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Fighting Online Sexual Harassments
A Qualitative Study of Strategies Applied within
a Feminist Digital Affective Public

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Abstract

Online sexual harassments are an increasing societal issue, affecting women on a daily basis, and resulting in exclusion from the public sphere. When a particular group is refrained from participating on equal grounds, it undermines democracy. The objective of this study is to highlight strategies that are applied when countering and fighting sexual harassments within a feminist digital affective public. The study contributes with theoretical knowledge on how interaction rituals within a feminist digital affective public can give rise to emotional energy and can lead to solidarity and create a collective identity. By carrying out a thematic analysis on posts from an Instagram account, it displays how humour, disgust, and shamelessness are applied as successful strategies. The research emanated from a hermeneutic perspective and drew inspiration from symbolic interactionism, regarding how individuals interpret and ascribe object meaning which turns them into symbols. These strategies provide future studies with a methodological tool for generalising on analytical grounds when studying online sexual harassments.

Keywords: Digital Activism, Emotions, Feminist Digital Affective Public, Interaction Rituals Online, Online Sexual Harassments.

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Introduction and Background

Threats of violence and harassments online are well known phenomena and frequently occurring in many peoples' lives. Previous studies highlight a difference in threats and harassments related to gender. Men tend to be exposed to harassments relating to their professions, whereas harassment towards women are more personal and tend to contain sexual harassments and threats of sexual violence (Bladini, 2017). According to the Swedish law, sexual harassment is "a behaviour of sexual nature that violate someone's dignity" (SFS, 2008:567, authors translation). Even though the law defines sexual harassments, it does not shed light on the wide range of actions that are included. The perception of the severity of an offence differs depending whether it is carried out in real life or online. A person that shows their genitals to someone else in real life without their consent breaks the law, whereas the equivalence online, sending someone a dickpic without consent, generally does not give rise to any further consequences.

Since 2011 there has been an increase in threats of sexual violence and online sexual harassments and many girls and women are exposed to it on a daily basis (Jane, 2016). Sexual harassments are a form of violence, and online sexual harassments apply to the same mechanisms as those offline, i.e. they are mainly carried out by men to control women, and women exposed to it might end up suffering from tension, anxiety, and disrupted sleeping patterns. Furthermore, sexual harassments can result in silencing and excluding women from the public sphere. Despite the negative consequences of online and real life sexual harassments, it is generally not considered a severe offence, and tends to be downplayed (Fineman 2003; Flam, Hearn & Parkin 2010; Megarry, 2014). Sexual harassments result in restricting women from venturing their voices in the public sphere. Consequently, this can lead to undermining the democratic system since not all voices will be represented.

Online sexual harassments are omnipresent but there are platforms that provide space for mobilising, countering, and fighting it. *Assholesonline* is an Instagram account that highlights sexual harassments. It was established in 2014 and has more than 263 000 followers. The woman who runs the account, makes copies of sexual harassments that she has received and publishes them on *assholesonline*. The identity of the people who send sexual harassments are anonymised, preventing the focus to land on the individual and resulting in the creation of a stereotype of men who sexually harass women online. Instead, the countless anonymous messages, containing sexual harassments, highlight a structural issue.

Previous research (Baer, 2015; Blodgett & Salter, 2012; Consalvo, 2012; Dixon, 2014; Heron, Belford & Goker, 2014; Kasumovic & Kuznekoff, 2015; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Megarry, 2014; Papacharissi, 2015; Sundén & Paasonen, 2018) has provided indispensable information that laid the ground for this research. It highlights how harassers mobilise and carry out joint attacks on women online, and how feminists have used shamelessness to fight sexual harassments. Furthermore, it provides information on the strengths of hashtag activism, with regard to mobilising people, and how affective publics arise through the sharing of painful stories.

However, there is a gap regarding how rituals that give rise to solidarity (Collins, 2004) are carried out online. Further research is required to reach an understanding on how emotional energy can give rise to solidarity, and creates a collective identity within a feminist digital affective public. Studying interaction rituals online will contribute with knowledge to literature on solidarity and will further highlight differences and similarities between communication carried out in real life and online. Furthermore, through studying what strategies are used on assholesonline, this study can contribute with a greater understanding on how sexual harassments can be met, and countered. Sexual harassments is a societal issue, that affect many women's everyday life. When half of the population is restricted from participating in the discussions that are carried out in the public sphere, there is a risk that the democratic system losses legitimacy. It is therefor vital to further investigate what actions can be taken to counter, and decrease threats and sexual harassments online.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to identify strategies that are applied when countering threats and sexual harassments online which can lead to strengthening women's opportunity to participate in the public sphere on equal terms. Furthermore, the study will contribute with theoretical knowledge on how interaction rituals, within a feminist digital affective public, give rise to emotional energy, and how emotional energy can be connected to solidarity and a collective identity.

How can interaction rituals be understood within a feminist digital affective public?

What strategies are used on assholesonline when responding to sexual harassments?

What role do emotions play on assholesonline when responding to sexual harassments?

Digital Activism and Online Sexual Harassments

Digital Activism

Online activism is vast, and previous research highlights different aspects of it. Baer's (2015) research shows that through hashtag activism feminists can gather individual stories, and when the stories are viewed in combination they highlight structural issues, rather than individual problems. Dixon (2014) highlights that hashtag feminism provides a virtual place where women can express their beliefs and this can be found to redefining social realities. Also, through identifying with the language used within a community they can experience an emotion of connectedness with the leading hashtag feminist. In contrast, Megarry's (2014) study of women's experiences of Twitter and hashtag activism, highlights that due to threats and harassments online women are being silenced and excluded from the public sphere.

Online activism has its strength in its ability to mobilise people, it can bring together local and global parts of a movement, and it supports non-organised groups to meet up and create new constellations (Papacharissi, 2015). Van Lear and Van Aelst (2010) make a distinction between internet-based and internet-supported actions. Whereas internet-based action consists of actions that are mainly carried out online, internet-supported actions role is to facilitate the organisation and coordination of social movements that operate and carry out their actions offline. However, the authors highlight that the differences tend to be subtle. Generally, there is a constant interaction between online and offline activities, and it is counterproductive treating them as separate unites, as they are closely interwoven (Boyns & Loprieno, 2014). Online mobilisation is not homogeneous and a movement's success is tied to sociocultural and political economic aspects. To achieve a societal change, it required the ability to imagine a different reality, a redefinition of what societal institutions represent, and what role they ought to have in the future (Papacharissi, 2015).

Affective publics arise when networks of individuals share their stories of emotions and a discourse of structural emotions occurs (Papacharissi, 2015). Affective publics can be understood as a virtual space of solidarity. According to Ahmed (2014) emotions are often described as private and as something that occurs inside a person and negative feelings are often perceived to be the result of personal shortcomings. However, when a large amount of anonymous, individual stories witness of similar emotions, it highlights structural issues, rather than individual ones (Baer, 2015; Summers-Effler, 2002). #MeToo is a vivid example of how the sharing of painful, individual stories of sexual harassments highlights structures.

Sharing stories can create a space where a 'we' can be formed. The reader imagines the others' pain and makes it their own. Through that pain, a relationship is created between them, it is not a joint pain that they share, the reader rather imagines and is pained by what the writer is experiencing (Ahmed, 2014). This can be connected to circumstances under which a collective identity is created. According to Melucci (1996) a collective identity is created through the interaction between the members of a group that communicate and influence each other. It is a process that is closely connected to the meaning of the collective actions, and it is the collective identity that decides which direction a social movement is taking. To create a collective identity, it is required that the individuals feel as part of a community, which is accomplished through an emotional investment in the group. Collective identity differs from an affective public in the sense that a collective identity is how people relate and feel connected to each other. An affective public on the other hand can be understood as a virtual space where the stories are shared.

#MeToo highlights how rapid online mobilisation can be and sheds light on how movements can grow explosively in a short time. However, as legislation and political decisions are slow processes, it can be difficult to see the connection between online activism and real life, particularly since online activism often includes soft methods, such as the sharing of stories (Papacharissi, 2015).

Online Sexual Harassments

Threats and sexual harassments online occur under different circumstances; they are sent privately, as personal messages and emails, whereas other times they are made publicly, posted on social media and various platforms. Discourses within the gaming community have a history of hypermasculinity (Blodgett & Salter, 2012), and many threats and sexual harassments have been carried out online. This has provided researchers with access, allowing them to study mechanisms that motivate threats and sexual harassments online, and even though they have been carried out within the gaming community, they still follow patterns of sexual harassments that are carried out in the real world, i.e. carried out by men to silence women (Fineman, 2003; Flam et al, 2010; Megarry, 2014). Heron et al. (2014) found that the women who are exposed to the most severe threats and sexual harassments within the gaming community, are professionals e.g. game developers and game critics. It can be explained through an understanding of power and status, where women in a professional role threatens the existing patriarchal structures. It can further be connected to Kasumovic and Kuznekoff (2015) study, that found that there was a connection between threatened

status and online harassments. Women who were skilled gamers were exposed to threats and sexual harassments by men who were less skilled than them, whereas men who were more skilled than the women, did not tend to abuse them. This was further connected to a threatened masculinity.

Blodgett and Salter (2012) studied the gaming community and found that hypermasculine discourses expressed hostility towards those who expressed a female identity, and Consalvo's (2012) research showed that threats and sexual harassments carried out against feminist critics followed a pattern. Loosely connected networks consisting of men carried out somewhat coordinated harassments online, which contributed to reproducing existing structures of male dominance within the gaming community. Marwick & Caplan (2018) highlight how these strategies also can be found outside the gaming communities, within the manosphere, an online community that articulate that feminists conspire to take over the world. Furthermore, they highlight how the language used within the manosphere portrays feminists as man-haters. Sundén & Paasonen (2018) studied how the shaming of women is embraced by feminists, and how they apply shamelessness as a tactic of resistance (cf. Wasshede, 2013).

This study will contribute with theoretical knowledge on how interaction rituals within a feminist digital affective public give rise to emotional energy. It will highlight how emotional energy can be understood to foster solidarity and lead to the creation of a collective identity online. Furthermore, it will shed light on the diversity of sexual harassment online as the data presented will consist of different examples of sexual harassments.

Interaction Rituals, Solidarity, Humour, Emotions, Power and Status.

Interaction Rituals in Social Movements

Summers-Effler (2002) combines Collins's interaction ritual theory with Wiley's model of the self, and shows how interaction between individuals and collective emotions can be understood as motivators for resistance, social movements, and social change. Interaction rituals consist of four components: 1. It is carried out face-to-face, 2. There are boundaries, separating those who are included, from those who are excluded, 3. There is a shared focus of attention amongst the participants, 4. The participants share a common mood. Furthermore, a successful interaction ritual can give rise to four different outcomes: A. Solidarity towards the group, B. Emotional energy, C. Symbols that are representable for the group, D. A sense of righteous morality. A successful

interaction ritual is considered exhilarating, whereas a failed ritual drains the participants of energy (Collins, 2004).

The parasocial interaction theory was coined by Horton and Wohl (1956), and describes interaction that is carried out over time and distance. Through combining the interaction ritual theory with the parasocial interaction theory, Boyns and Loprieno (2014) claim that face-to-face interaction is not vital for successful interaction rituals. They advocate that emotional energy can be created amongst individuals online, as online platforms offer a virtual space whereas technology and real-life interactions are closely entwined, and provide an environment where feelings of co-presence arise.

A successful interaction ritual can give rise to a collective excitement. It is a temporary feeling that can result in more permanent effects, e.g. emotional energy, group solidarity, and symbols. Emotional energy is the emotional result of interaction, and arises in relation to experiences of solidarity or in hierarchal interactions. It is described as an exalted feeling, that builds on a sense of moral right and is found to be motivating in its nature. This is due to emotional energy which causes the individual to feel good about themselves, and encourages them to take part in similar situations that create more emotional energy. Furthermore, a successful interaction ritual results in a positively loaded outcome and can lead to creating group emblems which are symbols connected to group identity. There are no restrictions or requirements of what a symbol ought to be, a symbol is rather signified through containing a shared emotion for the participants, e.g. vocabulary, laughter, or a celebrity. When symbols are used repetitively they gain situational emotions. These symbols can then be used within a network to create solidarity, and depending on the frequency in use, they evoke various strong emotions of solidarity amongst the group members (Collins, 2004).

Solidarity in Social Movements

Solidarity is a vital part of feminist groups, although, for it to prevail and thrive, it requires a sharing of experiences that constantly awake and stimulate solidarity (Summers-Effler, 2002). It is also one of the cornerstones of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015). Actions that awake solidarity give rise to emotional energy and women can receive emotional energy from feminist solidarity, which leads to creating a sense of 'we'. Consequently, a collective identity can emerge. A strong feeling of solidarity and a collective identity can motivate a group to challenge societal norms and turn the shame of being in a subordinate position into pride over solidarity towards the group

(Summers-Effler, 2002). Embracing shamelessness can be considered as a strategy carried out by feminists, that turns power and status positions around and thereby allows women to resist the shame (Sundén & Paasonen, 2018).

However, it requires a lot of emotional energy to maintain resistance against the dominant societal order. A person who does not benefit from the existing societal norms but receives a great amount of emotional energy elsewhere can become a charismatic leader. The leader can then work as a symbol of solidarity, and her experiences can generate and further bring large amounts of emotional energy to the group, who then will have the required emotional energy it takes to spread critical thinking amongst the rest of society (Summers-Effler, 2002).

Feminism springs from injustice. Seeing that the realisation of injustice is painful, feminism and pain are considered closely entwined (Ahmed, 2014). The realisation of injustice is a must to develop a critical thinking, it builds on deviant emotions which occur when there is a conflict in how individuals *wish* to react, and the knowledge of how they are *expected* to react, according to societal norms. A critical consciousness is essential to identify and counter further injustices, as it will allow a new understanding when interpreting experiences and emotions. People in subordinate positions, such as women, will receive less emotional energy, and a limited access can result in rivalry amongst the members of the subordinate group.

Feminists who criticise the patriarchy are often exposed to penalties, in shape of withdrawal of emotional energy. Simultaneously women who do not oppose or are not found to pose a threat, can be rewarded with emotional energy for their submissive behaviour, leading to the reproduction of gender hierarchies. Through a collective identity and solidarity from the group, sharing stories of subordination can turn competition into a sense of injustice and the lack of emotional energy can be understood to be the result of social structures, rather than the result of personal shortcomings. Additionally, emotional energy is found to be crucial to infuse hope that a societal change is possible, and that it motivates and fuels individuals to continue to carry out critical thinking. Furthermore, emotional energy can be used to turn shame and anger into hope and fosters the strength to continue to keep on resisting oppression (Summers-Effler, 2002).

Humour

Dugas advocates the relief theory which states that when tension is built up, laughter is a way of releasing pressure (Billig, 2005). Locke on the other hand favoured the incongruence theory which suggests that incongruence is what triggers laughter (Billig, 2005), and Attardo (2014) added that

incongruity occurs when something unexpected happens. According to Hobbes (1999) and superiority theories, people laugh when they experience 'sudden glory' in accordance to their own triumph or others' demises.

Kemper (2016) argues that experiences of triumph can be explained through successfully exercising power or gaining status. If someone challenges a group and someone in the group carries out a joke successfully, it results in the group gaining status, and the one who challenged them loses it. It is a symbolic victory that highlights the group's superiority over the one who challenged them and grants them a sensation of triumph, resulting in laughter, that expresses pleasure in symbolically winning over the enemy, i.e. gaining higher status than them.

Humour is context bound and what is perceived as amusing is bound by time, culture, psychology, norms, ideas, politics, aesthetics, and morals (Billig, 2005; Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014). Within social movements, humour is an emotional strategy used to communicate and engage other members, as well as entertaining the audience, and simultaneously delivering a message (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014). Bakhtin (1968) described the carnival life and according to Wettergren's (2009) interpretation, those who took part "laughed at hierarchical structures and privileges, ridiculed death, transgressed social norms and taboos." (p. 6). On a different note, Malmqvist (2015) highlights the role satire plays within online social groups and how satire can be used to disguise racism when making racist comments.

Laughter is a rhetorical device that can be communicative, however, so can refraining from laughter, e.g. the absent of laughter when a laughter is expected can result in a palpable silence, and communicate a lack of amusement and can articulate disapproval. Laughter, like humour, is equally context bound, and can be either disciplinary or rebellious. Disciplinary laughter challenges social control, and operates to make individuals follow societal norms, whereas rebellious laughter is carried out to mock social norms and rules. However, it is further noted that disciplinary laughter can be rebellious, and rebellious laughter can operate disciplinary (Billig, 2005).

Emotions, Power and Status

Social interaction is full of emotions (Wettergren, 2010). As emotions motivate action, an understanding for emotions will grant an understanding for the action (Barbalet, 2001). Due to history, discourses, and associations, certain bodies have been exposed to hate and disgust (Ahmed, 2014) which can explain how the period, and women on their period, came to be perceived as dirty.

Using what is found to be dirty is a strategy to destabilise existing discourses (Wasshede, 2010), as it turns power and status positions around.

Additionally, there is creativity in using disgust because it is not restricted to follow previously given directives, and can thereby be used to reach change (Wasshede, 2013). Persdotter (2013) used Wasshede's concept of *abjectification* which refers to an object that is found to be dirty when it is considered to be out of place, and highlighted how the menstruation, which is generally treated as something that should be hidden away, is found to be dirty when talked about in public. As the period holds an abject position, it can be used to provoke and shock (Persdotter, 2013). It is a strategy that can alter power and status when used by feminist to resist oppression (cf. Sundén & Paasonen, 2018).

Status is a structural relation, affected by changes in power and occurs between individuals as well as groups. High status enables a person to affect people in subtle ways, whereas power is used confrontational, forcing people to obey (Kemper, 2006). Violence and threats of violence are means to reach and maintain a position of power (Fineman 2003; Flam et al, 2010). Online harassments and shaming women, are other ways of exercising power and creating fear (Megarry 2014; Sundén & Paasonen, 2018). Power and status positions are permeated by structural emotions, and scrutinising emotions can explain changes in power and status (Kemper, 2006). Resentment, fear, anxiety, and shame are emotions that occur in relationships of power and status, although they are often articulate as anger (Barbalet, 2001; Kemper, 2006).

Method

Sample

The data used in this study was gathered from the Instagram account *assholesonline*, where 468 posts, with 150-2500 comments per post, were analysed. *Assholesonline* was found to be a suitable case to study because it sheds light on structures of misogyny, and it is a unique case with regards to the specific way of how threats and sexual harassments are countered within a feminist digital affective public. The sample presented in this research consists of posts and followers' comments, through which it can be highlighted how humour, shame, and disgust are applied to counter threats and sexual harassments online. The woman who runs *assholesonline* occurs publicly in different media; she writes for a Swedish newspaper, she has been on Swedish television, she has joined different podcasts and occurs in several YouTube videos. Bringing in the different platforms that

she occurs in would have brought light on her role as an influencer, but it would have taken focus away from the strategies that she applies to highlight and counter online sexual harassments. Approaching the material as a case study was not to achieve broadness, instead the goal is to make an analysis with more depth.

Further criteria for choosing the specific posts was due to the need to present the wide variety of sexual harassments, including men articulating ownership over the female body, women being reduced to objects of lust/pleasure, men throwing their sexual preferences on women without their consent, rejection resulting in abuse, and threats of sexual violence.

Studying the same account allows to identify the support the woman receives from her followers within the feminist digital affective public, when applying different strategies. The people who follow *assholesonline*, had the same opportunity to comment on all posts which means that how the various posts were received can be studied both from viewing the individual comments and also through studying attitudes that are represented by a certain group. Furthermore, it allows the identification of followers that occur in various comment fields of different posts and who liked several posts. This can be connected to and analysed in relation to theories on solidarity. In contrast, it can be argued that the samples lack representation amongst the follower, as only those who seek out the account or are tagged in posts, are represented. However, it was not considered negatively affecting the study, as the focus is to analyse the strategies feminists that are operating in a digital affective public apply when dealing with sexual harassment online.

The case does not represent how sexual harassments are generally dealt with, however, the sexual harassments that the woman is exposed to are structural, which is why this research will generate some knowledge that can be generalised. This study follows Halkier's (2001) theory on how qualitative methods generalise on analytical grounds and do not strive to provide a stable and universal generalisation. Instead the generalisation ought to be specific and context bound, and take "dynamisms, ambivalences, conflicts, and complexities" (p. 788) into consideration. It is an interactive process that conceptualise the object of the study in relation to the context it occurs in.

There are three different ways to reach generalisation; ideal typologising, category zooming, and positioning. Generalising through ideal typologising can consist of coding the material, finding different patterns in the material that highlight narrow descriptions, and identifying the different patterns in future analyses, i.e. finding the same patterns in different studies. Category zooming pinpoints a particular aspect in a study and sheds light on its complexity and specific details, the entity that has been thoroughly studied can then be identified in different studies. Through analysing how individuals position themselves in relation to others, patterns can be identified and

tied to situations that are socially constructed and thereby highlight patterns of generalisation. Generalising on analytical grounds when studying online sexual harassments, can contribute with a methodological tool for future research. Furthermore, an understanding for strategies that are used on assholesonline can contribute with further knowledge on how to fight online sexual harassments. This knowledge can be used to contribute to creating an equal space for women online, where they can participate in the public debate, which will consequently strengthening democracy.

Several alternative approaches were considered, consisting of comparing different Instagram accounts that highlight and counter threats, sexism and sexual harassments online; interviewing the people who run the accounts, with the purpose to identify how different strategies were applied, and how efficient they were found to be. However, comparing different accounts would split the focus and risk losing the depth of the study. Interviews could provide interesting information about underlying thoughts and emotions that motivate the authors, but that would be at the cost of not including the followers' comments, and thereby losing the opportunity to study the interaction between the person running the account and their followers.

Research Process

A thematic analysis was carried out, giving the process focus and facilitating the analysis of the various posts. The different themes that occurred were: interaction rituals, rituals that give rise to solidarity, disgust, shamelessness, vengeance, triumph, and criticism. When processing the material, inspiration was drawn from Wolcott's (1994) strategies that are used when conducting qualitative research. Firstly, the data was processed and described. In this study the data consists of posts from assholesonline, which consist of text and one picture. Secondly, an analysis was carried out, in this process the author analysed and identified *what* was happening in the material. Thirdly, an interpretation was made, where the material was scrutinised and it was identified *how* the data could be understood in relation to theory. However, as the analysis was carried out, a pattern began to emerge, indicating that the different posts consist of elements that occur to be following a structure. New theory were included, and as the posts were further analysed, different elements that occur in interaction rituals were identified, e.g emotional energy, solidarity towards the group, symbols that came to be representable to the group, and a sense of moral superiority. Furthermore, attention was drawn to *how* the use of emoticons appeared to enhance emotions and contributed to giving rise to emotional energy and was further investigated.

The hermeneutic perspective guided the research process, with special attention paid to *casuistry*, where facts are seen as being produced and given context through interpretation. Legitimacy was not reached through logic, the focus was rather on argumentation, judgement, and practical reasoning. A reflexive knowledge was reached through analysing aspects of context, agreement, coherence, potential, penetration, comprehensiveness, thoroughness, suggestiveness, and appropriateness (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Theories and previous knowledge have been closely entwined in the interpretation process and the producing of new knowledge. The process consisted of going back and forth between studying previous theories and the empirical material, providing a firm base to build the research on, and deepening theoretical knowledge when needed.

Inspiration was drawn from the symbolic interactionism perspective, where Blumer (1969) advocates that individuals interpret and ascribe object meaning which turns them into symbols. Individuals will then act towards symbols according to the meaning they have given them. The connotation of a symbol can change as interaction between individuals can grant the symbol a new meaning. As time passes, the context and the individuals' approach to the symbol might change, which will result in a change of the symbol's meaning.

It is a case study of feminist digital activism within an affective public, the case resembles other cases (Blodgett & Salter, 2012; Consalvo, 2012; Fox & Tang, 2014; Heron et al, 2014; Kasumovic & Kuznekoff, 2015; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Megarry, 2014; Sundén & Paasonen, 2018), following the same structures where sexual harassments are used to silence women (Fineman 2003; Flam et al, 2010). However, the case differs from other cases in a sense that the woman who is exposed, responds with humour, disgust, and embracing shamelessness. The sexual harassments are then copied, and posted as screenshots on her Instagram account, to highlight a structural issue.

Using data gathered from one single source was a strength, because it allows analysing how the posts were received in a greater context, where a shift in how the various posts were received could be connected to attitudes towards the particular posts. If the posts had been gathered from different accounts, the changes in the responses to the various posts could instead have been explained through different individuals commenting on different posts. Scheff (1997) highlights how scrutinising an individual case can contribute with knowledge about a whole system. The case (*assholesonline*) was found to be highly suitable to build the study on, as it consists of many smaller elements (posts and comments), and it is part of a greater system (online sexual harassments and how to counter them), and can thereby contribute to further highlight structures. All posts and comments have been translated by the author from Swedish to English.

Studying threats and sexual harassments online is rough, it is painful to read about all the hatred, and it often required that I forced myself to continue processing the material. When first encountering assholesonline, I was intrigued. It introduced a new way to me of how to counter and fight threats and sexual harassments online. I was amazed to see the support it received in form of likes and supporting comments, and thrilled to see that the profile pictures of the followers consisted of a wide range of different people. I was eager to find out more about the strategies that were applied, that allowed the woman to reach out to such a heterogeneous group, and filled me with such an empowerment.

Ethics

In order to carry out a non-biased research and to strengthen the validity, a systematic analysis was carried out, closely interwoven with theory, alongside a reflexive process. The research followed the ethical guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council¹ and paid special attention to the guideline 'do no harm' (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). There are no firm guidelines provided in relation to online research, even though there are discussions concerning it (Zimmer, 2010). The woman in charge of assholesonline, has been contacted several times, asking for her consent to use the account for this study. The first email received an auto reply, stating that she receives around 100 emails per day and would try to reply as soon as possible, the following messages received no replies. The followers that commented on the different posts, and who's comments have been used in this study, were not contacted. Getting in touch with followers who commented on posts would have been difficult. It was taken into consideration to post a comment at the end of each posts, informing and asking for permission. However, as the posts used in this study are more than a year old, it was found highly unlikely that anyone would have seen the message, and therefore found to be an excessing measure. Many of the users use fake names and everyone was anonymised in this study, the comments were translated, and amongst the thousands of comments, it was found that it would be highly unlikely that anyone could trace the comments back to the individuals who made them. Ethics have been taken into consideration throughout the study, weighting between 'protection of the individual' and 'research demand'. The decision to use the material in this research builds on it being published on a public Instagram account, where the point is to spread and share information/pictures/ideas. Sexual harassment online is an increasing societal issue and the need to study it further was found to be dire.

¹ Vetenskapsrådet

Analysis

A Feminist Digital Affective Public

Assholesonline is an Instagram account, run by a woman who shares photos of threats and sexual harassments that she has been exposed to online. She counters the harassment with humour, shame, and disgust, strategies applied to highlight structures of misogyny. The account is not a strict feminist group, it would require that those who were part of it were all in support of a feminist ideology and that it provides a safe space where such ideas can be expressed without fear of being attacked. Even though the majority of the comments articulate support for a feminist ideology, there are still those who question it.

Many comments that are posted on assholesonline are degrading, personal, and directed towards the female gender, e.g. "You deserve to be raped by arabs, as you love refugees and black people so much, disgusting woman", "You're a small person. A little dyke idiot. Humanity must have been bred to bits when freaks like you are born.", and "Disgusting feminist, I will stab a knife up your cunt" (assholesonline, 2017). These are strategies applied to exercise power over her by scaring and shaming her, diminishing her as a woman, silencing her, and keeping her from participating in the public sphere (Ahmed, 2014; Fineman 2003; Flam et al. 2010; Megarry, 2014; Sundén & Paasonen, 2018). Whilst these particular sexual harassments have been directed to one specific woman, many women are exposed to sexual harassments on a regular basis (Jane, 2016). Through sharing different stories of sexual harassment, the women highlights that it is part of a structure and not the result of personal shortcomings (Ahmed, 2014; Summers-Effler, 2002). Criticism that is directed at the person, rather than e.g. profession, tends to push attitudes in a direction of an 'us' and 'them' (Ahmed, 2014; Summers-Effler, 2002).

The followers cannot feel the pain that the threats and the sexual harassment cause the woman, they can only imagine it, relating it back to their own previous experience. It is sharing stories of pain, that allows the woman's followers to connect to her, even though it is not a joint pain, they still share her pain (Ahmed, 2014). It is painful to read comments of sexual harassments and this pain can further be explained through an awareness that it is not a just treatment. The pain connected to injustice is deeply rooted within feminism. Minority groups that highlight and question injustices/inequalities tend to be criticised in return, and the criticism tends to be directed at their persona (ibid), e.g. women tend to be exposed to harassment that relate to their gender and often contains threats of sexual violence. Pain must be understood in relation to injustice. It is

necessary in order to develop a critical thinking (Summers-Effler, 2002). Through sharing threats and sexual harassment that she has been exposed to online, her followers get a glimpse of her reality. This knowledge can facilitate for them, who does not already possess one, to develop and foster critical thinking.

Pain caused by structures, within which inequality thrives, gives rise to anger. In the comment fields many followers articulate anger: "These bloody lunatics", "Absolutely, fucking crazy!", and "It is so damn unreasonable how quick they go from being nice and polite to unbelievably rude and disgusting..." (assholesonline, 2017). Anger plays a contradictory part in the feminist movement. On the one hand, it is useful as it can be used to motivate actions, on the other hand, women who articulate emotions, e.g. anger, are often perceived as to lack rationality, resulting in them not being taken seriously, and dismissed (Ahmed, 2014). The woman who is being harassed has found a way around this, managing to reach out to a large, heterogeneous group. Her followers consist of those who articulate feminist beliefs, i.e. equality for all, and those who criticise it. Looking at their profile pictures and reading comments they have made about themselves, there are men, women, none-binary individuals, people of different ethnicities, symbols that represent various religions, and they are young, middle age and old. By adding humour to her posts, she manages to deliver a message without being perceived as irrational, even though she articulates great deal of emotions, e.g. "Come on then, you fucking idiot!" (assholesonline, 2017), as swearing and exclamation marks are used when articulating anger in texts (Retzinger, 1995).

Interaction Rituals and Rituals of Solidarity

The following post consists of a conversation between the woman and the harasser and was chosen because it displays how the man values his self-appointed right to hit on the woman, at anytime of the day, higher than her right to be left alone. Studying the conversation and the follower's reaction to it will shed light on how actions are carried out on assholesonline. It can be understood as an interaction ritual, and highlights how rituals of solidarity are performed. The conversation starts out with the harasser texting the woman at 2 am, expressing a desire to meet up due to a common interest in sports. It is unclear if the conversation starts out early Saturday morning or if the conversation is carried out over several days.

02:06
Harasser I would love to meet you in person, as I am very interested in handball.

10:07
Woman Sounds legit.

12:00
Harasser I am single.

Harasser Give me your number.

Harasser So we can meet up.

Harasser And get to know each other.

12:59
Woman No thank you.

SAT 20:19
Harasser Disgusting cunt, you don't have to be rude.

Harasser Go pee yourself.

SAT 20:38
Harasser Why don't you want to meet up? I'm a super nice guy!

SAT 21:05
Harasser Why don't you want to meet up?

Harasser Hello

SAT 21:32
Woman I don't want you to write to me anymore, because I don't think you seem to be such a nice guy. Thank you for your consideration.

Harasser You don't know anything about me your fucking idiot.

Harasser You should kill yourself.

Harasser Stupid girl.

Harasser Pee-girl.

Harasser Disgusting, ugly and stupid.

Harasser I hope you know how fragile life is.

Harasser Pee-girl

Woman I have changed my mind, we should meet up after all.

Harasser I would love to meet you.

Woman In court.

(Assholesonline, 2017)

The woman responds that his message sounds reasonable, a statement that might not be sincere, as the request was sent in the middle of the night and is generally not considered an appropriate time to approach someone professionally. Her reply is followed by him stating his civil status. Informing the woman that he is single, which indicates that the reason for the meet up is no longer to discuss sports. When the woman declines, the harasser turns aggressive and abusive, and the swearing articulates anger (Retzinger, 1995). The harasser continues in questioning the woman's decision of not wanting to meet him, claiming that he is a super nice guy. This claim in combination with the sexual harassments give rise to incongruence (Billig, 2005), as it articulates a behaviour that is not considered as nice/polite. When the woman tells the harasser that she wants him to stop writing her, he turns aggressive again, insults her, urges her to kill herself, and threatens her life. The woman replies that she has changed her mind and wants to meet up, the harasser changes into being extremely friendly, and expresses a desire to meet up, to which she informs him that it will be in court. This results in further incongruence, since what is first interpreted as a remission, turns out to be the opposite, and the woman successfully tricks the harasser. The woman's followers' respond with amusement and encouragement, and the comment field mainly consists of comments articulating support and a collective enthusiasm (Collins, 2004), "Hahaha, such an awesome reply! 😂😂😂" and "OMG!! The reply is spot on 😂" (assholesonline, 2017), where the statements are further enhanced through the use of emoticons.

When the conversation between the harasser and the woman is presented to her followers, it can be seen as the first part of an interaction ritual which is (1) interaction. Following Boyns and Loprieno (2014) interpretation of Collins' (2004) interaction ritual theory, interaction is not required to be face-to-face to give rise to emotions energy. The interaction is carried out on Instagram, an online platform, that in a sense can be understood to exist in a virtual room of its own, fulfilling the second requirement of an interaction ritual, (2) a sense of boundaries around those participating in the interaction. Everyone's focus is on the post which fulfils the third condition of an interaction ritual, (3) a shared attention. Forth and last, the post give rise to amusement, a collective effervesce, and results in (4) a shared mood. The interaction ritual can be understood as successful, because (A) the outcome articulate solidarity towards the group, seeing that there are comments expressing support and solidarity towards the woman and her cause. Moreover, comments such as e.g. "This is the best comeback ever! 😂😂😂" (assholesonline, 2017) can be understood to give rise to (B) emotional energy, which builds on a feeling of moral right, and cause emotions of wellbeing. The emoticons articulate amusement and the 'happy face crying with laughter' can in this context be

interpreted as triumphing. The woman who resists and counters online sexual harassments, and her actions, becomes (C) a symbol of resistance, and give rise to (D) a sense of moral superiority amongst her followers, building on an idea of that they are right in their actions (Collins, 2004).

””I’m a super nice guy!” 😂😂😂” suggests that the amusement lies in the incongruence of what is being said and what is being articulated (Billig, 2005). Further comments ”I’ve changed my mind, we should meet up after all” 😂😂😂😂😂 Hahaha I almost choked laughing 😂😂😂😂” and ”Oh my god... 😂 What an absurd conversation. I love your reply ❤️” (assholesonline, 2017), articulate amusement. Whereas ”I’ve changed my mind, we should meet up after all” and ”I love your reply!” highlight that when the woman expresses compliance to meeting up, it gave rise to tension (ibid). It can be understood as emotions of unease which were building up within the readers, as it was not in line with what was expected after the harasser had been abusing her. When the woman specifies the location, it is revealed that she tricked the harasser. This can be understood to lead to further incongruence in relation to the followers’ expectations, and results in that the pressure is released. ”Hahaha I almost choked laughing” highlights that it is the surprise that gives rise to entertainment (Billig, 2005; Hobbes, 1999).

The following comments articulate amusement and admiration to the woman’s wittiness ”Damn, you are awesome!”, ”I love your account! So damn important. ❤️”, ”You are insanely brilliant, thank you for taking the fight! 🦊👊👍”, and ”You’re an amazing role model! Give ’em hell!” (assholesonline, 2017). The comments articulate appreciation for how she continues countering and fighting sexual harassments, where the harasser comes to represent the oppression of women and the woman who is harassed comes to symbolise the resistance (Collins, 2004; Summers-Effler, 2002). The woman gains status due to her way of dealing with harassments and increases her way of influencing people in the future without a direct confrontation (Barbalet, 2001; Kemper, 2006).

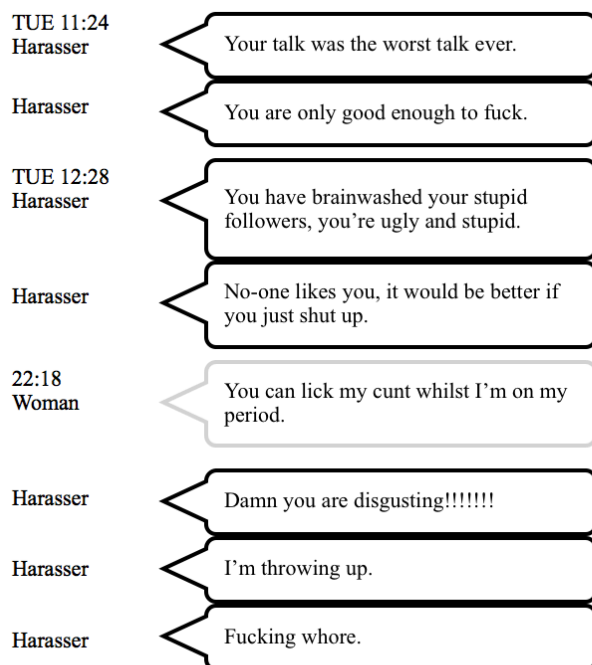
Emoticons are used by the followers as a way of expressing or enhancing emotions that are articulated or statements that are made. ”❤️🦊👊” (assholesonline, 2017), the ❤️ represents love and can be understood to address the woman or her actions, the 🦊 is interpreted to represent strength and encouragement, whereas the 👊 are likely to articulate appreciation and support. Emoticons are situation bound and must be understood in the context they occur, as the situation affects how they can be interpreted. Furthermore, as with most communication, it is up to the reader

to interpret them, which brings new aspects to how a text can be understood. The followers' comments express amusement and appreciation over different parts of the post, and altogether they can be understood as the articulation of a collective effervesce (Collins, 2004).

The collective amusement suggests to give rise to emotional energy and solidarity amongst the followers. It can be understood as a ritual of solidarity, as it creates loyalty towards the group and a strong sense of solidarity that can lead to creating a collective identity. The collective emotions that contain emotional energy are vital to ignite hope that a societal change is possible (Summers-Effler, 2002).

Disgust and Shamelessness

The following post was chosen because it displays how disgust and embracing shamelessness are used when reacting to sexual harassments. Furthermore, it sheds light on the contrasts in how a woman's period is viewed compared to how sexual harassments are viewed. The harassment was a response to a podcast that was casted by the Swedish public service where the woman talked about online sexual harassments.



(Assholesonline, 2017)

The woman who uploaded the post commented on how some men are more disgusted by a woman's period than by the idea of someone being raped. The harasser articulates obliviousness in regards of applying the same rhetoric strategy as the women when accusing her for being disgusting. The

woman brings up how a previous post about premenstrual syndrome resulted in a large amount of hateful emails, containing statements of her being disgusting and having mental issues, which highlights how the period is perceived by some.

The harasser starts by insulting the woman, reducing her to an object of men's sexual pleasure. Followed by further insults and degrading language which can be considered as strategies that strive to silence and exclude her from making her voice heard in the public sphere (Ahmed, 2014; Fineman 2003; Flam et al. 2010; Megarry, 2014). When the woman replies with a sexual reference of her own, which includes her period, and posts it on assholesonline, she does not comply to being silenced. In the Swedish society, a woman's period is something that is generally not talked about in public, as it enters a stage where it generally is considered that it does not belong, it becomes an abject and it is often perceived and described as disgusting (Persdotter, 2013). When the woman mentions her period in relation to sexual activity, she applies a strategy that is used to destabilise an existing discourse (Wasshede, 2010).

The reply disrupts the harasser's attempt to exercise power over her, she posts the conversation online for public view, and does not stay quiet. She rather repels the shame through highlighting an offence that she has been exposed to. In return, the status positions switches, his ability to affect others decrease, whereas hers increases and results in sudden glory and triumph (Hobbes, 1999; Kemper, 2006, 2016). The harasser responds with shaming the woman (Sundén & Paasonen, 2018), articulating disgust and further insults. The response can be seen as a result of a social construction, where history and discourses have taught the harasser (Ahmed, 2014) that a woman's period is something disgusting. However, through embracing her period, the woman embraces shamelessness (Sundén & Paasonen, 2018), and does not comply to mechanism that shaming results in, such as silencing (Fineman 2003; Flam et al. 2010; Megarry, 2014).

Some comments in the comment field continue to spin on the theme of the period being perceived as something disgusting, "Maybe the best weapon is to have a plastic bag with menstruation-blood and used pads in the bag, that one can bring with oneself, and if someone were to attack or try to rape you, you could smear it in their face.", "Oh come on, I do not understand what their problem is. I want to throw my used tampon on them.", "We ought to head home to this dude and bleed on him, let the female power corrode his socks. ❤️", "Can you show their names and I can send them pictures of my period knickers and my moon cup next week.", and "Next step: "suck my tampon"" (assholesonline, 2017). The mocking is a form of rebellious humour where women mock the existing discourse concerning the period, and it can further be found to operate in

a disciplinary way as they ridicule the harasser, striving to prevent him from articulating similar statements in the future (Billig, 2005).

Some comments aim to normalise the period "Great that you bring it up, and tried to remove the stigma around the period!", and "Have said it before, will say it again; Everything men can do, women can do bleeding. The strong gender: Female." (assholesonline, 2017). Whereas other comments strive to highlight the stupidity to be disgusted by the period, through providing different contexts, with regard to the period "The disgusting thing about the period, is the oppression of it. Nothing else.", "Slightly amusing that so many men are provoked and disgusted by TALKING about the period as a biological phenomenon, but to send an unwanted VISUAL dickpic, is considered something completely different...", and "I chose to laugh at your wonderful reply, he thinks you should suck his dick, but gets overwhelmed by disgust by your reply. But most of all it is sad. Both his hatred, and that the period is perceived as something shameful." (assholesonline, 2017). Whereas others articulate encouragement: "You are awesome ❤️", "Keep on fighting! You are awesome!", "So good, and so important!! I'm cheering for you 💖👏💖", "Thank you! You are an amazing role model for all women!!!! Your talk was unbelievably good!!!!", "Your talk was one of the best ever!", "THANK YOU for your talk, and THANK YOU for everything you do.", "Best reply ever! 🤔👊❤️", "You are the best 😍", and "I love you 🌈" (assholesonline, 2017). It can be understood as articulation of support, solidarity and a moral superiority, whilst generating emotional energy (Collins, 2004, Summers-Effler, 2002). Through solidarity, a sense of collective identity can arise, and inspires the followers to feel proud about the group, rather than feeling shame over being oppressed (Summers-Effler, 2002).

Vengeance

The following post was picked because it shows how humour and vengeance are used when highlighting online sexual harassments. It contributes with an insight on how unwanted attention can affect women's digital experiences. The internet and online harassments provide harassers with the mean to carry out instantaneous harassments. Simultaneously, sexual harassments can be carried out over a long period of time which can be slow and persistent, where messages operate to continuously reminding the victim that they are still being observed. A constant reminder that they are never left alone which can only be assumed to be tormenting. In the following post the

harassment begins in January, continues in February, and lasts until March, it is unclear when it ends as there are no dates presented on the last messages, only the time and the weekday.

28 Jan 00:05
Harasser
What a delightful and beautiful profile picture you have. How are you entertaining yourself this evening... Home or on your way out into the night?

1 FEB 19:35
Harasser
Hey what are you up to?

Harasser
I would really like to meet a hottie like you for a night at my place.

Harasser
What do you say? 2000kr per hour

2 FEB 23:01
Harasser
Oh my god, you cannot have an easy time looking like that...

13 MARS 19:31
Harasser
Oh you are so beautiful.

Harasser
I'm really curious about you.

Harasser
Hug.

THU 16:28
Harasser
Do you want to meet up this weekend?

Harasser
6000kr?

SUN 23:08
Harasser
Hey you

Harasser
You are so beautiful.

Harasser
- I hope you want to get in touch.

Woman
You hoped to hear from me, and here I am, like a bloody genie in a bottle, ready to fulfil your wishes. Hello!

Woman
I just wanted to say hello and inform you that me and your wife had a good conversation earlier today about your sexual harassments and the invites you have been leaving sporadically in my inbox.

Woman
She actually thanked me for letting her know about your extramarital activities, and she will probably update you on the rest of the conversation tonight. So, good luck with that, or by the way, no, I cannot claim that I wish you any particular luck at the moment. Your wife on the other hand is a fantastic woman, and I wish her all the luck in the world, she deserves so much better than you and your shit. Good bye.

(Assholesonline, 2016)

The harasser starts out complimenting the woman. He articulates desire that escalate to lust which a few days later it turns into desperation as he attempts to persuade the woman to prostitute herself. Money is a way to exercise power and by spending money people can influence others to do their bidding, and persuading them to do things without using force in a confrontation. This can be seen

as a way to increase status. When the harasser offers the woman money, he tries to gain control over her body and her sexuality which can be seen as an act where he puts himself in a superior status position over the woman (Barbalet, 2001; Kemper, 2006). He diminishes her value as a person, reducing her to an object of lust, someone who's body others express entitlement to, and claims ownership over.

A month later the harasser contacts her again, makes another attempt to convince her to prostitute herself, and this time offering more money. The woman replies and informs the harasser that she has been in contact with his wife, telling her that he is sexually harassing her, which gives rise to amusement amongst her followers. "So. Damn. Good.", "Epic!!!", "Keep on fighting, you're doing an awesome job", ", ", "Sisterhood at its most beautiful, GO!", "Spot on, best way to deal with it", "DYING", "Ha ha ha you're the best!!!! 😊😊😊", "BOOM" (assholesonline, 2016). One way of understanding the followers' reaction is through looking at the mechanisms that give rise to the amusement. When the followers read about the sexual harassment, they can imagine the pain the woman feels (Ahmed, 2014) which can lead to emotions of unease and cause tension. When it is revealed that the woman is fighting the sexual harassment, it can be interpreted that the pressure is released and results in laughter (Billig, 2005). The articulations of amusement, encouragement, cheering, and appreciation amongst her followers, can be seen as articulations of collective enthusiasm.

By informing the harasser that she had a conversation with his wife, the power balance shifts, as the structural emotions are disrupted, and the status positions changes (Barbalet, 2001; Kemper, 2006). The harasser's status decreases as it becomes evident that he possesses no influence to affect the woman without using force. When the woman states that the wife has expressed gratitude over the information about her husband's extramarital businesses and that she intends to discuss this further with him, it articulates that the harasser is in grave trouble. Wishing the harasser good luck, and then changing her mind about it, articulates that the woman is not going to pretend to offer him any false sympathy.

The entertainment lies in the incongruence (Billig, 2005; Attardo, 2014), as the reply was unexpected. Furthermore, when the power balance is turned around, due to the harasser failing to make the woman comply, there is a change in status positions (Barbalet, 2001; Kemper 2006). When the pain of being exposed to sexual harassments is dealt with by using vengeance, it can be understood as giving rise to emotions of triumph and sudden glory (Hobbes, 1999; Kemper, 2016). The response to the sharing of the post can be interpreted as giving rise to solidarity and emotional

energy, and through countering the power that were exercised over her, she becomes a symbol of resistance (Collins, 2004; Summers-Effler, 2002).

”Karma is a bitch 😂😂😂”, and ”So damn good. Fry him in hell. Other deserve the same treatment. The only way to destroy the trolls, is to drag them out into the light. Poff, and it’s not that fun any longer.” (assholesonline, 2016) articulates amusement, triumph, and joy over the vengeance. Those who articulate support might experience that they are being part of the resistance and can perceive the triumph as theirs, which could be explained by having attained a collective identity (Collins, 2004; Summers-Effler, 2002). It is a symbolic victory over an outsider in which the group is perceived to gain status simultaneously as the ’enemy’ loses status (Kemper, 2016).

Triumph and criticism

By analysing the following post, it is highlighted how humour is applied when countering harassments and how triumph can be seen as giving rise to emotional energy, solidarity, and a collective identity. Studying the comment field shows how the interaction amongst the followers can be understood as operating in a connecting way which operates as strengthening a collective identity. Simultaneously, it sheds light on how some critics act to shame the woman who is being harassed.

Harasser	I want to fuck you baby
Harasser	What are you doing?
Harasser	Are you awake?
WED 19:52 Harasser	Hey baby, what are you up to?
Harasser	Oh man, your boobs.....
Harasser	Do you like being fucked between your boobs?
Harasser	- Are they real?
THU 19:43 Harasser	[Dickpic]
Harasser	I am so fucking hard and thinking of you baby
Harasser	Can you take my whole dick????

life. The woman responds with a selfie, where she smirks and drinks from a mug with the text 'Male tears'. The photo articulates triumph and is a result from her increased status, as her way to affect does not require force and can be considered as a symbolic victory over the harasser (Billig, 2005; Hobbes, 1999; Kemper, 2016). By using humour the woman entertains her followers, while simultaneously delivering a message (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014).

The majority of the comments articulated support: "Hahaha I love this! 🙏", "👏👏👏 Best! Everyone who are exposed to creeps should do the same.", "😂 Boom 👊", "Haha, YOU destroyed! Like driving into the wall, and blaming the wall! "The wall started!!", "You're so damn good!! 🙌💕" (assholesonline, 2017), of which a multiple articulate triumph. The triumph can be understood in relation to a collective identity amongst the followers, and how the joke was successfully carried out, resulting in the group's increased status, and the harasser's loss of status (Kemper, 2016). The incongruence and the way the power structures and status positions are turned around creates a sense of rebellious humour, as the laughter is directed to exciting discourses where some men articulate a personal right to women's bodies. However, the laughter articulated in the comment field can also be understood as consisting of a disciplinary kind, that strives to conform the harasser's behaviour to follow social norms (Billig, 2005; Kemper, 2006, 2016), and refrains him from further sexual harassments online.

Whilst the harasser messages the woman, it can be understood as that emotions are building up and creates tension. When the woman replies that she has seen, read and shared it with the women that he has a close relationship with, the pressure is released and results in relief and laughter (Billig, 2005). Comments such as "Best way of waking up a Monday morning, finding a man that sexually assaults women gets what he deserves. Keep it up! 🙌", and "Get them! Everyone's not like that, so just give them what they deserve. 😏👹" (assholesonline, 2017), articulate a sense of empowerment. Whereas "You should be drinking male tears from a goblet, you bloody hero" and "There's something so genius about this." (assholesonline, 2017) are comments written by followers granting the woman in charge of the account an almost iconic status, turning her into a symbol. Furthermore, the majority of the comments can be understood as to articulate solidarity, and the woman who is harassed refers to her followers as her rainbow army which strengthen the sense of a 'we', and facilitates the creation of a collective identity. These emotions can then be used to turn the shame, that sexual harassments and threats of sexual violence give rise to, into pride over the solidarity within the group (Summers-Effler, 2002).

Many comments written by men articulate distancing themselves from the harasser by referring to him as "a sick person", "not a real man", and "not a manly behaviour" (assholesonline, 2017). These comments create an 'us' and 'them', where men who harass women are portrayed as a deviation rather than acknowledging that sexually harassing women is generally carried out by men who act and are perceived as being 'normal' offline. This leads to that the issue highlighted is not perceived as a structural problem, rather it is portrayed as something carried out by men that depart from the norm. However, there are those who acknowledge the problem without making excuses. Other comments proclaim "I'll be damned, that one needs to be ashamed over one's gender.. what's wrong with us men.", "Stupefying! I feel sad and ashamed over being a man when I read your posts. Applauding your commitment and your strength to keep on going. Impressive!!", "Seriously, what's wrong with guys 2017? As a man, one feels ashamed when reading these things. 😊😊", "What a genius comeback! I apologise for this sad representation of us men. I will do everything in my power to teach my sons common sense, respect and where the line is drawn. Hang in there!", and "We stand by your side, more than you think, but fewer than we ought to be." (assholesonline, 2017). These comments articulate a view that support a feministic ideology. This might give rise to emotional energy amongst the followers, as it highlights that the woman's cause is supported by a heterogeneous group and can give rise to hope that a societal change is possible (Summers-Effler, 2002).

Even though the majority of the comments express support, there were those who were critical "pathetic that you ruining his life for ever", "How the hell can you expose a poor little teenager like that?", and "How is she sexually harassed? Why doesn't she just block him or say no?" (assholesonline, 2017). These statements articulate that the woman who is being harassed is required to take responsibility and actions to avoid harassments whilst the harasser is being ridden of responsibility. One of the men continues with "Why not help them, rather than bullying them?" (assholesonline, 2017). These comments express a view that, when it comes to sexual harassments and violence against women, it is considered the woman's responsibility to take actions to avoid it, rather than men's responsibility to refrain from sexually harassing and violating women. The critical comments caused friction in the comment field, as several other followers, men and women, argued against these statements. It appears that the interaction results in a bond between those who supported and defended the woman who was harassed, and that it strengthened their common view on the matter, and potentially facilitated creating a collective identity (Summers-Effler, 2002).

Several comments concerned the meaning of 'male tears', and claimed that it is slang for semen. However, male tears were originally used by feminists as ironic male-bashing (Marwick & Caplan, 2018) where feminist tried to highlight the absurdity with 'misandry'. 'Male tears' were only later picked up by anti-feminists within the manosphere, a community consisting of men who articulates that feminists are conspiring to take over the world. Men from within the manosphere started to claim that male-tears referred to semen which is a strategy applied to shame women who claimed to be drinking male tears. Claiming that male-tears are semen can also be understood as that men within the manosphere deny and accept the fact that men cry.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to analyse what strategies are applied when countering threats and sexual harassments online, and contribute with theoretical knowledge on how interaction rituals, within a feminist digital affective public, can be understood to give rise to emotional energy.

Analysing the data from assholesonline showed reoccurring patterns that can be understood in relation to the interaction ritual theory. The following mechanisms were identified: 1. Interaction; posts were published on assholesonline, initiating interaction between the woman who was being harassed and her followers. 2. A sense of boundaries; Instagram is a platform that offers a virtual room, with a sense of boundaries to the surroundings, allowing interaction to be carried out under what can be thought of a space that is somewhat cut off from the outside world. 3. Shared attention; those commenting on a post got a shared focus. 4. Shared mood; the majority of the comments in the comment fields are encouraging and supporting, and result in what can be understood as a collective effervesce. The outcome could then be understood as to result in a successful outcome, because A. Expressions of solidarity; the majority of the comments expressed encouragement and support, that can be understood as creating solidarity. B. Emotional energy; many comments articulate excitement, encouragement, and empowerment, which are emotions that give rise to wellbeing and can create emotional energy. C. Symbols; the woman who counters and fights the sexual harassments, can be seen as a symbol of resistance against oppression. D. Sense of moral superiority; the followers express support for the woman and contempt towards the harasser which can be interpreted as an articulation of moral superiority. This provides information on how interaction rituals within a feminist digital affective public can be understood.

In this study, it is highlighted how humour, shame, and disgust are used as strategies when fighting online sexual harassments. Furthermore, it shows how these strategies can be understood to

create rituals of solidarity that give rise to a collective identity and strengthen loyalty towards the group. Assholesonline can be understood as a feminist digital affective public, that arise through sharing painful stories of male domination, which give rise to solidarity. Following Collins' (2004) theory the analysis show that there appear to be a great deal of emotional energy, which can lead to creating solidarity and can result in giving rise to a collective identity. Although, it is difficult to establish how sincere the solidarity is, or how strong the collective identity is, without interviewing the followers. Emotional energy can be understood as an instantaneous emotional reward, whereas solidarity is the longterm emotion that linger with the followers. It can therefore be difficult to estimate which followers that only experience emotional energy, in contrast to those who continues to develop solidarity towards the woman, and who might develop a collective identity. Through looking at who have been liking and commenting on the different posts, individuals that reoccur can indicate those who feel solidarity and might have developed a collective identity. For those who develop a collective identity, emotions can be understood to be what motivate the followers to continue to support the woman who runs assholesonline.

There is no information on what motivates people to follow assholesonline. There are followers who do articulate criticism against feminism and might follow her for some easy entertainment which brings up the concern whether feminism is decreased to simple entertainment. However, I argue that by applying humour she facilitates reaching out to a large heterogeneous group, as 'everyone enjoys a good laugh', and previous research highlights that by using humour, entertainment will be delivered simultaneously with a message (cf. Wettergren, 2009). This suggests that people who would normally not seek out information about women being sexually harassed online, will be informed about it simultaneously as they get their entertainment. Through encountering it in a positive way, they might be more inclined to listen to it, and one day, it might even awaken a critical thinking.

Feminist literature on misogyny would benefit from further surveys that highlight different forms of online sexual harassments, shedding more light on the issue. Extreme forms of misogyny are carried out within incel, i.e. an online community that describe themselves to suffer from involuntary celibacy, and encourage men to carry out violence against women (Independence, 2018). A greater understanding on how communication on a virtual platform can affect, support, and encourage men to carry out terrorism against women, could provide information about how to prevent future attacks.

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