned. These expressions are significant for providing audiences

guidance on how to interpret the sign, and demonstrate the seriousness and urgency of the contributor's claim. It is only through more longitudinal analysis of this campaign that we are able to witness this transformation, and thus encourage other scholars to similarly adopt this approach.

Conclusions

As the first of our findings chapters, we have sought to provide insight of what experiences of harassment, misogyny, and rape culture girls, women, and some men are disclosing via four high-profile feminist digital platforms. Using a qualitative content and thematic textual analysis, we have showcased how issues such as sexual violence, harassment, and sexism are discussed across the case studies. Furthermore, the chapter provides insight into what the public understands these practices to include. Significantly, our research shows the complex and nuanced ways terms such as "sexism" and "street-harassment" are used, and the multitude of practices they encompass, from seemingly "low-level" "banter" to more violent and extreme forms of abuse, stalking, and violence. Contrary to popular opinion that often dismisses these practices as ubiquitous and unharmful, contributors shared the ways these behaviors were in fact deeply discomforting and distressful, leading them to feel anger and fear, and in many cases, restricting their participation in public life.

When thinking more broadly about how the public uses these digital feminist platforms, our research showcases the diversity among digital feminist practices and conventions, arguing that emerging vernacular practices are impacted by platform architecture and affordances (see also Harvey 2015; Star 1999), which work to simultaneously encourage and discourage certain narratives and groups of people. Indeed, as others have shown, although digital platforms may provide "unparalleled opportunities" to disclose experiences of sexual violence, the ability to harness and reap the benefits of online disclosure is largely uneven (Salter 2013, 226; Fileborn 2018). As we will discuss in chapters 5 and 6, disclosing personal experiences can be emotionally laborious, and the labor required in disclosing can outweigh potential benefits (Fileborn 2018).

Contributing to a growth of research on digital disclosures of sexual violence (Fileborn 2017, 2018), the chapter paid attention to the "curatorial" practices evident among our case studies, demonstrating how particular platforms may encourage the identification of specific locations, or immediate experiences, while others prioritize less specific detail of where and when, in place of the overall impact on the contributors' lives. Although we have only begun to map these differences here, we encourage scholars to adopt insights from critical technology and cultural studies, which recognize that the

materiality and design of digital networks inevitably shapes digital feminist practices and their affects. And although we find the concept of platform vernacular useful, it is important to pay attention to dominant, non-dominant, and unexpected vernaculars, their "slipperiness," and how they may change over time (see Warfield 2016).

Finally, the chapter highlights how these digital platforms can be used in unexpected ways. This includes the ways these platforms were at times "hijacked" by groups or individuals seeking to drive traffic elsewhere, as was evident with #BeenRapedNeverReported, or the extent to which participants used these platforms to share historic experiences of sexual violence, harassment, or assault. In some cases, feminist campaigns can inspire "backlash" movements, such as Why I Don't Need Feminism, which emerged in response to Who Needs Feminism? In sum then, this chapter sets the scene for the rest of this book in showcasing the complexities of digital feminist activism, arguing that it is far more nuanced and complex than one might initially expect. While this chapter presents data from our textual analysis, the remaining chapters share insights from the girls, women, and some men who engage with, or organize these campaigns, highlighting the various emotional, mental, or practical factors that create different experiences for those involved.