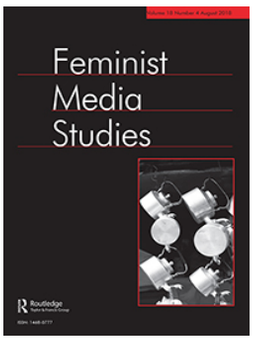

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We take the red pill, we confront the DickTrix: online feminist activism and the augmentation of gendered realities in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the internet in South Korea has become a battleground for unprecedented gender wars. This was intensified by the emergence of *Megalia,* an online feminist group that was started in 2015 as a response to the misogynistic culture and discourses in male-dominated online communities. This article explores the emergence of a new form of digital feminist activism as a process through which gendered realities and feminist experiences are simultaneously augmented. We argue that female online users in Korea, by taking the online seriously as a focal site in which offline realities are not simply extended or revoked but augmented through and through, could gain a critical perspective on gender relations via the activism of fun.

KEYWORDS

Online misogyny; digital feminism; augmented reality; online community

Introduction

In recent years, the internet in South Korea has become a battleground for unprecedented gender wars. At the center of the on- and offline gender wars is *Megalia,* an online feminist group that emerged in 2015 as a response to the misogynistic culture and discourses in male-dominated internet communities and Korean society at large. Referencing the 1999 film *The Matrix*, "*megalians*" compare their experiences of online-based activism to the act of "taking the red pill," through which they have gained a new vision of Korean society as the "DickTrix" in which everything conspires against women and exploits them as a battery to power the patriarchal society. What distinguishes *megalian* activism from other forms of peer-group feminist empowerment are the unique experiences of activists. For them, the web is not only a medium to transfer feminist messages, but also the source of inspiration, the matrix of its growth, and its battleground, which has shaped the movement differently from more general peer-group feminist empowerment. In this article, we analyze how participants in the *megalian* movement have gained a critical perspective on the pervasive misogyny in Korea through their linguistic performance of aggression and provocation, while parodying the online misogyny.

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Megalia first emerged as a group of trolls without an explicit activist goal. Its widespread popularity and proclivity for provocation that threatened young Korean misogynists distinguishes the *megalian* movement from earlier feminist endeavors to utilize the internet as an alternative space for already politicized feminists (Jihye Cho 2004; Yisook Choi, Linda Steiner, and Sooah Kim 2006; HyunYoung KwonKim 2001; Hee-sun Shin 2005). *Megalians* did not simply desire to speak out and share their gendered experiences as other feminists did, they also wanted to provoke and irritate young Korean men. The movement spontaneously emerged among female internet users who were aware of the highly misogynistic nature of the Korean web, where male users indulged in their "fun" of ridiculing, denigrating, and bullying Korean women.

The beginning was haphazard in a sense: in the midst of the MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus) epidemic in Korea during May 2015, some female users occupied the new discussion board on MERS. The first group of female trolls were heavy users of a discussion board on male celebrities, who developed an eccentric "masculine" style of writing while objectifying, sexualizing, and disparaging (Bora Yoon 2015). They occupied the MERS board with that writing style, and started writing wickedly funny posts blaming Korean men for anything and everything, which, they thought, had always been done to Korean women by male users of the web. Their provocation went viral to other online communities and people from all the other communities swarmed into this forum to witness the new phenomenon. A new independent website for this group was built and named *Megalia*, taking inspiration from a feminist novel *Egalia's Daughters*[1], and the members started calling themselves *megalians*. Many young women joined in their trolling and the "mirroring"/parodying of online misogyny soon became the signature of the *megalian* movement. Rather than remaining an individualized "digital vigilante" response to online misogyny that shifts the burden of responsibility from the public to the private sphere (Emma A. Jane 2016), *megalians* actively organized collective political actions that addressed gendered violence and other feminist issues both online and offline. Feminist activist groups that emerged as part of this current include B-wave Korea[2] and DSO[3]. Protesting in favor of decriminalizing the "termination of pregnancy" against state patriarchy (B-Wave Korea), and fighting to eradicate nonconsensual digital pornography (DSO), these groups organized actions around the themes that young women in *Megalia* found particularly urgent.

This article focuses on the emergence of a new form of digital feminist activism, presenting it as a series of processes through which gendered realities and feminist experiences are simultaneously augmented. Our use of the term "augmented" was inspired by recent discussions on "augmented" politics (Nathan Jurgenson 2012), subjectivities (P. J. Rey and Whitney Erin Boesel 2014), and realities (Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson 2017). As the online and offline become increasingly enmeshed, the online becomes a site where political potentials are intensified by the strategic use of online media to amplify the significance of events. At the personal level, bodily experiences extend and are extended by digitally mediated experiences, for better or worse. Augmented reality games, such as *Pokémon Go*, turn an otherwise banal and familiar material environment into a playground where an alternative, fantasy narrative is at work, and changes the user's experiences of the place through their playful engagement with the physical environment. We approach the online as a site where certain gendered aspects of reality are augmented through the users' discourses, which in turn affect the ways in which users perceive and engage with their everyday realities. While online misogyny was once a mechanism to augment the misogynistic atmosphere of

Korean society and women were taught to see themselves as the objects of male violence, *megalian* experiences have enabled them to learn that they have been taught to be a specific kind of woman, and that they can resist, fight back, and be assertive. Their lived experiences, of which online ones are equally important, are fundamentally reformulated through *megalian* engagement with the misogynistic world. This newly augmented reality is a product of an augmented perspective from which they come to recognize what they describe as "the misogyny that was imperceptible like air."

We will first provide a context for the *megalian* movement in terms of the intensification of online misogyny tied to the neoliberal economic restructuring in Korea, as well as the participatory culture of female-dominated online communities that, to some extent, *megalians* inherited. The following section will analyze the unique strategy of *megalians*, which parodies not only the content but also the writing styles of misogynistic male users. We draw attention to *megalians'* experiences of the online gender war through which they gained a wholly different perspective on Korea and which causes gendered reality to take on a different significance. The language that they create and use online to understand and criticize the misogynistic Korean culture becomes a signpost with which they navigate their otherwise familiar, banal everyday world. We argue that female online users in Korea, by taking seriously the online as a focal site in which offline realities are not simply extended or revoked but augmented through and through, could provide an opportunity for users to gain a feminist perspective.

Digitized South Korean society and embedded misogyny

In this section, we briefly discuss the context for the emergence of the recent online feminist movement. This spontaneous organization was made possible by the participatory culture that female users have developed in women's online communities. This movement was provoked by the intensification of online misogyny in the context of the neoliberal restructuring of Korea.

Ever since the 1990s, when computer-mediated communication became popularized in Korea, female users have been actively participating in online interactions (KwonKim 2001, 335). Women took the opportunities that cyberspace offered to organize themselves, share their thoughts, and gain support. This was made possible as women increasingly established female-dominated online communities based on their shared interests and to avoid the discomfort of being a woman in male-dominated communities. As early cyberfeminists pointed out, female users in male-dominated communities often felt that they were trapped by the masculine expectations to speak like women, oscillating between the object of the masculine gaze and the docile feminine subject (347). Online communities composed mostly of women, where they could express their emotions and feelings as well as their opinions, became shelters where they could escape from gendered regulation of the form and content of their self-expression. These female-dominated online communities were an important part of the users' social world: they gained a sense of belonging in these communities through their conversations with strangers who emotionally supported, assisted, and comforted them, and took these collectives of women as reliable interlocutors to share information and knowledge (Yeran Kim 2010, 169–172). These female-dominated online communities, while they were not explicitly feminist-oriented, socialized the female users as proto-feminist subjects, and furthermore became a milieu where feminist ideas and discourses could

circulate and proliferate despite the intensified online misogyny outside of these women's communities.

The online misogyny in Korea is largely a product of masculine anxieties and anger about economic insecurity, which is projected onto "selfish Korean women." The recent form of misogynistic discourse is unique because it targets Korean women in general, and expresses misogyny in a style that presents explicit hatred of women. It is analyzed as an effort to relegate women back to a subordinate status within the patriarchal system in order to prop up the hegemonic masculinity of young men when the status of male breadwinner is no longer secure (Eun-Kyung Bae 2009, 66; Soo-ah Kim and Sae-Eun Kim 2016, 38). In this situation, expressing a hatred of women worked as a kind of "neoliberal safety net where masculine anger caused by social anxiety could be projected"[4] (Hyejin Um 2012 n.p.). This crisis of masculinity generated a widespread sentiment of self-pity among young men for their loss of the gendered privileges that their fathers once enjoyed, but this loss was often blamed on young women, who no longer subject themselves to the traditional norms of good wives and mothers. While young women had to struggle even harder with the post-Fordist sexual contract (Lisa Adkins and Maryanne Dever 2016), those young men projected their anxieties about the new order onto "selfish young women" who ask too much and deprive men of their gendered "rights".[5] This sense of "imagined deprivation"[6] intensified and was strengthened as young men entertained misogynistic discourses. The Korean web became a home for misogynistic discourses, neologisms, and styles of thinking that reflect and amplify the misogyny in the offline world. In addition to more direct forms of online misogyny, such as flaming, trolling, cyberbullying, and the circulation of revenge porn, which are directed at specific women, male users of online communities constantly produced and circulated discourses that mocked and reviled Korean women. The figure of the "selfish young woman," reflecting male anxiety about being deprived of their privilege, was everywhere on the Korean internet. Corresponding to the increasing misogyny tied to neoliberal restructuring and the precarity of young Koreans, this online misogyny became more and more intense. Hence, young women became the specific targets of this violence in both the online and offline worlds.

"Mirroring" the misogyny, becoming feminists

All this online misogyny was not unknown to female users, who could freely read the discussion boards of male-dominated online communities, but it was not until recently, when *megalians* emerged online, that female users were able to collectively strike back against this "air-like misogyny." In doing so, *megalians* developed unique strategies including trolling, linguistic violence, parodies of misogynistic discourse, and flaming. This set of strategies is termed "mirroring:" they copy the misogynistic language but reverse the positions of perpetrators and victims in the original. This mirroring reveals how bizarre the original was, and allows users to recognize the misogynistic assumptions and tones that were hitherto so pervasive as to be almost imperceptible. If the online misogyny that they were fighting against took the form of "boredom speech" or "gaming speech" (Emma A. Jane 2014), *megalians* also mimicked this gaming aspect of their speech acts with anti-misogynistic or feminist ends. Their response was intuitive: if men did it for fun, women could have fun too, while throwing back the feeling of being mocked and offended into the faces of male users. Trolling, flaming, and intentionally offending other people online had been considered

"masculine" behavior, and male users at first responded to the *megalian* speeches by insisting that they could not have been made by any woman. In repeating those "masculine" acts, *megalians* gained an unexpected perspective on misogyny. Analyzing online posts by *megalians*, we will examine how their experiences of fun-based activism allow them to discern, or rather rediscover, the misogynistic aspects of their everyday milieu, Korean society, and reconfigure their experiences of it.

Air-like misogyny

> Unlike Korean men-bugs, who spit out whatever is unpalatable to them, I think *godchi*s [novel women] have a tendency to tolerate things that make them uncomfortable, thinking, "this is culture, art, or the social atmosphere, so it's not necessary to point it out importunately." This is the fate of *godchi*s who are more mature than dicks, but the result of generous refined *godchi*s tolerating [men] for too long is the misogyny that permeates society like air. […]
>
> The problem is: while the misogynistic speech of men is passed over in silence as a joke or someone's own eccentricity, the misandrous speech of women meets a lunatic response (from men) like "how can anyone think that way? She's a despicable person!" […]
>
> *Ssipchi* [fucking Korean men] chaps should have quit when they finished the first verse. They should have given up when the *godchi*s started censoring themselves […] If they hadn't published their immoderate misogynistic talk about Mrs. Kim or mom-bugs, there would be no *Megalia* now. […][7]

In this post, entitled "Misogyny That Has Infiltrated [Korea] Like Air," one user of *Megalia* contrasts the casual acceptance and toleration of misogynistic jokes in Korea with the condemnation of women's negative commentaries on men. She points out that the tolerance towards misogynistic speech has permitted widespread misogyny, and that the misogynistic speeches that have now gone beyond the limits of women's toleration have resulted in the spontaneous emergence of the intense online feminist movement, *Megalia*. The phrase "misogyny that permeates society like air" highlights not only the fact that misogyny is so pervasive in Korea, but also that it has been almost imperceptible as a social problem. Misogynistic commentaries were previously taken as harmless jokes, banter, or, at worst, anomalous individual thoughts, rather than as a reflection of a widespread social problem. Yet, the user identifies the "immoderate misogynistic talk" exemplified by neologisms such as Mrs. Kim ("a bad driver who must be a middle-aged woman with inappropriate manners") or mom-bugs ("mothers/housewives these days are nuisances because of their selfishness"), as the spur for the creation of *Megalia* as a response to the suffocating atmosphere of online misogyny.

These misogynistic neologisms blame Korean women for being selfish and indifferent to the public good. They were popularized in male-dominated online communities, usually accompanied by anecdotes about specific women whom they saw as doing wrong. For instance, an episode in which a group of housewives are having a coffee break at a café while a child is being noisy is frequently shared online as a story of "the mom-bug I saw today." The neologism "mom-bug" reduces a housewife/mother into a kind of idle and self-obsessed parasite who wastes money without appreciating her husband's struggle as he labors and sacrifices at his workplace, and does not do her own job of disciplining her child. These kinds of neologisms, which stress the female gender of any woman whom a male observer sees as a nuisance, were constantly produced, circulated, and popularized in male-dominated online communities and soon started appearing in the mass media.[8]

In addition to their gendered "moral" message and labeling effects, these neologisms have functioned as a device allowing male users to casually complain about their mundane and brief observations of any woman as though they reflected "a trend of Korean women increasingly becoming selfish and inappropriate." These neologisms have added another frame to male internet users' experience of the real world. Fed by the sense of being deprived of male privileges, these neologisms create a kind of augmented reality for young Korean men in which Korean women selfishly and immodestly claim things that they do not deserve. As the stories about "misbehaving" women are often shared under the banner of "humor," involving mockery of women rather than critical commentary in the male-dominated online community, the stories are more rapidly and widely circulated. In a sense, the offline world becomes a site where male users collect stories about Korean women to share with other male users, while the neologisms help them to identify the stories that can be easily shared. While misogyny is turned into a game (Kim and Kim 2016, 38), this playful online activity also allows users to rediscover reality augmented by the misogynistic frame.

The misogynistic augmentation of reality became intensified online through a series of discourses on women (*-nyeo*), a series of neologisms such as *kimchinyeo*, that allowed young Korean men to tag, label, and stereotype the Korean women of their generation as a selfish, self-obsessed, and vain group. The increase in linguistic productivity of this misogynistic discourse coincides with the growth of the notorious misogynistic male-dominated community *Ilbe* in the late 2000s. Male users constantly coined terms, as though they were jokes, that combined certain traits with a suffix "*-nyeo*" (woman) to stress her femaleness. It was not an individual's eccentricity, but Korean women in general, who were to be blamed. The internet culture that oversexualizes and objectifies ordinary women, and the legacy of colonial masculinity derived from historical relations with the USA and Japan, were both at work here. The old racist rhetoric was revived on the internet: for instance, "white horses," the idea that Caucasian women were supposed physically superior and sexually desirable, and that Japanese women, "*sushi-nyeo,*" were seen as more docile and submissive than *kimchinyeo*, Korean women. Korean women, neither sexually attractive nor docile, were also depicted, by male users of *Ilbe* and beyond, as selfish and obsessed with themselves, with the vain dream of Westernization that was unsuitable due to their inferiority as *Kimchi* that stink of "Korean-ness." *Kimchinyeo*, combining the representative Korean food *Kimchi* with *-nyeo* leaves no space for a woman to escape from being generalized as stinky *Kimchi*, if she identifies as Korean.

Women find themselves unable to laugh, unable to take the numerous neologisms as harmless banter. One possible response to them is to say to the male speakers that it is not fun at all but an individual effort to destroy the scene of laughter. However, this turned out to be useless in the seemingly "harmless/humorous" context. Thus, *megalians* adopted another strategy—by stealing the language that men use, by devising their own neologisms that correspond to the misogynistic ones, and by making visible the misogynistic nature of those terms that were previously imperceptible, like air.

Feminist activism, megalian *style: stealing the enemy's dialect*

When *megalians* first emerged, their primary strategy was to use the enemy's dialect. They subverted various different kinds of "masculine" language that was being used online. Such language is defined as masculine because of the gendered division of online communities and the unique development of their own dialects. We use the term "dialect" to refer to the

way of speaking/writing that is peculiar to each online community, which enables users to recognize the speaker's online identity (Kim 2010; Michael S. Bernstein, Andrés Monroy-Hernández, Drew Harry, Paul André, Katrina Panovich, and Greg Vargas 2011). This includes specific slang, neologisms, and tones. Yet, the dialects of male-dominated communities were also laced with implicit and explicit misogynistic terms, as well as blatant expressions of hegemonic masculinity. Using masculine dialect is not simply a "phallic girl"-like gesture of mimicry of masculine behaviors aimed at becoming an equal "phallus-bearer" with their male counterparts (Angela McRobbie 2007). In "stealing" the enemy's dialect, *megalians* were aware that they were taking away from men the masculine indulgence of misogynistic back-talk about women. Through parodying, they also laid bare the absurdity and bizarreness of the pervasive misogynistic speech. It also enabled them to overcome their uneasiness about using provocative and assertive language and public expressions of anger.

Online communities that are predominantly composed of younger female users have developed dialects that sound more intimate, warm, and amenable. In addition, they have developed a style of complaints that does not sound assertive: "am I the only weirdo who feels uncomfortable about this?" In contrast, male-dominated online communities have adopted linguistic styles that are rather indifferent, cool, and laddish. The most conspicuous and controversial case of this masculine homosocial community is *Ilbe*, which is notorious for its blatantly immoral gestures and ultra-right-wing political stance[9] which is epitomized by their mockery of victims of state violence. Yet, for *megalians*, *Ilbe* was more importantly a home for misogynistic discourses and styles of speech, one end of the spectrum of widespread misogyny among young Korean men.[10] *Megalians* actively appropriated *Ilbe*'s dialect, the nastiest, most vulgar and misogynistic dialect that was intended to threaten female users.

Against the misogynistic neologisms and discourses prevalent both online and offline, *megalians* started using the enemy's language. They devised neologisms that deride men by substituting *nyeo* (woman) with *nam* (man)—as in *kimchinyeo–kimchinam*. Another tactic that is of particular interest is their deliberate use of swearwords and slang that were supposed to be masculine and extremist—the dialect used on *Ilbe*. This dialect is filled with nasty banter and swearwords that mock stereotypical Korean women, so it is useful to parody for fighting back because of its inherent hostility and its symbolism as an extremist's dialect. If men call women cunts (*boji*), why would women not use the same words? Instead of criticizing the vulgar language that objectifies women, *megalians* actively appropriate the language, calling themselves cunts, and calling men dicks (*jaji*). If men call women *kimchinyeo*, women can use a stronger word: *ssipchinam* (fucking *kimchi* man).

Megalians described their deliberate use of provocative language, combined with their strategic parodying of misogynistic neologisms and styles of speech, as "mirroring." Even though the act of mirroring has operated as a strong form of attack on misogynists and led to the actors being appraised as "the only feminist group that can confront *Ilbe*" (Hyun Mee Kim 2016), their violent and politically problematic use of language is controversial. Korean feminist scholars and activists have drawn attention to the political implications of this strategy. For instance, the Korean feminist philosopher Ji Yeung Yun (2015) proposes that "mirroring" works not only by revealing the contradiction in the misogynistic messages by reversing them (as in plain mirrors), but also by enabling different visions by sometimes magnifying minute objects (as in concave mirrors), and at others rendering visible the wider field of view, which is the social and structural context (as in convex mirrors). Her eloquent discussion of mirroring draws attention to the effects of this tactic as it rendered visible what

had previously been invisible. She highlights how minute instances of misogyny, through strategic mirroring, are made into objects of concern to viewers of the mirror(ed) images. Yet, we contend that the effect of mirroring as a method of activism is not limited to "disclosing" the hidden misogynistic culture to audiences who need to be enlightened. In the next section, we will discuss how *megalian* activism is *experienced* by female users of the internet, who gained and augmented their feminist perspective through the very act of linguistic violence.

In pursuit of fun and pleasure

> Title: We men are rational so we don't hesitate before doing things by chattering like girls.
>
> Content: We simply kill you![11]

This quotation is one of the *megalian* jokes that was made at an early stage of the movement. While female trolls and misogynist trolls competed to occupy the board with flaming, one of the *megalians* uploaded this post to go phishing; it purports to be written by a man so as to trick others. When readers access the post, the content reveals a pie chart showing that 94 percent of felonious crimes are perpetrated by men in South Korea, combined with the comment above. This post gained 1,158 recommendations on the day it was written and was subsequently deleted by the administrator of the board. However, a screenshot of the image has been circulating in women-dominated online communities to date (December 2017) because the post is considered hilarious and also many women expressed empathy with its idea, which is that the violence against women conducted by men is pervasive and normalized in South Korea. The post is an exemplary case of how mirroring produces fun while augmenting the misogynistic reality that was previously imperceptible. Using statistics without background information to frame "selfish women" and to render a specific trait as a generalized peculiarity of Korean women is a common repertoire of misogynistic discourse online. *Megalians* copied the pattern and parodied it to frame "irrational men/men who kill women" as a label for Korean men. Juxtaposed with this comment, the meaning of an objective crime-rate figure was shifted into a significant representation of gendered reality and forced readers to rediscover the world that statistics embeds, which is augmented by the new frame. The phishing post provides fun for readers and the writer, as the upvoted population proved, and at the same time it pokes fun at misogynists, as the poster tried to disguise herself as one by mimicking their saying, "we men are rational."

One important characteristic of *megalian* activism is its explicit emphasis on fun, humor, and the pleasure of doing activism. This does not mean that they refuse to engage in the arduous labor of doing activism, or avoid the painstaking work involved in becoming a feminist in a hostile, misogynistic society, or shun any serious discussion of feminism altogether. Yet, from the beginning, *megalians* have emphasized that activism should be fun. And their activism is not so much about enlightening their audiences or persuading them to agree with what they think as it is about striking their opponents, the male misogynists, causing them to tremble, while having fun writing and reading anti-misogynist humor and parodies. Mirroring in this respect is not just about the content, but also about the act of playing with violent language, and the experiences of pleasure and fun through experimenting with language and their own assertiveness, not only in their own online community, but also in other places—on the streets, in other online communities, and on the digital news

pages—protesting their presence in an utterly humorous and violent language. As the online misogyny in Korea is often augmented in the guise of humor, with women as the prey for men's entertainment, so the feminist/anti-misogynistic discourses and actions launched by *Megalia* were also augmented in the same manner, while utilizing misogynistic language as its own raw material for joyful parody.

Megalians insist on producing/having fun, since this is the element that enables them to join together and continue reading and writing in this community. In discussions about how they became *megalians*, it is not hard to find users stating that they visited the board just to see what was happening or why people were so upset about it, but when they read the posts, they found them not only convincing but also hilarious. Writing on the board, being upvoted by other users, and reading the replies also offers enjoyable experiences and a sense of being part of this community. Furthermore, one of their fun activist tactics of writing funny commentaries on digital news articles is not only an act of speaking out and making their opinions public, but also a playful battle against the misogynistic men behind the screens who are humiliated and irritated by the *megalians*' comments. The battles, of course, can be tiring and not always pleasant, but *megalians* still found it funny to irritate their opponents. As they took pleasure from the strategic "mirroring" way of writing, neologisms proliferated and their presence became increasingly visible.

Megalia shares many characteristics with contemporary online-based feminist activism in which participants utilize media platforms such as Twitter hashtags to share feminist ideas and connect with each other (Jessalynn Keller, Kaitlynn Mendes, and Jessica Ringrose 2018; Jinsook Kim 2017). Its constant production and circulation of humor and parodies also reminds us of the increasing significance of the feminist politics of fun as seen in the production and propagation of feminist memes that mediate technological, cultural, and affective networks (Carrie A. Rentschler and Samantha C. Thrift 2015). What makes *megalian* activism unique is their self-conscious emphasis on fun and the strategic importance of parody, which they learned through their online battles. Their constant production of entertaining materials is explicitly aimed at "fun"—making fun of misogynists, and having fun themselves to intrigue their audience and to renew the vigor of online activism. Because it is fun to laugh with like-minded feminist/anti-misogynist users, they constantly search out more and more misogynistic originals, which would otherwise have made them uncomfortable. They articulate their anger while "making fun" of misogynists and seeing those men trembling behind their screens from the anxious and frustrated responses of male internet users. *Megalians* are committed to activism, but they are also immersed in fun activities. The activist community can be sustained without becoming exhausted when it is fun. To keep it going, they produce more and more fun.

The immersive aspect of this fun-producing activism has made activism more like a game. This is not to dismiss the significance of the discourse or to discount their serious commitment, but rather the opposite. Like serious game players, *megalians* are deeply committed to their activism. Furthermore, they seek more fun, more targets, missions, and battles, and devise fun strategies to make things happen. As one keeps playing a game, one learns the rules, and becomes more skillful in identifying targets and attacking them. Through repetition and users' immersion, the game's structural characteristics and gaming activities can alter the player's sensory perceptions and behaviors, as users render their familiar environment through the patterns of the game (Angelica B. Ortiz de Gortari, Karin Aronsson, and Mark Griffiths 2013). In a similar vein, the online battles and discussions alter the user's vision

of the world, their expectations of what to see and how to feel, and they find different patterns through their feminist perspective. *Megalian* fun comes from the keener perception of the misogynistic elements in the world, and their capacity to frame these elements into stories to share. Through the *megalian* experience, in which misogynistic elements of daily lives take on an amplified significance, everyday misogyny is now rendered visible, perceived and experienced with greater intensity: everyday life is now augmented. Things that once made them feel uncomfortable for some reason and led them to ask "am I the only weirdo to feel this way?" or keep quiet in order not to kill others' joy now fit together into the structure of misogyny. If the air-like misogyny was previously imperceptible and the misogynistic language was often very subtle and disguised as humor, *megalian* experiences enabled them to identify those elements as parts of misogynistic Korean society. Korean society is a spring from which things to attack, or misogynistic originals, "do not dry up," not only because it is thoroughly infiltrated with the air-like misogyny, but also because their *megalian* experiences gave women the ability, confidence, and motivation to identify its misogynistic elements. One user's post on how she started seeing the gendered lookism in Korea in terms of the objectification of women and misogyny gives an insight into this process:

> After *Megalia*, I realized how horrible the frame is.
>
> Now I came to judge Korean men on their looks and look down upon them. [...]
>
> Aw, that ugly dork! Look at his pimples! How bony he is! He boasts he's a man, but he would never beat a white or black man physically.
>
> When these thoughts occurred to me, I became astonished by the fact that, *by only looking down on the man's appearance, it became possible to totally ignore him as a being*. However respectful as a dignified person, or however precious as a son of his parents, that doesn't matter at all, and I take him just as an "object" that occupies its spot in the frame that I've gained. I look at him just as an object not a person, so I don't feel serious or guilty. It feels like I'm just one of the "riders" on the gigantic vehicle of the frame, not an agent who despises that person. The frame made him an object to be judged, it's not what I did. I can hide behind the frame. So, I need never feel that what I did is terrible.
>
> This is creepy. Women have always been the objects of this process. […]
>
> I climbed halfway up the hill where the men were standing at the top, and the world becomes a wholly new spectacle, and every day I feel like I'm in a new world […] [12]

This lengthy quote needs to be read with caution and with an understanding of the context. Talk about women's looks, whether they are celebrities or just random individuals, has been prevalent in male-dominated online communities and offline conversations among men in Korea. Racist and offensive "jokes" and commentaries that compare *kimchinyeo* to "*sushinyeo,*" or "white horses," were not seriously problematized among male users. When *megalians* started posting "Korean men are ugly" online and coining neologisms that mocked the specific looks of men, they were parodying what men have always done to women. This user joined this mirroring game, and started making comments about men in that way. During this process, she felt how those men might have felt—they judge women on their appearance without any guilt, without much thought, because those women are just "objects" naturally given by the "frame," to use her word. Through the repetition of masculine ways of speaking, she adopted the "frame" that objectifies men, as men have always objectified women, which offered an opportunity for her to experience its effect. However, she could not just be happy with this new frame, but realized how "creepy" it is that men could stay happy with it. If the misogynistic augmentation of everyday reality among male online users

has reinforced the hegemonic discourse and become too pervasive for her to recognize, the linguistic performance of parody has revealed how absurd and bizarre the existing discourse is, and led her to gain a critical perspective.

Discussion

The online sphere has become a site where offline experiences are rearticulated and norms are challenged, for better or worse. In this article, we have attempted to illustrate the complex process of augmentation, and draw attention to the novel feminist strategy of actively augmenting gendered realities and feminist politics. *Megalia* emerged out of the matrix of misogynistic online communities where the blaming of Korean women worked as a glue or homosocial bond among Korean men, a means of self-appeasement for their failure, and a leisurely activity for having fun. The strategic reaction to this online misogyny, sometimes disguised as men's jokes, was to take the fun out of men's hands by throwing parodies back at male users. It is the activeness, experiences of participation, and communities of sharing thoughts gained by female users that enabled *Megalia* to emerge and become popular. Moreover, through their extensive use of digital technologies on a daily basis, these female users learned the rules of the game of online activism. Fun is not a random thing, but a deliberate choice to expand and sustain the movement. And it was not only fun. Their immersion in this online activism has equipped *megalians* with an augmented vision to identify misogynistic elements as well as women's potential to fight back. Through this immersive experience, they have gained a critical perspective.

In their activism, *megalians* revealed the pretense of the online/offline dualism, actively claimed the online as part of augmented reality, and made a loud noise that revealed the madness of the misogynistic world. The red pill added to their lived world with another layer of targets to fight against, and the world is not the same as before.

They took the red pill that irreversibly transformed the world for them. *Megalians* said that the world has completely changed from before, everyday reality became unbearable and something that necessitated constant struggles, and they became an important force of feminist activism in Korea. *Megalian* activism and its evolution, which emerged out of the DickTrix, appropriating its tactics and language while turning the misogynists' toxic "fun" into their own, urges us to attend to the complex and creative processes of feminist mobilizations in the ongoing digital gender wars.

Notes

1. *Egalia's Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes*. Written by Gerd Brantenberg in 1977, Korean translation published in 1996.
2. http://cafe.daum.net/myboddymychoice
3. http://dsoonline.org
4. Translated by the authors.
5. The debate on the abolition of the veteran's extra point system for public servants, ensured by a constitutional appeal by feminist and disability-rights activists in 1998, was an important event that caused young Korean men to identify feminists or young women in general as their adversaries, who steal their privileges and are parasitic on their sacrifice.
6. Young Korean men's anti-immigrant sentiment is termed "imagined exploitation" by Korean cultural critic Park (2013). This is because "even though young men claim immigrants steal their jobs, the actors who actually deprive them of their jobs are not immigrants, but the state and

capital." We contextualize young Korean men's misogyny as based on "imagined deprivation" in this vein.

7. http://megalian.com/free/359466 Dec 14, 2015 (Accessed June 10, 2017 in the archived form http://archive.fo/U5Fn1). All quotations from *megalian* postings are the authors' translations.
8. In a survey conducted in 2015, 51.6 percent of 317 participants answered that they had received misogynistic messages from the mass media and everyday life experience in one week. "Q. Why did young men come to despise women?" July 3, 2015, *Busan Daily News*. http://news20.busan.com/controller/newsController.jsp?newsId=201507040000030 Accessed December 6, 2017.
9. MIC reports *Ilbe* as "a loose group of mostly digitally savvy, ultra-right-wing South Korean men" congregated in a "4chan-esque web forum.""Inside Ilbe: How South Korea's angry young men formed a powerful new alt-right movement" *MIC*, September 19, 2017. https://mic.com/articles/184477/inside-ilbe-how-south-koreas-angry-young-men-formed-a-powerful-new-alt-right-movement#.xRNJMMGju (Accessed December 8, 2017).
10. *Ilbe*'s blatant refusal to recognize social norms and its hostility towards women has been analyzed as a product of the precarity of young men and their unfulfilled desire for intimacy and individualized gender rivalry (Bora Yoon 2013), and as the manifestation of male desire to reassert the ideal of normative femininity in order to regain control over women (Jin Um 2016).
11. "We men are rational so we don't hesitate before doing things by chattering like girls" MERS board, June 2, 2015. (Reposted August 5, 2015 at http://gall.dcinside.com/m_entertainer/2021696. Accessed September 19, 2017).
12. http://cafe.daum.net/subdued20club/ReHf/1135430 (Originally from *Megalia*, shared in a women-only community November 24, 2015, Accessed May 8, 2017).

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