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Silent Voices, Hidden Stories: A Review of Sexual Assault (Non)Disclosure Literature, Emerging Issues, and Call to Action

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Abstract

Social media and digital platforms are being used to disclose sexual and dating violence experiences and to unite victims/survivors in social, educational, and advocacy efforts. While digital disclosure can be empowering, there are reasons why some individuals do not disclose. This article focuses on the nuances underlying decisions to (and not to) disclose victimization experiences online, and also presents a call to action, particularly for researchers and practitioners working on sexual violence intervention and prevention. Through a comparative, international literature review, the authors highlight research on factors affecting disclosure decisions while also considering contemporary issues that may impact these decisions. They conclude that, in responding to victims' and survivors' "justice" needs (e.g., physical and emotional safety, conscious choice, and empowerment), an intersectional feminist lens is essential in today's complex digital world in affording an understanding of variation in disclosure practices. When combined with trauma-informed care, such an approach holds promise for transforming existing online environments into more inclusive and compassionate socio-technological spaces.

Keywords

#MeToo; sexual violence; digital harm; feminism; trauma-informed care.

Introduction

In 2017, hundreds of thousands of sexual violence survivors took to Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms to voice their stories of sexual harassment and assault through the #MeToo hashtag in what has been called a "watershed" moment for gender-based violence. The movement, started in 2006 by Tarana Burke to help survivors and raise awareness about the pervasiveness of sexual violence, was popularized in 2017 by actress Alyssa Milano. The campaign encouraged victims/survivors[1] to speak up and speak out about their experiences of sexual abuse at the hands of men, including bosses, teachers, coaches, and intimate partners, in a concerted effort to expose and halt ongoing violence against women. In just a short period, over 19 million #MeToo tweets poured out from countries all across the world (Anderson and Toor 2018).

The #MeToo movement can be considered a culmination of the rise in digital feminist activism over the last decade; for once in history, it seemed as though everyone was finally listening to victims/survivors, or at least being exposed to their pain. Aided by the celebrity status of some of its advocates, the campaign successfully made visible the magnitude of the problem, offering victims a platform to have their voices heard and experiences acknowledged. It also reinforced and legitimized the voices of non-celebrity victims/survivors who had been speaking out about sexual violence for years. The #MeToo hashtag helped countless individuals find catharsis and community in speaking their truth while bringing attention to larger issues surrounding gender and power, and it moved the cultural landscape toward supporting and believing rather than blaming or denying victims/survivors (Tambe 2018). Women's speech and (her)storytelling are, therefore, integral to feminist anti-rape politics (Serisier 2007).

Although driven by good intentions, the #MeToo campaign (and digital activism more broadly) has been criticized for being exclusionary while claiming to be representative. The movement, for example, largely omitted the voices of some of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups (e.g., Black and Native American women, people with lower income, those with physical/intellectual disabilities, LGBT+ populations, immigrant women, incarcerated people, and individuals without access to technology) (Burke 2017; Gill and Orgad 2018). The campaign also overlooked the complexity in some individuals' current lived realities, such as that of those belonging to groups who may have reason to distrust the state or criminal justice system, and those deterred from speaking out about their experiences due to residing with abusers (Tambe 2018). Despite the array of voices and experiences found among posts to the hashtag, the stories and opinions profiled in media coverage and trending on Twitter focused on a select kind of woman (i.e., middle-aged, cis white, American) (Gill and Orgad 2018) and collapsed the spectrum of gender-based violence to select kinds of offenses (e.g., sexual harassment and sexual assault) (Gessen 2017), thereby lacking in intersectionality and failing to recognize that harms fall along a continuum (see Kelly 1987).

Less frequently highlighted in critiques of the #MeToo campaign and research on feminist hashtag activism emerging from the United States is how this trend in social media activism and disclosure made divulging one's victimization to the world seem easy, as if everyone could do it and would find strength in it or gain support from others. As Serisier (2018) noted, many ethical considerations surround survivor speech (both online and offline), as observers witness not only rewards associated with disclosure, but also risks and barriers that make silence just as paramount to feminist understanding and responses as speech. Compared to international scholarship on digital activism and disclosure, scholarship in the United States has been slow to address the reasons that some individuals do not reveal their abuse on social media and the ways that online disclosures themselves can be dangerous or retraumatizing for some victims/survivors. This paper aims to address this gap. The authors review the literature on reasons for nondisclosure (pre–digital media) among victims of sexual violence to establish

lessons learned and subsequently extends their applicability to online disclosure by highlighting current trends in technology-facilitated sexual violence, including the harms that digital technologies pose for those on the receiving end. Attention is then turned to the work of international scholars whose research is leading the way for understanding and responding to the complexity of sexual violence disclosure in a highly digitized global world, so that solutions can be considered to better meet the needs of victims and survivors. Drawing on this scholarship, recommendations are crafted for researchers and practitioners in the United States that can also be applied by those in other parts of the world. Specifically, the authors conclude that online disclosure should be examined through an intersectional, evidence-based, trauma-informed approach that calls on both individuals and institutions to consider how they can better understand and respond to the unique obstacles that victims may face while simultaneously minimizing risks and working toward victim safety, choice, and empowerment.

Sexual Violence and Digital Activism

The recent outpouring of personal stories on social media platforms in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, India, and Australia highlights the prevalence of sexual violence as a serious social problem. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in three women and one in four men in the United States experience some type of sexual violence in their lifetime, with one in five women and one in 38 men having experienced completed or attempted rape (Smith et al. 2018). One-third of these victimizations occur before the age of 18. In England, it is estimated that one in four women and one in 20 men are victims of sexual violence at some point in time, with similar figures present in Australia (O'Neill 2018; Walby and Allen 2004). Sexual violence is also often connected to other forms of interpersonal violence, including domestic abuse (García-Moreno et al. 2013). Approximately one in 10 women and one in 45 men have been raped by an intimate partner (Breiding et al. 2014). Sexual violence can also include technology-facilitated and -perpetrated violence, which is often overlooked in surveys and would undoubtedly increase the observed percentages. For instance, the United Nations estimates that nearly three in four women experience online abuse (Tandon and Pritchard 2015), highlighting the extent of digital harm. Despite decades of research and activism on these issues, sexual violence remains highly underreported to formal institutions and is commonly overlooked in public discourse (Weiss 2011). Additionally, the experiences of victims and survivors tend to be invalidated by perpetrators, peer groups, institutions, and communities, who routinely fail to recognize the problem, seek effective strategies and policies to address it, or provide justice for victims (Clark 2010; McGlynn 2011).

As a result of legal and criminal justice system shortcomings in taking sexual violence seriously and these systems' inability to effectively address victimization experiences, victims and survivors have sought and created alternate methods of obtaining justice. Research shows a rise in hashtag feminist movements or "digitalism" (Fenton 2008; Segrave and Vitis 2017) since the early 2010s (e.g., #hollaback, #BeenRapedNeverReported, #YesAllWomen) (see Mendes et al. 2018, 2019; Rodino-Colocino 2014) to tackle issues of sexism, misogyny, and gender violence (Mendes et al. 2019). Women and girls are increasingly using social media to discuss, share, and expose in-person and digital experiences of sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and harassment (Fileborn 2017; Jane 2016; Segrave and Vitis 2017); seek support (O'Neill 2018; Rapp et al. 2010); and create networked counter-publics to obtain some form of justice (Powell 2015) or exact revenge (Salter 2013) through these platforms.

Many studies on digital activism argue that, while not a panacea, online platforms and hashtag campaigns can function as spaces where survivors' justice needs can, to a certain extent, be met (Fileborn 2014; Powell and Henry 2017), considering that technology enables care providers to extend advocacy in real time (Bogen et al. 2018). Victims have turned to social media to raise

public awareness about an incident, garner support to spur an investigation, and avenge those harmed by publicly shaming or otherwise punishing perpetrators in instances when the law fails (Jane 2016; Salter 2013). Victims, therefore, use social media in redress and to transition to a survivor.[2] Online platforms may also offer some victims the first opportunity to have their voices heard or stories taken seriously, providing them with validation and affirmation (Clark 2010; Fileborn 2017). As Loney-Howes (2015) demonstrated, such spaces enable women to connect and build community across identity lines, wherein they can support each other, resist self-blame narratives, and take important steps toward healing and recovery (also Mendes et al. 2019; O'Neill 2018). Additionally, many survivors see online disclosure as a political practice (Clark-Parsons 2019)—by voicing what has been silenced and ignored for so long, presenting an overwhelming number of narratives is crucial for raising awareness about the pervasiveness of sexual violence and "producing a history of rape, and of gender and power" (Serisier 2007: 88). Further, survivors can turn to these technologies to disrupt and challenge dominant representations of gender-based violence and its causes, and help situate the problem within broader structural forces, to facilitate social and cultural change (Clark-Parsons 2019; Fileborn 2017; Powell 2015).

Disclosure Practices

Offline Disclosure Barriers

Decisions relating to disclosure are complicated. While many victims use their agency to disclose experiences to the social world, some exercise agency when deciding not to, or deciding to limit audiences. Research on traditional, in-person disclosures has identified various factors that influence the decision to disclose sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and other gendered violence victimizations. These include assault characteristics, such as the type of assaultive behaviors (Campbell et al. 2001; Fisher et al. 2003); victims' relationships to perpetrators (Wolitzky-Taylor et al. 2011b); whether alcohol or drugs were involved (Wolitzky-Taylor et al. 2011a); past assault experiences (Starzynski et al. 2005); timing of disclosure (Ullman 2002); self-blame or shame (Lutenbacher et al. 2003); cultural factors (Ibanez et al. 2006); and perceptions of service providers as related to judgment and care (Dienemann et al. 2005).

Unique, cumulative, and compounded challenges are present for members of understudied groups. For instance, Tillman et al. (2010) reviewed barriers to disclosure for African American sexual assault survivors, underscoring the importance of various factors such as inadequate sexuality socialization, which may influence victims' perceptions of what constitutes sexual assault, stereotypical images that depict hyper-sexualization and typecast women into limited roles, and cultural expectations about protecting perpetrators from the criminal justice system and the resulting harm to families and communities. When combined with socioeconomic status, the intersection of gender, race, and class reveal further barriers for African American women with limited means (e.g., inadequate finances, limited health care coverage, access and system barriers, discrimination by service providers, distrust of professionals). Women of minority religious, ethnic, immigrant, and other groups (Ferris 2007; Rizo and Macy 2011), those with disabilities (Curry et al. 2011), and countless others (e.g., children, the elderly) also face distinct barriers that may make reaching out to informal support systems as challenging as reaching out to formal ones. Likewise, people in the LGBT+ community may face issues with informal social support networks that may not approve of their sexual orientation (McClennen et al. 2002), treat them in stereotypical ways, or pressure them to keep quiet to avoid stigmatizing the group as a whole. Male victims also face sociocultural barriers, with pressure to conform to masculine ideals (e.g., being strong, being in control, not showing emotion), and sociopolitical barriers, with limited community resources to serve gender-specific needs (Easton et al. 2014).

Online Disclosure Barriers: Digital Technologies and Gender-Based Harm

Increasing engagement with new media and communication technologies has extended to harmful behaviors, with offenders now using these tools to facilitate and perpetrate sexual violence, dating violence, and other types of gender-based violence (see Marganski 2018, 2019). Research on the varied nature and prevalence of technology-facilitated sexual violence is still emerging, but studies by and large show that technologies have significantly expanded opportunities for the surveillance, control, and harassment of women and girls (Henry and Powell 2015; Maher et al. 2017; Salter 2013). These practices are rapidly increasing (Henry and Powell 2016; Jane 2017; Woodlock 2017), with harms toward women including online sexual harassment (Barak 2005; Henry and Powell 2016), cyber hate speech (Baumgartner et al. 2010; Jane 2017), privacy violations like doxing (Douglas 2016),[3] stalking and "revenge pornography"[4] (Citron 2009, 2014; Henry and Powell 2016; Salter 2013), and other offenses. The features of digital technologies, including accessibility, visibility, reach, and perpetuity, intensify and extend the potential for harassment and humiliation, amplifying the risks and consequences that new media pose for victims of sexual and dating violence (Henry and Powell 2016).

The use of technology to intimidate, threaten, and access or reveal information about victims means that the harm directed at them can be significantly more acute, invasive, and distressing than traditional kinds of abuse, resulting in far-reaching physical, psychological, social and financial consequences for victims (Henry and Powell 2016). Many women who are targets of online misogynistic harassment, for instance, reach emotional breaking points resulting in severe anxiety, fear, and depression (Jane 2016, 2017), and may cease using technology altogether as a result. Such distress is pronounced among victims of image-based abuse, given long-held beliefs that closely tie women's social status to chastity and feminine propriety (Salter 2013). The creation and distribution of nude or sexual images without consent, or the mere threat of such distribution, causes many women feelings of shame and humiliation, fear of reputational harm, anxiety, and paranoia (Citron 2014; Henry and Powell 2016; Jane 2017). In some cases, victims (e.g., Audrie Pott, Rehtaeh Parsons) have taken their own lives in response to image-based abuse and accompanying cyberbullying and harassment (Dahl 2013; Kirchgaessner 2016; Powell and Henry 2017).

Like traditional kinds of victimization, image-based abuse can have social and financial ramifications for victims, including reputational damage, loss of employment, and weakened or lost social ties with family and friends (Citron and Franks 2014; Henry and Powell 2016). Practices such as gendered cyberhate similarly constrain women's ability to market themselves online, find jobs, network, and socialize (Jane 2017), or otherwise fully partake in the benefits of the web. Threats to their physical safety, profession, and reputation have forced some victims to move, change names, and leave jobs, thereby negatively affecting their psychological and financial well-being and disrupting relationships with their children, families, and support communities, which places additional stress on survivors (Henry and Powell 2016). Overall, technology has modernized the kinds of violence that occur and the ways in which victims may be adversely affected.

Rethinking Online Disclosure Through an Intersectional Feminist Lens

Thanks to years of work by researchers, advocates, and activists in the field of gender violence, sexual violence prevention efforts have become more inclusive of victims' lived experiences in ways that challenge patriarchal, heteronormative practices and promote recovery. Feminist approaches have opened the doors to examining social location and positionality, with standpoint feminism (Harding 1986) allowing for the realization that knowledge is situated in social position. Along these lines, Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) work on intersectionality influenced understandings of social relations through consideration of the intersecting forms of

discrimination and oppression that influence individual-level experiences and the systems that people reside in. When multiple or overlapping areas of oppression are present, there are unique and compounded effects (e.g., women who are older, Black, bisexual, Muslim, disabled, and immigrant can not only experience sexism, but may also experience ageism, racism, biphobia, Islamophobia, teratophobia, and xenophobia) that shape transgressions and how they are received. Intersectional perspectives are vital in critiquing dominant discourses of victimization and recognizing the diversity of experiences among victims and survivors (Heberle and Grace 2009; Powell and Henry 2017). Understanding online disclosure choices and responding to justice needs helps to avoid discursive representational simplicity, victim hierarchies, and broad generalizations that fail to recognize the junction of disadvantage, discrimination, and oppression (Crenshaw 1989). An intersectional feminist framework answers recent calls for critical technology studies that interrogate naturalized notions of the impartiality of new media and explore power and inequality in digital technologies and the Internet (Noble and Tynes 2016). Through such investigations (Marganski, 2018, 2019), researchers learn more about a range of victim/survivor issues and challenges and may better contemplate cybernetic solutions.

The new issues that digital technologies present surrounding victimization make it essential to explore the reasons why victims do, or do not, disclose experiences on social media platforms. The omnipotence and amplification of harm and abuse in digital spaces outlined in the above literature demonstrate the specific ways online participation is gendered and sexed, and help researchers understand why victims may be reluctant or unwilling to reveal experiences of sexual violence and why online disclosure need not always be an option. Contrary to representations of the web and social media platforms as participatory public spaces of global citizenship, inclusion and freedom, research shows that abusive online behaviors contribute to the social exclusion of women and other marginalized groups in the public, online sphere (Citron 2009). The fear of backlash, digital harassment and abuse, victim blaming, revictimization, being doxed or being subject to revenge porn works to keep victims silent (Clark-Parsons 2019; Fileborn 2017; Powell 2015), as does the failure of the law and justice system to effectively respond to such types of harm. Similar to existing reasons for not disclosing in the offline world, victims may be reluctant to reveal their abuse online due to fear that such disclosure may bring about or escalate harm if partners or abusers find out (Dimond et al. 2011). Alternatively, they may be afraid they will be met with vitriol or their accounts will be trivialized or dismissed (Maher et al. 2017) due to the long historical precedent of women's sexual violence accusations not being taken seriously (Daly 2014). A related reason could also be the risk of context collapse, with family or friends finding out and the possible implications of this on victims' social ties, communities, and resources, especially for already marginalized people.

Survivors must negotiate the emotional cost of disclosing their abuse against their needs. Scholarship from Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada has been particularly responsive and nuanced in discussions of the intersection of digital harm and digital activism as related to online disclosure and survivors' needs. Bianca Fileborn (2017) argued that dealing with victim blaming, online retaliation and threats, and revictimization by perpetrators and others can be extremely mentally taxing for survivors. Moreover, disclosure is not a "one and done" type of event; instead, it is a cyclical process that requires repeated tellings of events (Ullman 2002). Continuously revisiting these experiences may have a detrimental effect on some individuals, as can being exposed to other victims' accounts of violence (Mendes et al. 2018). For many, speaking out on social media presents the possibility of losing control over their stories, and the risk of being (re)silenced. Control and agency are crucial elements to restoring well-being and empowering victims in recovery and healing. In their study on the circulation of survivor selfies, however, Wood et al. (2018) showed that once narratives are posted online, victims have no control over where their stories go or who can use them, and risk their narratives and needs being hijacked by larger movements or co-opted toward unexpected and unintended ends (also

Fileborn 2014). Consequently, personal disclosures may be taken out of context or lead to misunderstandings; they may also result in unwanted attention or increased scrutiny when publicized beyond the victim's original intent. Relatedly, Salter (2013, 2017) noted that incidents that do not match traditional representations of rape (i.e., violence, coercion, trauma) can expose victims to having their narratives challenged or dismissed, and to additional blame and harassment from digital audiences (also Serisier 2018). Online testimonies have even been used against survivors in both criminal and civil court proceedings to undermine victims' credibility and the veracity of their accounts. It is important not to assume that survivors intend for their digital disclosures to go viral, considering how difficult it can be to contain viral justice.

Additional barriers exist as a result of the social inequalities present in the digital age (Regnedda and Muschert 2013). Globally, women do not have singular or universal access to communication technologies; access differs by country, locale, socioeconomic factors, gender, race, and education (International Telecommunication Union 2017), making online disclosure difficult for those who lack access to technology and social media platforms, or have limited technological skills to engage with them. Powell and Henry (2017) noted that there is also a second-level participation divide online, which has implications for digital disclosure. Internet and mobile media usage, comfort, and experiences vary by age, socioeconomic status, gender, and race (Büchi et al. 2016), and the intersections of these digital social inequalities affect experiences of technology-facilitated sexual violence, opportunities and desire for disclosure, and the likelihood of being believed and supported (Salter 2017). Research on sexual violence repeatedly reveals hierarchies of credibility and visibility based on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (Salter 2013), with white, middle-class, heterosexual women typically awarded "ideal" victim status. Such standards of respectability may discourage survivors from diverse demographic groups from disclosing due to fear of not having their accusations taken seriously. Studies have demonstrated the extension of these inequalities onto digital platforms, meaning not everyone can successfully harness technology to garner support and be heard in a meaningful way (Burke 2017; Fileborn 2017; Mack and McCann 2018; Serisier 2018). Awareness must exist that there is a certain type of privilege that comes from being able to speak out, and victims/survivors may vary in their capacity to effectively engage in online disclosure.

Further challenges exist for individuals living in highly restrictive cultures or countries with oppressive political regimes. Women in highly patriarchal and religiously conservative cultures, for instance, are confronted with extreme pressure to maintain silence due to social mores, fear of repercussions, and weak protections that place them at risk of future violence (Kartika 2019). Others must navigate widespread surveillance, censorship, and a suppression of their rights, along with punishment for any deviations. Activists have been harmed—even tortured—for speaking out against sexual violence in countries like China (Lok-to and Feng 2019) and Indonesia (Kartika 2019). Accessibility to social media and specific content has been filtered, regulated, or restricted by repressive systems and governing entities (e.g., North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Vietnam, Turkmenistan; see Gupta 2019; Turner 2019), resulting in alternative displays of solidarity that have given hope for solutions. Political climate and cultural context are therefore critical when considering who discloses and disclosure practices.

The pressure from digital activist campaigns to publicly share one's story neglects that disclosure is often situational and "curated" (Fileborn 2018), and many victims may not desire or need such public audiences or avenues to justice. Critical scholars interested in trauma-informed care must evaluate how online disclosure aligns with the justice needs of survivors. While for some, sharing experiences of abuse online is useful for attaining accountability, this is not true for all. As Clare McGlynn (2011) stated, victims' needs and goals for justice are not static, and justice itself is an ongoing and situated process, reflecting lived and evolving experiences (Daly 2014). Some victims may opt to not disclose due to a lack of trust or interest in institutional responses. This

may be the case for many survivors belonging to marginalized groups, whose previous experiences with state institutions have been negative, who fear violent state-sanctioned responses toward their already vulnerable communities, or whom the state has historically failed to protect (e.g., racial minorities, LGBT+ populations) (Mack and McCann 2018). Others, Fileborn (2017) added, might not see online disclosure as a useful avenue for meeting their needs. Online counter-publics cannot be considered proxies for justice; rather, in most instances, online justice is a partial form of justice, and one potential justice response among many (Fileborn 2017; Wood et al. 2018).

Digital Media, Survivor Needs, and Trauma-Informed Care in the Twenty-First Century

We commend those who defy silence to step out and share their lived realities while also recognizing and respecting others' decisions not to disclose based on risks and circumstances, as there are varying degrees of disclosure for victims and survivors of sexual violence. Informed by an intersectional framework, we reiterate the work of past researchers and advocates when we argue that online disclosure should be considered a choice, an option available to victims/survivors—one that is complex and depends on access, context, position, and whether or not victims/survivors opt for it. It is essential to understand that disclosure is not always the best option for victims/survivors, and we, as feminists, critical criminologists, social workers, victim advocates, therapists, and educators, must be more mindful of not only how we listen and react to disclosures, but also how we can be more supportive of individuals who do not disclose, and work to effectively meet their justice needs while also addressing larger system limitations. Extrapolating from the research reviewed, we therefore believe that the best approach to accounting for, understanding, and responding to survivors' choices and engagement with digital technologies is trauma-informed care (TIC).

Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care

Developments in social work, behavioral health, and related fields have led to TIC as a means by which victims/survivors can be cared for in the aftermath of adverse experiences (Courtois and Ford 2009). This evidence-based approach recognizes the prevalence and pervasive impact of trauma on the lives of individuals and works to create a culture that understands, respects, and responds to victims' needs (Bloom 1997). In doing so, it acknowledges factors that contribute to and complicate trauma (e.g., age, gender, frequency and duration of harm), along with variations in trauma responses (Briere and Scott 2012), and seeks to connect those who have been harmed with pertinent support services that may treat trauma symptoms and reduce the risk of triggering or aggravating deleterious outcomes (Harris and Fallot 2001). Through promoting a culture of safety that minimizes hazards and harms, and listens to and empowers victims/survivors, TIC is trauma-reducing rather than trauma-inducing (as some criminal justice and health care responses can be and have been), which aids in healing and recovery (Harris and Fallot 2001; SAMHSA 2014).

TIC is a promising tool for creating positive, prosocial change in today's technological world. It involves approaching online sexual violence disclosure or nondisclosure in more nuanced and inclusive ways that recognize the individual and complex needs of victims/survivors and their responses to the lived experiences and harms caused by traumatic events. If steps toward healing include finding community and validation, as well as regaining control over the form and content of one's narrative, we must be sensitive to not only how social media can facilitate this (while respecting victims' agency and autonomy), but also how it may compromise these goals. Generally, a trauma-informed approach necessitates that we minimize victims' risk of revictimization and retraumatization by considering responses that empower victims and place their needs at the forefront; in many cases, this warrants clinical and organizational change (Holland et al. 2018). Larger institutions (e.g., social media providers and platforms), then, play a

vital role in recognizing and responding to sexual violence and the diverse needs of victims, which in turn affects individuals (e.g., social media users) and their environments. Through survivor-centered reforms, technology companies and platforms (e.g., Google, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter) can use their power to shape space in ways that offer victims/survivors a sense of safety, control and empowerment, and foster healthy atmospheres for all users.

Understanding the nature of contemporary sexual violence, along with the unique obstacles/struggles that victims and survivors face (between and within groups) and their resulting consequences, is essential in creating more compassionate digital spaces. Educational strategies show promise for raising awareness about what sexual violence is, debunking commonly held myths and misperceptions and encouraging allyship (Fabiano et al 2003). Translated into the twenty-first century, social media platforms can disseminate electronic communications or messages regarding reasons for (non)disclosure, establish policies for breaches of privacy involving the sharing of victims'/survivors' narratives without consent, and recruit allies as peer support, resource officers, or violence interrupters. They can cultivate respect for victims'/survivors' needs through actively listening to user-generated concerns, improving the ease of reporting harassment and abuse online for both victims and bystanders, and increasing the transparency of reporting abuse and redress for users. They can also develop platform features aimed specifically at mitigating transgressions (e.g., allowing users to filter or block content, blocking harassers, banning repeat violators), and improve their overall response time to abuse and harassment complaints (Harper 2016; Shaikh 2015; Vitak et al. 2017).

Further, social media providers and tech companies can offer appropriate and accessible resources to those who may have experienced trauma, regardless of whether they have or have not disclosed. Sharing readily available information about national hotlines and crisis text messaging support services, or even hiring teams of care workers that individuals could reach out to for support, has the potential to make a difference, considering how many individuals have experienced sexual violence and its consequences in their lifetime, so that these individuals can reach out for help if or when they are ready. Integrating such features into daily operations, along with principles of TIC (e.g., safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment; Harris & Fallot 2001), can help create online environments that facilitate digital equality, participation, and citizenship, and digital spaces for future generations that actively promote social justice (Fraser 2007; Powell and Henry 2017).

Other evidence-based practices can work in tandem with educational efforts, technology-related modifications, and resource connections. As noted by Henry and Powell (2016), strategies may include the broadening of legislation to identify and reflect technology-facilitated sexual violence, and the support of law enforcement agencies, service providers, and online communities. In turn, this could contribute to social, institutional, political, and cultural shifts that foster better practices among users. Likewise, changes by social media providers that are victim- and survivor-centered could further the shifts witnessed with hashtag activism in ways that also yield meaningful change.

The extent to which online disclosure and hashtag campaigns can generate substantive change is open to question. We applaud efforts to raise awareness on sexual violence, but until significant transformations take place at institutional, societal, and cultural levels, we will continue to observe the same patterns that we have witnessed in "the real world" reproduced in digital spaces. *So, questions remain: How do we go from social media activism to actual and meaningful change? What politics are involved? What might this change look like?* Having social media giants integrate TIC seems like the next logical step. By shifting from standard practices to victim- and survivor-oriented reforms that are mindful of the complexities of digital disclosure, social media providers can take steps to educate users, reduce trauma, empower victims, and place us on the

path to cultural change. This new kind of justice would require heavily masculinized spaces and people to embrace more feminized, restorative approaches. As has been witnessed repeatedly throughout history, proposing and embracing such changes would most likely result in backlash and require a fundamental revolution to the Internet in terms of how it is regulated, what is regulated, who is regulating it, how that regulation is enforced, what responses exist to breaches, and so on. All this generates important questions about how such change could be achieved and what the roles of the state, the law, and other professional bodies (e.g., police, courts, corrections, victim services, and offender services) may be in terms of collaborating with social media providers and holding individuals accountable for their digital behaviors.

Knowing more about victims' and survivors' experiences is an integral step in being more inclusive and finding ways to facilitate healing and "justice." As others have argued, we need victim- and survivor-centered reforms (Holland et al. 2018), and we need the transformation of a culture that minimizes and tolerates sexual violence in its many forms. Practical strategies for social and institutional responses to sexual violence should be informed by complex theoretical approaches and include various parties in the implementation of solutions. Merging intersectional feminism with TIC can provide a starting point to deepen understandings of the diversity of victim/survivor reactions to trauma and disclosure decisions while shaping the resulting responses. To press onward in the quest for justice, it is therefore essential that the general public, social media platforms, legislative bodies, service providers and others are cognizant of varying degrees of disclosure influenced by social location, circumstances, and needs, just as it is imperative they work collaboratively alongside those harmed or marginalized to build "safe spaces" that underscore choice and promote empowerment (i.e., trauma-informed approaches). By integrating feminist and trauma-informed approaches, we can build knowledge, raise awareness, and work collectively to better support those who experience adversities while shaping structures, systems, and possibilities for more compassionate socio-technological environments that allow future generations to thrive.

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[1] The terms "victim" and "survivor" have different connotations. In this paper, "victim" broadly refers to anyone who has been harmed or injured as a result of another's actions while "survivor" is a more restricted term that implies taking back control that was lost due to victimization, healing from victimization, speaking out against violence, activism, etc. (i.e., victim + purposive action = transition to survivor). We recognize that other definitions/distinctions also exist. Nevertheless, the terms are used throughout the paper, sometimes interchangeably when deemed appropriate, and we do our best to adhere to the aforementioned conceptualizations.

[2] Figley (1985) discussed the processes underlying trauma victims' transition to survivor status.

[3] Doxing is a form of digital harassment that involves the malicious public release of another's private or personal information such as a home address, email address, and phone number, which can result in harm to that person (Franks 2016; also see MacAllister 2017).

[4] According to Levendowski (2013), revenge pornography is defined as "sexually explicit images that are publicly shared online, without the consent of the pictured individual" (p. 422). While revenge is only one of many motivations underlying perpetration, the phrase has nevertheless been widely used.

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