“Our experiences are different … our risks are different”: Racialized women’s online activism to end violence against women in Canada

By

Nasreen Rajani

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In

Communication

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Abstract

Existing research on online activism to end violence against women tends to homogenize the experiences of women. To help address this issue, this dissertation poses the following questions: why and how do racialized women in Canada participate in anti-violence online activism, specifically around violence against women? Grounded in an intersectional framework, this dissertation draws from semi-structured interviews and uses a social constructivist grounded theory approach to examine the experiences of nine racialized online activist women in Canada. In line with the intersectional framework guiding this research, and in an effort to further both research and discussion as it pertains to the diversity of women involved in such activities, all analyses will also attempt to account for other identities expressed by participants.

Broadly, the collective experiences of these participants involves a focus on creating a variety of digital media technologies (e.g., personal websites, social media pages and profiles, and podcasts) to draw attention to the intersectional nature of violence against women. The counternarratives that they create and distribute challenge prevailing narratives that tend to ignore the intersectional nature of violence against women, specifically pointing to omissions in: mainstream news media; the non-profit sector involved in preventing and ending violence against women; and settler colonial policies, frameworks, and regulations. The racialized women interviewed for this dissertation expressed a struggle to increase their visibility and widen their networks for support and mobilization online. As noted by participants, this struggle often arises from a range of social media platform biases and experiences of technology-facilitated violence, factors that are often ignored in research and discussion pertaining to such online activist efforts. By focusing on the intersectional identities expressed by participants and their experiences with struggles unique to online activist work, this study contributes a deeper and more nuanced account to the limited research on racialized women in Canada and their efforts to end violence against women.
Acknowledgements

This project would not exist without the nine women whom I interviewed. Thank you for sharing your experiences, perspectives, challenges, and hopes on online activism to end violence against women with me. I am so grateful to have met each of you.

It has been an honour to work with each of my committee members throughout this journey. Thank you to Rena Bivens for her ongoing support and guidance throughout these many, many years we’ve known each other and worked together. I’ve learned so much from her that has helped me to grow as an intersectional feminist researcher and an anti-violence activist-scholar.

Thank you to Chris Russill for always being one of my biggest academic cheerleaders and especially guiding me through really thoughtful theoretical and methodological positionings that have deepened my knowledge and understanding of this type of research. Thank you also for the many laughs we’ve shared over the years.

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Thank you to Yasmin Jiwani for being the external examiner for this project. Her insights and thoughtfulness have provided me with great ideas to think through the
complexities and challenges of intersectional research, especially as I continue to tackle the hurdles of putting intersectional theories into practice.

Thank you to Matt Murdoch and Alyssa MacDougall for their help when I felt stuck and blocked in the writing of this piece. They supported me and this project when I was ready to quit (many times) and I could not have made it to this finish line without their help. I’m also so thankful for their friendship over the many years we’ve known each other.

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Dedication

For my mom and my sister.
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Appendix 1: Recruitment Poster

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List of Acronyms

BLM  Black Lives Matter.

DM  Direct messaging.

LGBTQ+  Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (or questioning) individuals, where the plus sign is a way to be inclusive of expanding language of other gender and sexual identities and orientations.

MMIWG2+  Murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit individuals, where the plus sign is a way to be inclusive of Indigenous-specific language of other gender identities.

NWAC  Native Women’s Association of Canada.

OCAP  Ownership, control, access, and possession.

PM  Prime Minister.

RCMP  Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

TERF  Trans-exclusionary radical feminists.

TRRC  Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

TFV  Technology-facilitated violence.
## Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ableism</td>
<td>Ableism “positively values able-bodiedness,” making it compulsory and hegemonic (Dolmage, 2017, p. 7).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activism</td>
<td>A term broadly characterized as a spectrum of efforts to promote and exert social or political change motivated by one’s values and beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-violence</td>
<td>A term used broadly to connote a commitment to end violence, where violence is understood as an umbrella term for methods that sustain hierarchical rule and domination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>From the term “weblog”, blogs are websites where content is organized by reverse-chronological order and usually focused on a single issue or topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cisgender</td>
<td>A term used to identify individuals who possess the same reproductive organs associated with their identified social categories of being a man or a woman (Aultman, 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cisheteropatriarchy</td>
<td>The patriarchal hierarchy of social structure that is based on a “presumed biological divide between males and females” (Connell, 2009, p. 9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cisheteronormativity</td>
<td>A term that refers to a construction of gender where heterosexuality is normalized and unquestioned (Landstrom, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadname</td>
<td>The use of a transgender person’s birth name, which they no longer use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doxxing</td>
<td>The revealing of personal information of a target, such as their address, so that anyone online who sees it has the potential to enact offline violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism</td>
<td>I adopt bell hooks’ (2000, p. 24) declaration of feminism being “a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashtag</td>
<td>A keyword or phrase following the # symbol that allows for indexing and searchability of online content. Although first used in the context of Twitter in 2007 by a user, the hashtag has become</td>
</tr>
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x
normalized on many social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and tumblr.

Intersectionality
A way of understanding and discussing how the conditions of people’s social and political contexts are shaped by not one, but rather multiple, simultaneous, overlapping, and interlocking systems of oppressions (Arvin et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Hill Collins, 1998; 2017; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; hooks, 2000).

Islamophobia
Defined as “a fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination” (Zine, 2002, para 13).

Margin
I follow bell hooks’ (2000, p. ix) characterization of the margin as being “part of the whole but outside the main body.”

Marginalized
People are individually or collectively marginalized because of societal values and social institutions that systematically reinforce systems of cisgender patriarchy, white supremacy, and ableism, among many other oppressions.

Meme
The term meme has been adapted by Internet users to more specifically identify “rapidly spreading, momentarily salient in-jokes; recognizable images (and image forms); and other artifacts like viral videos” (Leavitt, 2014, p. 138).

Misgender
The incorrect use of gender pronouns when referring to gender diverse and transgender individuals.

Misogynoir
A term coined by Moya Bailey in 2013 to describe the “particular brand of hatred directed at Black women in US visual and popular culture” (Bailey, 2021, p. 1).

Neoliberalism
Brown (2015, p. 17) broadly characterizes neoliberalism as a “peculiar form of reason that configures all aspects of existence in economic terms” that is also “quietly undoing basic elements of democracy.” It is characterized by “deregulation, privatization and withdrawal from the state for social provisions” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). Significantly, neoliberalism differs from liberalism as liberalist ideals consist “of both freedom and equality universally shared and of political rule by and for the people” (Brown, 2015, p. 18). Although neoliberalism developed primarily in the US and in Europe, it has had a global impact, even as it varies temporally and geographically (Brown, 2015; Duggan, 2012).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberal feminism</td>
<td>A feminist ideology that “helps to neutralize the potential critique from other strands of feminism” whereby concerns of inequality are rooted in maintaining a middle-class, work-life equality with men as opposed to stemming from a structural problem (Rottenberg, 2014, p. 432).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcasts</td>
<td>A converged medium that brings together the Internet, audio, and portable media devices. Podcasts have been available since 2001, but podcasting listenership began to soar in popularity throughout North America since 2015, arguably coinciding with a rapidly increasing shift in smartphone use (Berry, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular feminism</td>
<td>A feminist ideology that exists along a spectrum where corporate and commercial feminism manifest and circulate widely through mainstream media spaces and digital spaces, displaying liberal ideas about the universality of gender without challenging and disrupting deep-rooted structures of inequality or intersectionality (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). Such expressions make feminism accessible and digestible to wider publics (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Banet-Weiser et al., 2019).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postfeminism</td>
<td>A sensibility that is closely connected with neoliberal feminism and popular feminism, circulating as ideas and images that gender equality has been reached (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>An umbrella term to refer to non-heterosexuality that is purposely ambiguous to be inclusive of those who do not identify with conventional categories around sexual orientation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racialization</td>
<td>The process of marking bodies where “some bodies are racialized as superior, and others as inferior” (Grosfoguel et al., 2015, p. 637).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settler colonialism</td>
<td>A term used to describe the invasion of, and the continued dispossession of, Indigenous peoples from the land, as well as the coerced dependency between Indigenous communities and the settler state (Arvin et al., 2013; Simpson, 2016; Tuck &amp; Yang, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone</td>
<td>Internet-enabled mobile devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Spirit</td>
<td>A term “that encompasses a broad range of sexual and gender identities of Aboriginal peoples across North America. While some use the term to refer specifically to the cultural roles of individuals who embody both female and male spirits, Two-Spirit is also used</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to describe Aboriginal people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ)” (Hunt, 2016, p. 7).

**Violence**
An umbrella term for methods that sustain hierarchical rule and domination where physical acts are the most visible (hooks, 2000; Hill Collins, 1998; 2017).

**White feminism**
A political and analytical category that centres white, Western, middle class, cisgender women’s concerns, essentializing gender, neglecting and silencing racialized women’s perspectives and experiences, and otherwise viewing racialized women as monolithic entities (Liska, 2015; Mohanty, 1988). Significantly, white feminism refers to a practice of feminism and not an identity of every feminist with white skin tone (Young, 2014).

**Whiteness**
More than just a phenotypical expression, whiteness is a socially constructed race based on ideology emerging in modernity that justified pre-existing Eurocentric hierarchies and priorities (Frankenberg, 1993).
Chapter 1: Introduction

From 2013, there has been increased uptake in scholarly and media attention on digital media technologies being used to address violence against women (Bailey et al., 2019; Berridge & Portwood-Stacer 2015; Dixon, 2014). However, the bulk of this research has focused on the collection of content from highly-visible and trending social media hashtags, blogs, and smartphone applications, thus emphasizing the what aspects of such online activism (Mendes et al., 2018; 2019). Although this has been somewhat useful in our understanding of the potentials and pitfalls of online activism that challenges violence against women, few researchers have explored the experiences of those engaged in such online activism. As a result, existing research provides an incomplete picture of such online activism, with growing understanding of the what aspects of such work largely overshadowing the how and why of online activism as it pertains to violence against women (Mendes et al., 2018; 2019).

Further, few research studies have examined the challenges and benefits of online activism challenging violence against women through an intersectional lens, and fewer still have focused on the experiences and perspectives of those individuals at the margins. Despite some empirical evidence on some women’s experiences of online activism to challenge violence against women, that will be discussed in detail below, it is inappropriate to assume that these findings can be generalized to the experiences of racialized women in Canada, given the unique social, political, and historical contexts from which their work arises. To help address this gap in existing research, this

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1 Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “racialized” broadly to refer to those who are historically, socially, and politically marked as racially different from white people, acknowledging that white people are also racialized.
dissertation draws from semi-structured interviews to examine the experiences of nine racialized women in Canada involved in online activism that challenges violence against women. Reflecting the intersectional framework guiding this dissertation, particular attention is paid to other identities expressed by participants (e.g., queer and/or disabled) and the impact that such intersecting identities have on the experiences of those involved in online activism to end violence against women.

A major purpose of undertaking this project is to rectify a tendency in research to treat women as a homogenous group. Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “women” inclusively for all those who identify as women, recognizing that gender-diverse individuals who express femininity are often misgendered as women2 (see section 3.1.). Moreover, the overall aim of this dissertation is to place online activism that challenges violence against women in Canada in its historical and theoretical contexts, interrogating the potentials of such work to advance transformative social justice. As a result, the findings of this research help to both explore and challenge commonly held assumptions about Canadian online activist efforts to bring an end to violence against women.

To help ground this dissertation in the existing literature, I will present a brief overview of the state of research on online activism as it pertains to violence against women. This review of the literature will then be used to direct the development of the research questions guiding the current study. After presenting these research questions, I will then identify and explain the methodological and theoretical approaches used to help

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2 Given the intersectional relationship between gender and age (among many others), when children are discussed specifically, the term “girl” is used instead of “woman”.

2
answer these questions. Following this, I will present evidence from interviews with nine racialized women online activists challenging violence against women in Canada to help support the main findings of this research. Finally, I will present an overview of each of the chapters in this dissertation, highlighting their main arguments and research contributions.

1.1. Online Activism Involving Violence Against Women

Increasing attention to activists employing digital media to address online violence against women can be somewhat attributed to the design features and cultural values of digital media technologies (e.g., social media platforms; websites; mobile phone applications). Activism is not new, nor is the existence of activism to end violence against women in Canada (Barker, 2008; Beres et al., 2009; Fraser, 2014; Hargreaves, 2017; Rankin & Vickers, 2001). Further, activism has always involved some form of incorporation and integration of various media (Lim, 2018; Tarrow, 1994). However, activism involving digital media technologies is a relatively new development and has introduced new features to activist work, particularly in how these technologies are reconfiguring relationships with, and participation in, activism at the scale at which individuals can generate and disseminate content to potentially global audiences (Dencik and Leisert, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012; Lim, 2012; 2013; 2018; Margetts, et al., 2016; Milan, 2015; Poell & van Dijck, 2015; Youmans & York, 2012).

For instance, research that avoids technologically deterministic approaches have demonstrated the need to avoid a preoccupation of social media platform technologies involved in online activism because there is a larger context around media use for online activism for different activist groups (Dencik and Leisert, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012; Lim,

Furthermore, much of this research has shown that social media is biased towards certain kinds of movements where social media features can facilitate and amplify some movements over others (Dencik and Leisert, 2015; Guha, 2015; Lim 2013b; Milan, 2015). For example, social movements have been identified as being biased towards movements that use simple narratives with low-risks to engaging in activism (Guha, 2015; Lim, 2013b). Additionally, trending twitter topics can set the agenda of public discourse, thereby amplifying visibility of already trending movements (Milan, 2015).

Yet, much of the research on online activism that challenges violence against women has focused on collecting and examining content from digital media technologies, prioritizing the what aspects of this activism. One of the most common modes of anti-violence activism using digital media technologies that has drawn considerable media and research attention in recent years has been the use of hashtags. This is sometimes referred to as “hashtag feminism,” or the use of hashtags to share cultural critiques related to feminism, and is often in response to instances of violence against women that are reported on or discussed in mainstream media (Dixon, 2014, p. 34). For example, social media users have used hashtags to:

- respond to misinformed and dangerous stereotypes about sexual violence\(^3\)
  (Bailey et al., 2019; Horeck, 2014; Rentschler, 2015);

\(^3\) E.g. #SurvivorPrivilege; #AskThicke; #SafetyTipsForLadies.
• show solidarity with others impacted by violence by sharing testimonies of personal experiences of violence\(^4\) (Clark, 2016; Keller et al., 2019; Megarry, 2014; Mendes et al., 2018; Thrift, 2014).

• claim public space and mobilize offline action (e.g., protests) around violence against women\(^5\) (Bowles Eagle, 2015; Fischer, 2016; Mendes, 2015);

• target politicians or business owners by directly calling on them to support anti-violence initiatives\(^6\) (Clark, 2014; Pavan, 2015; Saramo, 2016);

• draw attention to the intersectional experiences of those who have experienced violence against women\(^7\) (Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016; Kuo, 2016; Loza, 2014; Moeke-Pickering et al., 2018; Tynes et al., 2016).

Beyond solely using trending hashtags on widely-used social media platforms, other digital media technologies have been demonstrated to be effective in challenging, organizing, and, ultimately, mobilizing action against violence against women. Prominent examples include the use of blogs\(^8\) and smartphone applications\(^9\) (Blackwell et al., 2017; Desborough, 2018; Dimond et al., 2013; Mendes et al., 2019; Phipps et al., 2018; Rentschler, 2014; Weiss, 2016). The confessional aspect and sharing of lived experiences of misogyny through long-form blog posts are similar to the early feminist consciousness-raising of the 1970s that was necessary for North American women to

\(^{4}\) E.g. #WhyIStayed; #BeenRapedNeverReported; #MenCallMeThings; #MeToo; #YesAllWomen.

\(^{5}\) E.g. #BoardTheBus; #FreeCeCe; #SlutWalk and its location-specific renditions (e.g. #SlutWalkOttawa).

\(^{6}\) E.g. #NotBuyingIt; #TakeBackTheTech; #AmINext.

\(^{7}\) E.g. #YesAllwhiteWomen; #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen; #SayHerName; #MMIW; #BlackLivesMatter.

\(^{8}\) E.g. Hollaback!; The Everyday Sexism Project.

\(^{9}\) E.g. Hollaback!; SafeStreet; Protibadi.
challenge sexism occurring in both private and public spaces (hooks, 2000; Rentschler, 2014). In addition to blogs, smartphone applications often provide an opportunity for intervention of street harassment as smartphone ownership has rapidly increased globally (Poushter, 2016). Smartphone applications often allow users to safely and rapidly spread information related to experiences of violence (Mendes et al., 2019; Weiss, 2016). For example, those who have experienced violence in public spaces can easily snap a photo of the perpetrator in real-time to post on social media, blogs, or other mobile phone applications while also having access to their social and emergency supports from their phones.

Although such content-focused research indicates the potential benefits of digital media technologies in activist work, it also demonstrates that some women face challenges when involved in online activism given the ways in which digital media technologies exacerbate and reinforce existing hierarchies of power relations. For example, a close examination of the content from trending feminist hashtags identified that many center on, or are co-opted by, the concerns and experiences of white women, thus excluding the majority of women who have experienced violence (Diehl, 2019; Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016; Kuo, 2016; Loza, 2014; Lopez, 2018). Additionally, research examining the features and design choices of smartphone applications created to prevent sexual violence has demonstrated that these applications tend to reinforce dangerous myths about sexual violence (e.g. the idea that sexual violence occurs from...

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10 Throughout this dissertation, “white” is not capitalized in solidarity with the many intersectional writers who inform my thinking (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Garcia-Del Moral, 2018; hooks, 2000; INCITE, 2016; Razack, 2000; Razack, et al, 2010).

11 E.g. # MMIW; #YesAllWomen; #SolidarityIsForWomen.
strangers, and that women are assumed responsible for their own violence prevention) often rendering them ineffective (Bivens & Hasinoff, 2017). Further, those involved with online activism challenging violence against women report the great deal of labour involved in sustaining campaigns and momentum for continued collective action (Mendes et al., 2018; 2019).

A broader limitation of the use of digital media technologies in activism challenging violence against women is that being on the receiving end of violence is a prominent and common concern faced by many women while occupying online spaces (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015; Dixon, 2014; Filipovic, 2007; Herring et al., 2002; Jane, 2014a; 2014b; Shepherd, et al., 2015; Vickery & Everbach, 2018). Such instances of violence targeting women in online spaces is not a new phenomenon, with research dating back to the mid-1990s demonstrating that women using early online networks were disproportionately experiencing instances of violence compared to cisgender men using the same networks (Cherny & Reba Weise, 1996; Herring et al., 2002; Shepherd et al., 2015; Vickery, 2018).

More recently, there has been a flurry of media and academic attention to specific cases of attacks directed at highly visible feminist bloggers (Filipovic, 2007; Lewis et al., 2016; Valenti, 2013; West, 2015), celebrities (Lawson, 2018; Madden et al., 2018; Massanari, 2017), female gamers (Consalvo; 2012; Massanari, 2017; Salter, 2018), journalists (Amnesty International, 2018; Gardiner, 2018) politicians (Amnesty International, 2018), female scholars (Veletsianos et al., 2018), and women more generally in the United States (Jane, 2014a; 2014b; 2016). Many of these instances consisted of multi-year campaigns where women were threatened with physical violence
or forced to flee their homes out of fear of physical violence and death (Jane, 2014; Lawson, 2018). The prevalence of such attacks experienced as a result of participating online has left many women with few options other than abandoning their participation from online spaces altogether (Dixon, 2014; Jane, 2014; Shepherd et al., 2015).

This research has been fruitful in highlighting both the potentials and limitations of integrating digital media technologies in both new and ongoing activist efforts. However, digital media technologies are not a utopic space free of systems of power. Rather, a major limitation of the use of digital media technologies in activist work is that systems of power are embedded within these technologies, which have often served to reinforce pre-existing hierarchies of domination (e.g., cisheteropatriarchy; classism; ableism; ageism) (Brock, 2012; Costanza-Chock, 2018; Noble, 2016; 2018; Tynes & Noble, 2016). While some of this research (e.g. Bivens & Hasinoff, 2017) does take this critical lens into account, most others do not.

Furthermore, the plethora of research on social media content, or the what dimension of individual activist campaigns and projects, is largely a result of the high visibility of certain events and the convenience of big data scraping from social media platforms (Rentschler, 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2014). Although convenient, such mining and scraping methods introduce major risks. These include, but are not limited to: the tendency to neglect the role of human agency; the historical context surrounding activism; and the role of political economy of digital technologies being used, as many widely-used social media platforms for online activism are corporations that were formed under, and continue to shape, regulatory regimes (Lopez, 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2014).
The role of human agency has typically been absent from research exploring the use of digital media technologies in activist work by focusing on the content, or the *what* aspects. More specifically, the *why* and *how* of the experiences of those involved are less likely to be examined and interrogated in such research projects (Mendes et al., 2018; 2019). As a result, very little research has explored and examined the actual experiences of online activists working to challenge violence against women (Mendes et al., 2018; 2019). Given the specific social, political, and historical context of women experiencing violence in Canada (Razack et al., 2010; Thobani, 2015), this dearth of research is even more limited in helping both researchers and the general public to understand the experiences of those involved in such online activism in Canada.

However limited, some researchers have started working towards filling these gaps by incorporating interview data from women in Canada. For instance, Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2018; 2019) followed an ethnographic methodology to examine digital feminist activism in the US and Canada, some of which was specifically around ending violence against women. This research involved observing online feminist communities and conducting semi-structured individual interviews, surveys, and group interviews with 82 feminist online activists in addition to social media content scraping and analysis. Similarly, Fairbairn (2015; 2020) conducted interview-based research, interviewing 19 Canadian and US anti-violence prevention workers, activists, and public educators where social media was a primary component of their prevention work.

Both research projects uncovered hidden or invisible aspects of activism (e.g. feelings, motivations, and experiences) that took place (Fairbairn, 2020; Mendes et al., 2019). They also revealed various barriers that existed for their interview participants’
activism, such as violence, social status, confidence, technological savviness, and the time and resource-consuming nature of the work (Fairbairn, 2020; Mendes et al., 2019). This research indicates that the use of digital media technologies in online activism does not reflect the often homogenized presentation found in the majority of existing research that focus on the content or the what, as these technologies are used in various ways by different groups of activists for different concerns in various, often unpredictable contexts (Mendes et al., 2018; 2019).

Although such research represents a step toward understanding the experiences of online activists in Canada working to end violence against women, these studies perpetuate the emphasis on the experiences of predominantly white, cisgender, able-bodied women. For instance, Mendes and colleagues (2019) acknowledge that their extensive case study-based research project was a start on mapping out feminist online activism, but was missing those campaigns that centered on racialized and LGBTQ+12 individuals’ concerns and experiences. Fairbairn (2015) identified similar limitations to their findings, with less than 25% of those interviewed identifying as being racialized, disabled, and/or part of the LGBTQ+ community. Further, although these studies focused on feminist accounts with mention of intersectionality, a fuller understanding of the use of digital media technologies in activist work challenging violence against women is possible only if researchers more actively “reconsider the way that digital forms of feminism can more fully serve to destabilize hegemonic whiteness” (Lopez, 2018, p. 161).

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12 Refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (or questioning) individuals, where the plus sign is a way to be inclusive of expanding language of other gender and sexual identities and orientations.
The gaps identified in these and prior studies reflect a larger context where digital media scholars have often taken gender or sex into account before race (de la Pena, 2010), resulting in some scholars stressing the importance of specifically de-centering white women’s experiences (Daniels, 2009; 2016; de la Pena, 2010; Lopez, 2018; Loza, 2014; Noble, 2016). Furthermore, white women’s experiences and perspectives have a long history of dominating feminist inquiry (Ahmed, 2004; Arvin et al., 2013; Hill Collins, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Davis, 1983; Harris, 1990; hooks, 1981; Mohanty, 1988; Razack et al., 2010; Truth, 1851). In line with this lengthy history, gender is not the only domain of oppression faced by women using technologies (Haraway, 1991; Noble, 2016; Noble & Tynes, 2016). As Haraway (1991, p. 173) declared, “the feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language […] is a totalizing and imperialist one.”

1.2. Centering Women at the Margins

As a marginalized researcher and a community member who has been involved in anti-violence activism, who has witnessed many of the dynamics exposed in this dissertation play out online that have not yet been explored academically or in much of mainstream media, and who is tired of seeing the privileging of white women’s concerns, I was motivated to continue exploring the potentials and pitfalls of digital media technologies for online activism to challenge violence against women with a specific focus on those individuals at the margins. In this case, I focus on the experience of racialized women in Canada to narrow the scope of this dissertation to a geographical location that also allows me to examine and interrogate the role of the state implicated in violence against women and online activism to end it.
Thus, this dissertation was driven to build off the criticisms of past research and to start filling the gaps identified with exploratory research centering on the experiences and perspectives of racialized women in Canada. This research builds upon previous explorations of the what of online activism challenging violence against women by focusing more on the how and why of this work and the activists involved. To help achieve these broad goals, this project is guided by the following research question and sub-questions:

- Why and how do racialized women participate in anti-violence online activism within Canada, specifically as it involves violence against women?
  - Why are racialized women participating in online activism around challenging and ending violence against women?
  - How do racialized women challenge and expose issues of violence with digital media technologies?
  - How are racialized women’s experiences shaped by their online participation and, in turn, how do they resist and shape digital media technologies for their own needs?

Although the focus of these questions is on racialized identities, this dissertation is ultimately grounded in an intersectional framework. Intersectional theories offer an opportunity to place marginalized individuals at the centre of the research inquiry in a way that acknowledges and embraces the unique experiences of those who are multiply marginalized as a result of their identities, thus siting at the junction of multiple sites of oppression. This framework is appropriate to center the experiences that racialized women face as activists challenging violence against women and who are (multiply)
marginalized by issues embedded within the technologies they use, revealing the complexity of the politics at play in online spaces.

Relying on semi-structured interviews, this study foregrounds the voices of nine racialized women, some of whom also identified as queer and/or disabled, involved broadly in online activism to end violence against women in Canada. Reflecting the intersectional identities of these women and others involved in similar work, analysis of all interviews is guided by a range of intersectional approaches, specifically drawing from queer, Black, Muslim, Indigenous, disability, and anti-carceral feminist theories, where social factors of race, gender, religion, sexuality, and ability are understood as overlapping rather than competing systems of oppressions structuring their experiences.

To further interrogate and examine the political and historical context of the interviewees’ experiences, I rely on historical news coverage, non-profit and activist-created reports, and secondary academic research data. I also use corporate documentation and policies from the digitally-enabled networked technologies discussed by interviewees to help create a fuller picture of the technologies and their features primarily being used and how these limit or advance online activist work.

However, this dissertation cannot, nor does it attempt to, address all the various factors conditioning women’s experiences of violence and all the intersections women navigate. Rather, grounded in interviews with these nine women, I explore those factors that were most prevalent and apparent to the participants in this study as a way to acknowledge the diversity of their experiences and challenge the homogenizing, highly

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13 I use “Indigenous” to represent all First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples inclusively, and as a pointed departure away from state-given terms such as “Aboriginal.” Where interviewees used other terms, I defer to those terms.
visible accounts that often do not emphasize intersectional perspectives within a Canadian context.

This dissertation ultimately exposes and challenges complex power dynamics around the use of digital media technologies by racialized women in Canada working to challenge and end violence against women. Based on interviews with participants, I argue that these women are creating a variety of online spaces to draw attention to the historical complexity and intersectional nature of violence against women in Canada that have been excluded from dominant narratives. Further, I will explore issues identified by participants who have expressed a struggle with increasing their visibility and widening their networks for support and mobilization. Through such explorations, this study contributes a deeper and more nuanced account of the limited research on racialized women in Canada’s experiences of anti-violence online activism, particularly by identifying participants’ distinctive experiences within an intersectional framework.

1.3. Dissertation Map

In Chapter 2, I detail my methodological approach and design for this research study. Because of the critical reflexive framework I use, I present the methodology to introduce my research design process that is informed by intersectionality. I discuss my approach to, and the challenges involved in, interviewing nine racialized women using digital media technologies for online activism around violence against women. I also provide a descriptive summary of the participants in the study and outline my analysis on the data gathered, following a social constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006).
In Chapter 3, I used the literature review presented in this chapter as well as participant interviews to help build the theoretical approach for this dissertation and to more fully incorporate an intersectional analysis in a way that makes sense to the participants. I first review intersectionality broadly as a guiding theoretical approach for this project. As I am concerned about power relations and oppression at the macro and micro level of interaction between digital technologies and racialized women, this research sits at the crossroads of intersectionality, science and technology studies, and political economy. I discuss the role of intersectionality scholarship in my understanding of both digital media technologies and violence. This chapter, then, further reviews the key scholarship of the intersectional feminisms I take up based on the participant interviews, including queer, Black, Muslim, and Indigenous feminisms, as well as critical disability and anti-carceral frameworks.

Chapter 4 addresses the first part of my research question: why are these women participating online in their anti-violence activism? I argue that their involvement in online anti-violence activism aims to challenge and resist the ways in which many women have been continually excluded and further marginalized from narratives of violence by mainstream news media, the settler colonial state, and the anti-violence sector. I share participant recommendations for new governing systems and approaches to anti-violence. I then present participant counternarratives of violence that extend to structural violence and other aspects of intersectional experiences of violence women face.

In Chapter 5, I identify that participants create various online spaces for these counternarratives in the form of resource-based websites, podcasts, and social media
profiles and pages. I argue that these racialized women were countering their frustration with mainstream news media, the settler colonial state, and the anti-violence sector by using a variety of digital media technologies for anti-violence beyond relying on trending hashtags. However, I further contend that their reliance on corporate social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, to disseminate their messages to wider publics ultimately shapes the experiences of anti-violence online activism that is made visible to dominant publics. I demonstrate that, although participants were able to create resistance narratives about the violence that women face, they still faced gatekeeping through the design, policies, and cultural norms associated with Facebook and Twitter. This was evident from participants’ various experiences that I categorized along three domains: social media skills and knowledge of social media design and policies; the time and resources required to engage with others via social media platforms; and, the assumed abilities of all users.

In Chapter 6, I explore the experiences of violence faced by participants as a result of their online activism and the responses coming from those social media platforms, which further limits their online participation and activism to end violence. I unravel a variety of violent experiences faced by these participants that are less discussed in current research and media. As a result of participants’ online activism, most have been targeted by technology-facilitated violence (TFV) in ways that are not fully captured with a framework that focuses exclusively on intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or anonymous trolling from males, as the violence they faced was neither always based on misogyny, nor did it always necessarily involve attacks by complete strangers. In addition to these types of attacks, participants experienced further marginalization and
exclusion from the responses from Twitter, specifically, in helping to support those experiencing a range of TFV. I provide participants’ recommendations that center around having those involved in the anti-violence community as co-designers of technological projects and designs to better inform both the social media platforms and those involved in anti-violence activism.

Finally, Chapter 7 brings the results of this research together to discuss broader implications and research limitations. I conclude with my reflections on anti-violence online activism within a Canadian context that centers racialized women from an intersectional perspective, drawing out larger threads that are worthy of future research inquiry. I then review the four major findings of this research project, outline the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions this dissertation makes, and rearticulate major limitations of this study before providing recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Methodology and Research Design

The goal of this research is to uncover subjugated knowledges from a diversity of racialized women’s experiences engaging with online activism around violence against women in Canada. To help understand how I meet this goal, I begin by presenting my methodology and research design. Methodologically, I center the knowledge and expertise of traditionally marginalized individuals and I am guided by feminist methodologies to expose and interrogate the complexity of power structures and relations that situate these women within a framework of multiple and overlapping systems of oppressions. Centering those situated at multiple marginalized standpoint positions can yield crucial knowledge about power relationships and dynamics (Hill Collins, 1990; Haraway, 1988). Indeed, interviews with the participants in this study greatly informed the theoretical approach and interpretation of findings. But such rich insights are also dependent on the researcher and their approach to the research process.

In the first part of this chapter, I share how I engaged in critical self-reflexivity to be better aware of, and to help make visible, the power dynamics between myself and the participants as much as possible (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). This engagement includes articulating my location and assumptions about how these power relations might impact the research study (Carlson, 2017; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012; Hill Collins, 2014; Smith, 2012). Part of my reflexive activity was also in speaking with my research supervisor and advisors, who are more distant from the research data. These outside perspectives allowed me to discuss broader ideas that informed, and arose from, the research data, with those more experienced in the research process helping me to clarify certain positions and understandings, both for myself and others who may be affected by
this research (e.g., participants; researchers and academics; those involved in activist
work). In my effort to be as transparent as possible, before I dig into the research design
of this project, I share relevant pieces of my social identities and lived experiences that
brought me to this research and further guided the analysis of this project. This
divulgence is intended to hold myself accountable to the participants involved in this
project and to the larger research community.

After detailing my personal positions as they relate to this dissertation, I detail the
specific elements of my research design. I outline how I constructed this research study,
relying on a purposeful and snowballing sampling method for recruiting prospective
participants to conduct semi-structured interviews. I then present ethical challenges and
considerations and reveal relevant details about the nine participants in this research
project. Finally, I discuss how I approached the data analysis, primarily informed by a
social constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2006). Such an approach is post-
positivist, systematic, and flexible and allowed for in-depth exploration of subjective
perspectives and experiences that also positions the participants as experts who bring
their insights into the social phenomenon in question.

2.1. My Positionality Guiding the Research Design

In this section, I explain how, through critical self-reflection, I situate myself
simultaneously as an outsider and an insider to my research project and discuss how that
has impacted how I came to this research inquiry and how it has informed my research
design. Articulating my standpoint is inspired and guided by Hill Collins’ (1986, p. 29)
writing on the outsider within status in the research process, one that “trusts [my] own
personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge,” and as a way to
approach analysis of intersectionality. Hill Collins (1986) asserts that the outsider within status can be taken up by marginalized researchers to be one that provides a unique standpoint of oppressed groups, while enriching sociological study from the position of dominant groups. Furthermore, Hill Collins (1986, p. 29) argues that outsiders within occupy a particular place where “difference sensitizes them to patterns that may be more difficult for established sociological insiders to see.”

As the researcher of this project, I live with multiple fluid identities, many of which contain me as simultaneously an insider and an outsider. I am an insider within this research as I have similar social identity markers as some of the participants in this project (see Chapter 2.3.). However, I am simultaneously an outsider in many contexts related to the participants’ social identity. Although I am a South Asian Ismaili Muslim, I am not an insider to all South Asian and/or Muslim Canadian settler women. For instance, the sect of Islam my family follows does not prescribe women to wear any type of veil and, therefore, I have less obvious lived experience of gendered Islamophobia that targets visibly Muslim women (e.g., women who veil). I am also an outsider to other racialized communities in Canada. For example, I am a settler on Indigenous lands with a limited understanding of Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, thus limiting any understanding that may arise from my own racialized identity. I am also a cisgender woman and do not identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Further, as an able-bodied woman, I do not experience ableism in the same way as those with disabilities, including some participants in this study. These aspects of my social identity are important to mention as some of the participants I interviewed, and whose perspectives
and experiences make up this research project, discussed how multiple systems of power (e.g., homophobia and ableism) have impacted their lives along with racism and sexism.

Another identity I bring to this research project is one that has been committed to ending violence through my volunteer work with a range of anti-violence organizations in the city of Ottawa (Algonquin Anishinaabe territory). Being an insider to this sector has influenced this research journey as I was observing the work of racialized women participate in online activism around violence against women that was not as visible in most mainstream media and research. Moreover, as an insider to some anti-violence organizations, it was relatively easy for me to start finding connections for potential participant recruitment, as I was able to identify prospective participants based on my personal knowledge, networks, and experience. This shared identification with prospective participants helped me to establish an early common ground with those I was interviewing that helped with recruitment of participants, my perceived view of their comfort with the interviews themselves, and my interpretation of the data collected based on my limited insider knowledge. However, I am not a complete insider to this sector as my volunteer commitment over the years has been largely providing administrative and marketing support, as opposed to many of the participants involved who have experiences as front-line workers working directly with those who have experienced violence.

I also recognize that I am an academic researcher in training in a privileged position, as I will be gaining more out of this research than the participants in the immediate future. My education and professional credentials differentiate me from the participants, as none of them had, or were working towards, a doctoral degree (although
five of the participants mentioned holding graduate degrees). However, I aimed to minimize power relations between researcher and researched “to produce more truly collaborative encounters,” although removing them completely was not possible (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 214). For instance, I approached interviews as a collective process rather than a top-down process in two major ways. When I met with prospective participants, I emphasized my own multiple locations and standpoint as a settler racialized doctoral researcher involved in, and committed to, anti-violence and that these were the perspectives from which I started this inquiry. I further increased my familiarity with each interviewee by emphasizing my role as a student researcher in an effort to help diminish researcher-participant power relations, positioning myself as a novice researcher and the participants as knowledge experts (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

As a settler South Asian Ismaili Muslim able-bodied cisgender woman, engaging in critical self-reflexivity and actively being aware of power relations between myself and my participants was necessary for all interviews, but particularly for the Indigenous women involved in this research project. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 1) reminds non-Indigenous researchers, the term ‘research’ itself is “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.” The long history of distrust between academic researchers and Indigenous communities is exemplified by, and often arises from, academic outsiders providing little to no positive impact for the Indigenous communities and individuals that are being researched, essentially rendering these individuals and communities as research subjects rather than research participants (Carlson, 2017; Smith, 2012; Tuck, 2009). Furthermore, there remains a struggle in being held accountable and in balancing the needs of the communities being researched when a researcher is working within a
North American/European academic institution (Carlson, 2017; Kovach, 2017). I experienced this challenge even more as a doctoral student in an institution where graduate students rely on following disciplinary norms and canons for completing the requirements necessary to receive their degree.

To help minimize this struggle, I employed as much of an anti-colonial approach with this dissertation project as possible by: continuously engaging in my own understanding and unpacking of my complicity in settler colonialism, with guidance from my academic advisors; actively privileging the voices of Indigenous participants, scholars, activists, and writers where relevant; examining the ways in which the Canadian settler colonial state has enacted, and continues to enact, violence on Indigenous women’s lives; and to follow the data collection principles outlined by the First Nations Information Governance Center (see Chapter 3.3 for more detail on my anti-colonial approach).

More specifically, this research project is guided by OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession) principles that reflect a commitment to work with Indigenous peoples in Canada and to minimize harms that occur during the research process (First Nations Information Governance Center, n.d.). The four OCAP principles help to guide decisions to ensure that First Nations participants involved have access to, and physical control over, their interview data and any personal information collected in the research process (First Nations Information Governance Center, n.d.). For further detail on my involvement and how I navigated staying true to these principles, see Section 2.2.3.

2.2. Research Design
The research design guiding this dissertation is informed by intersectionality to examine how multiple and overlapping systems of power inform the perspective and experiences of racialized women involved in online activism around violence against women within Canada. However, incorporating intersectionality into research analysis is challenging as there is no single prescriptive way to do so (Bailey et al., 2019; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hill Collins, 2015; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008). My research design and sampling aimed for as much of a variety of racialized women involved in online activism around violence against women in Canada as possible, while my interview questions were designed to allow participants to discuss their social identities in ways that were most relevant to them with the aim of capturing the complexity of relationships among social identities (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; McCall, 2005; Windsong, 2018). My aim was to expose the systems of domination in terms of who remains in power and who remains invisible to examine the ways in which social, political, and economic institutions reinforce such structures, ultimately moving towards transforming or dismantling them (Cooper, 2015; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). With awareness that knowledges derived from the margins are not easily molded and articulated into conventional terms and logics, such as an academic dissertation, my role as a researcher is providing critical interpretation and translating the data to conform with disciplinary norms while acknowledging that some of the details may be lost in doing so (May, 2014). In the following, I detail my design and analytical process for increasing transparency of this critical interpretation and translation.

2.2.1. Recruitment process
The aim of this research inquiry is to provide exploratory empirical evidence that demonstrates a further need to look beyond the homogenous group of white cisgender women’s concerns of online activism around violence against women. Thus, as a starting point for this exploratory inquiry, I limited my scope to those who were: over the age of 18, identified as women of colour, involved in the creation of digital media around ending violence against women\(^\text{14}\), working on their activism anywhere in Canada, and able to conduct the interview in English. I used the phrase “woman of colour” in the recruitment for this study as a way for potential participants to quickly determine if they were an appropriate candidate based on the commonality of experiencing both racism and sexism (Bannerji, 2000). I welcomed those with social identities of marginalization that I did not emphasize in the research design. For the purposes of this study, it was important to cast a wide net while ensuring that white women and cisgender men would not participate.

I recruited participants through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling because my aim was to reach a relatively specific group (Patton, 2015; Suri, 2011). The use of purposive sampling allowed me to directly reach networks and individuals who were associated with challenging violence against women (Suri, 2011). Snowball sampling allowed me to build on this foundation by reaching prospective participants referred by other participants (Patton, 2015). More specifically, I relied on my established networks and their networks of those involved in anti-violence activism through a combination of social media outreach and personal e-mails. This sampling

\(^{14}\) Although violence also disproportionately impacts gender diverse and transgender individuals (Donato, 2020), this particular study used violence against women in the recruitment call to attract those working primarily, but not solely, with violence against women.
method was appropriate given that this study sought to gain deeper understanding of the perspectives of racialized women already committed to online activism around violence against women, rather than generalizing to a larger population of racialized women in Canada, as would be the case had I used other sampling methods (e.g., randomized sampling).

From October 2018\textsuperscript{15} to February 2019, I shared my recruitment poster (see Appendix 1) via Twitter, Facebook, and personal e-mails. I shared the recruitment poster with my social media networks, asking for my online networks to share with theirs and/or individuals they knew who might fit the recruitment profile. At the time, my Twitter account was publicly visible and my Facebook post was made public while my Facebook profile stayed private. Although I debated leaving my Facebook profile public in order to humanize the research project for prospective participants, I elected to keep my Facebook profile private to limit potential exposure to technology-facilitated violence (TFV) to myself and my personal connections on Facebook. However, I made the Facebook post public to allow Facebook contacts to share the poster with their networks, thus allowing those individuals and their networks to be able to see the post. By the end of December 2018, when the bulk of the interviews were completed, my Facebook post was shared 16 times and my Twitter posts retweeted 55 times.

Additionally, I sent e-mails to those who I believed might know potential people to approach about my research study, such as feminist activists in Canada with a large online presence and anti-violence organizations with an active online presence (e.g., sexual assault centers; feminist organizations; anti-racism and Indigenous women’s

\textsuperscript{15} This project was cleared by the Research Ethics Board at Carleton University on October 4, 2018.
organizations) that were found through extensive Google and social media searches. Many of these individuals did not respond to me even after I followed-up with an additional email. After a follow-up email, I decided not to continue contacting those who did not respond to me so as not to coerce anyone into participating or connecting me with others. In some cases, I received a failure to deliver message, indicating an individual’s out-of-date contact information. Eventually, six people responded that they would share information with their networks or let me know if they thought of anyone appropriate.

Ultimately, six of the nine women I interviewed had received a direct e-mail from me, two women contacted me to participate in the project after finding my recruitment poster via social media, and one was a referral from another participant, as a result of the snowball sampling strategy. I knew of four of the individuals I approached and ultimately interviewed for this project from my personal interest in their social media accounts prior to this study but, in these cases, I had little contact with them prior to their participation. Two participants were in closer networks to me as they were friends of friends or colleagues of others I knew outside of this project, with one further participant identified through the snowballing method.

One major limitation I faced in recruiting participants for this research project was increasing participation across Canada. I was in contact with a total of 15 potential participants who met the above research criteria over five months of recruitment. However, six did not end up committing to the research study for a variety of personal reasons. Two potential participants no longer wished to participate when they found out there was no compensation. Additionally, many potential participants did not respond
after the second e-mail reminder that I sent, typically as a result of a lack of interest, time, or perceived benefit to their participation.

Although I wished to compensate all participants for their time through an appreciation gift in contributing to this research project, I did not have access to funds to pay for the compensation of interviews, nor was I sure about the most appropriate gift. Even though I did not compensate the women I interviewed directly, I purchased coffee, tea, juice, and small snacks for those I met in person and offered to reimburse transportation to help participants avoid costs associated with their participation. Such details were outlined in the consent information sheet (see Appendix 2) and emphasized verbally before the interview began. Despite these attempts to provide some form of compensation to potential participants, this study is missing the stories and experiences of those who fit the criteria for participation but were unable to do so without appropriate compensation for their time and sharing their personal experiences. Ultimately, however, my analysis with a small sample is advantageous for such an exploratory project because of opportunities for greater interactivity between researcher and participants and room for an in-depth understanding of someone’s experiences and access to such rich information (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

In hindsight, I also found it challenging to identify non-white women participants. In two encounters, potential interviewees who came across my recruitment poster over Twitter contacted me wanting to participate. However, from my observations, I assumed these two women identified as white given that, from their social media profiles, their skin tones and names seemed to be associated with whiteness and there was no obvious clue on their profile as to identifying as racialized. I clarified in further engagement with
them that the study was specifically for women of colour, and one immediately retracted her willingness to participate, stating that she misread the poster and was indeed a white woman. In another case, the prospective participant clarified to me that she was indeed a woman of colour and she ultimately decided to participate in the interview. These two encounters demonstrate that the concept of “women of colour” is contentious and further helped me to engage critically with my own assumptions about race, resulting in my decision to refer to “racialized women” instead of “women of colour” throughout this dissertation so as not to assume one’s race based on their skin tone (see Chapter 3.1. for a definition of race). I do not claim that this term is the best for all cases, however, the term “racialized women” is suitable for the current context of this research project, my positionality, and the discussions I had with participants.

Moreover, from my interviews with Indigenous participants, I learned that my approach to limit my scope to be within the borders of Canada for this research project was challenging when Indigenous community borders do not always match up to the settler colonial borders. Therefore, the interview data collected from Indigenous participants did not solely involve their activism within settler colonial boundaries.

2.2.2. Interview process

I aimed to make the interview process flexible to promote as much participation from interviewees as possible (Carlson, 2017). Once prospective participants agreed to be involved in the study, I provided them with copies of the consent information (see Appendix 2) and the interview guide for the research project (see Appendix 3) so that prospective participants could look over all documentation in advance of our meeting. After prospective participants confirmed with me that they wanted to move forward with
being interviewed, we scheduled a meeting at a mutually beneficial time and location (online or offline).

In total, I conducted nine interviews for this research project. Three interviews were conducted in person, three interviews were conducted over an audio or video-enabled platform\textsuperscript{16}, and two interviews were conducted over the telephone. The length of these eight interviews ranged from 43 minutes to 2 hours and 35 minutes, with an average interview time of 1 hour and 21 minutes. Additionally, one interviewee provided the answers to the interview questions in written form\textsuperscript{17}.

When I met with prospective participants, I explained to them my motivations for taking on this research project. I verbally went over the consent documentation and asked if there were any questions or concerns about the interview process. I emphasized that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw their participation at any time up until January 31, 2019 (when analysis would begin and I would not be able to guarantee the removal of their information from any presentations or publications I made following then), and that any information provided would remain anonymous. Prospective participants were further assured that any identifiable private information they provided would be removed from the study during the audio-transcription phase of the interview. I asked all prospective participants, both verbally and in the consent form, if they were comfortable with my taking an audio-recording of the interview, emphasizing that it would only be used for the sake of transcription purposes and then deleted. No participant rejected my use of audio-recording the interviews for transcription purpose.

\textsuperscript{16} Google Meetings, Skype, and Signal were all used upon request by interviewees.

\textsuperscript{17} After agreeing to participate, the final participant elected to respond in writing due to scheduling and time constraints.
purposes. All participants signed the consent form in person or electronically, keeping a copy for their own personal records and my contact information.

Each interview began with a discussion of basic personal information. I asked all participants to provide demographic information that they were comfortable disclosing (see Appendix 3). During the interviews (described in more detail below), additional information about their demographic makeup, such as education level, was offered by some participants but was not sought from those participants who did not volunteer this information naturally over the course of the interview. This was optional personal information and, importantly, I wanted all participants to feel comfortable providing any information they perceived was relevant or that came up during the natural course of our interview. Limited demographic information was also mindfully collected to protect participants’ identities and well-being to avoid feelings of discomfort. For example, if a participant did not initially respond to demographic questions, I did not ask again so as not to coerce participants into providing information that they may not have felt comfortable sharing.

Following a semi-structured interview format, the interviews were guided with a set of key exploratory questions (see Appendix 3). This format allowed for flexibility and space to further probe into emerging themes and topics as they came up somewhat naturally (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, I designed interview questions to be as broad and open-ended as possible so as not to constrain participants’ responses to a particular topic, although this often unexpectedly led to discussions of some of the specific topics I had in mind when designing this study. As an example, instead of asking specifically about instances of violence they experienced, I asked participants more broadly about the
challenges they faced with their online activism, which resulted in participants revealing various and multiple experiences of TFV they faced as a consequence of their online activism (see Chapter 6). My interview questions also remained flexible as I followed the lead of the participants through natural conversation and asked before the end of our interview if there was anything else they wanted to talk about related to their anti-violence online activism or if there were other topics that they wanted to discuss. I also took field notes during and immediately following each interview to capture invisible aspects from the audio-recording, such as facial expressions, body language, varied vocal inflections, or any interruptions during the interview.

Within 48 hours following each interview, I used ExpressScribe, a professional audio player software, to aid in my transcription of all interviews. Field notes were transcribed into the interviews to aid in my interpretations of, and generation of meaning from, the overall interviews, especially in cases when data analysis took place long after the original collection of data. Words and phrases that were inaudible were marked with [unclear] in the transcript copy and any of the invisible aspects were marked with angle brackets (e.g. <smiling>) in the transcript. Wherever personal or identifying information was revealed, this information was replaced with a generic term (e.g. [company organization]). Although such information may have aided in contextual understanding in some cases, I chose not to include any potentially personally identifying information in any transcripts so as to ensure participant anonymity.

Following OCAP principles, interview transcripts belong to the participants, and I shared these with each of them at the earliest opportunity. Each participant was invited to make any changes to their transcript. This was also an additional opportunity for
participants to change their minds about their participation in the research project. Only one participant sent their transcript back to me with changes to delete some of her comments. I immediately deleted the content that she highlighted, using the updated version of the transcript as part of my coding and analysis. To date, no participant withdrew from the study. Four weeks after sending the transcripts to the participants, all audio-recordings were deleted while anonymized written transcripts were kept and used for data analysis to complete this project and for future publications and conference presentations.

All completed work (papers and presentations) will be shared with participants for their records and they are invited to engage in further conversation with me about the project or any research products that arise as a result of their participation. Although each of their individual contributions are rich for research insights, I have informed all participants that I was limited in my scope of research questions for this particular project and, as a result, not all of their comments will be reflected in this dissertation. This will be reiterated to participants upon sharing this dissertation and any future research products that arise from this project.

2.2.3. Ethical considerations and challenges

Two major ethical considerations for this research project are noteworthy: staying true to OCAP principles, as described previously, and anonymizing the participant data. First, for this project, I stayed true to the OCAP principles as much as possible for all participants, but I was limited in a few key ways. I provided all participants with their written transcripts with the opportunity to make any changes and to withdraw their participation. I will be sending copies of all final publications that stem from this project.
However, I chose to keep draft material (with anonymized data), shared between myself and my supervisor, from participants so as not to introduce unnecessary burdens to the task of ongoing participation in the project beyond the interviews, especially without compensation. I also wanted to protect the identities of other participants and providing draft materials would inadvertently increase the risk of losing anonymity, given both the snowball sampling used and such a relatively small community in Canada of those involved in activism focused on ending violence against women. I explained to participants, both verbally and through the consent form, that audio recordings were only meant to help with transcription and would be deleted after the transcript was complete and, therefore, no other copy of their personal data or information was collected apart from the signed and dated consent forms (stored separately from deidentified transcripts). As a result, OCAP principles were followed as much as possible given the constraints of this project, the need for participant anonymity, and my attempts not to overburden and potentially exploit participants, but could not be followed completely.

Second, a major ethical consideration pertinent to this research project, and related to issues experienced when following OCAP principles, was ensuring the anonymity of participants. For example, when I first spoke with one particular participant, we had an in-depth discussion about the ethical procedures in place for this research project. After outlining the interview protocol and asking if she had any questions or concerns, this participant asked me to assure her that her stories and details would be kept anonymous. I explained to her that, according to my research ethics clearance, keeping participants’ personal information anonymous was necessary for the completion of the project. However, maintaining confidentiality is not guaranteed
because the potential pool of participants makes up a small community that may already know each other, as exemplified in the use of snowball sampling. Anonymizing the data was one way in which confidentiality is maintained but, in research settings, maintaining confidentiality “means (1) not discussing information provided by an individual with others, and (2) presenting findings in ways that ensure individuals cannot be identified (chiefly through anonymization)” (Wiles et al., 2008, p. 417). This participant explained that she had experienced increasingly hostile encounters with certain groups of people and was more worried that her stories would leak out to them specifically. I assured her that, because her information would remain anonymous and I would not discuss her stories and experiences linked with her name with anyone outside of the confines of this research project, and therefore linking her identity to her experiences was not likely to occur. We began the interview only after she told me that she felt at ease. As with all participants, she was invited to make any changes and deletions from her transcript.

I further addressed concerns about anonymity and confidentiality for all participants by taking the following precautions with personal information that was collected for this research project. I emphasized before the interview began that no identifying-information would be connected to the participant in any published documents. Moreover, throughout this dissertation, I do not name any specific campaigns as these are easily searchable online and could breach the privacy of the participants. I was able to obtain these interviews with the ethical promise of keeping participant information anonymous. This means that I am purposely not revealing the names of the campaigns or digital tools they created or have been involved in, as it would be simple enough to search for information linking to my participants. For the participants, more
specifically, I use pseudonyms to protect their identities. These decisions do not impact the findings of this research because, based on my research questions, I am interested in participants’ relationships and experiences with online activism generally instead of focusing on the individual campaigns or tools.

The process of choosing pseudonyms for participants was surprisingly difficult and involved much reflection and dialogue with many colleagues and my advisors. Previous research involving confidential interviews typically rely either on the participants choosing their own pseudonyms or the interviewer choosing them on behalf of the participants. I found it challenging to make this decision without more research and reflection. For instance, I did not want to have the participants choose their own pseudonym because there is a risk that a name they choose is somehow associated\textsuperscript{18} with them and, therefore, that some close acquaintances may be able to identify them (Allen & Wiles, 2016). This potential identification reduces anonymity and puts participant confidentiality at an increased risk. Another reason I did not ask participants to come up with their own pseudonym is that it would place extra work on them (Allen & Wiles, 2016). As a result, I chose to select pseudonyms for participants as the women I spoke with were already very busy and offered their time for the interview with no compensation.

Coming up with pseudonyms myself was also challenging and placed additional power in my hands over those I interviewed (Lahman et al., 2015). I aimed to minimize this by using names that do not readily or easily reflect any associated meaning and was

\textsuperscript{18} Examples include choosing a childhood nickname or an online username used across multiple platforms that may be recognizable to others (Allen & Wiles, 2016).
mindful of not relying on names that carry strong cultural associations already (e.g., Lisa, which could be associated with Lisa Simpson, a popular feminist cartoon character). Moreover, I wanted to make sure that the pseudonyms used reflect that these women are racialized but did not mark them with identifiers based on obvious demographics, which can also inadvertently reveal their identity. I intended to choose all participants’ pseudonyms with an effort to represent their politicized identity markers as collectively “non-white” and uniquely different from each other. Ultimately, I chose names that are outer-worldly, using an online fantasy name generator\textsuperscript{19} often used to create fictional fantastical worlds. Such names are unfamiliar in the way that racially diverse names are less familiar in Canada than widely-used Eurocentric names, with this also helping to avoid identifying the specific and identifiable demographic makeups of the participants.

2.3. The Participants

I interviewed nine racialized women, each of whom identified as Black, Indigenous, South Asian, Muslim, Arab, mixed-race, half Chinese and half Caucasian, where some overlapped in these categories. Five of the participants further identified as heterosexual, three identified as queer, and one participant did not disclose their sexual orientation. Participants’ ages ranged from 25-50 years old at the time of the interviews. Five of the participants mentioned holding a graduate degree during the interview, although this question was not specifically asked to all participants as it was not part of the original interview guide. As a result, complete demographic information on all

\textsuperscript{19} Found at https://www.fantasynamegenerators.com/.
participants’ educational status is unknown. Finally, one participant further disclosed having some visual and physical disabilities.

The involvement of participants with broader anti-violence non-profit organizations varied. However, nearly all participants indicated having some involvement with non-profit organizations working to prevent and end violence against women within Canada, most likely due to taking on volunteer or paid roles in the non-profit sector at some point in their lives. Eight of the participants I spoke with had some involvement within the non-profit sector involved in preventing and ending violence against women in Canada, whether as part of broader anti-violence work, as part of their professional careers, or through volunteer work. One participant did not speak about any formal involvement with anti-violence non-profit organizations specifically, but discussed remaining closely connected with families of women who have experienced violence and was knowledgeable in discussing their experiences of interacting with anti-violence organizations. To help protect their identities, I will remain otherwise purposely vague about the non-profit organizations mentioned and the specific online projects discussed by participants.

2.4. Data Analysis

To help make sense of all the data I collected, I relied on a social constructivist grounded theory approach to analysis, which is post-positivist, systematic, and flexible (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, it is post-positivist because, unlike its original manifestation by Glaser and Strauss (1967), a social constructivist grounded theory approach relies on an interpretative rather than a positivist research paradigm (Charmaz, 2006). Specifically, a positivist approach to research “seeks causes, favors
deterministic explanations, and emphasizes generality and universality” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 126). Significantly, this approach views data collected as representative of an underlying truth (Charmaz, 2006). In contrast, a social constructivist grounded theory approach “places priority on the phenomenon of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences with participants and other sources of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). This approach enables a close and in-depth analysis of the data for an understanding and exploration of how and why racialized women participate in online activism around violence against women in Canada.

This approach is also systematic as I followed inductive coding analysis, guided by Charmaz (2006), to ensure that the analysis was grounded from the data. This systematic approach to grounded theory occurred through the early phases of data analysis. For instance, using NVivo qualitative analysis software, I first went through an initial coding process of all the data as they happened. Initial codes were created to define each segment of the data, where segments of data were differentiated by an action or process that was taking place (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As an example of my coding process, within the first transcript, I identified 219 initial codes. Codes were compared and contrasted to one another and, when related, added together to form a new category. Some codes were often placed in more than one category (for example “feeling frustrated at white feminists for racism” was coded under both racism and white feminism). Other common codes became related and collapsed together while new categories became apparent as new interview data was included.

Next, I compared and contrasted the initial codes to the rest of the data as it was collected. Such a comparative method allowed me to compare codes and categories as
they became apparent from the data for in-depth exploration of the topic (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). My initial thoughts and reflections about the analysis were also included in written memos, which are “preliminary analytical notes about our codes and comparisons and any other ideas about our data that occur to us” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). Following this, I compared and contrasted codes multiple times with the addition of more interviews until each code was retained in at least one larger relational category. Then, guided by my specific research questions, I completed a secondary analysis of the codes and categories. Drawing from each of the elements that make up my theoretical approach (Chapter 3), this secondary analysis thoroughly identified: which elements of violence were included in participants’ online activism and why (Chapter 4); the digital media technologies and strategies used, as well as their benefits and challenges to participants (Chapter 5); and the who, what, and how of their online activism around violence against women (Chapters 4, 5, and 6).

This approach also allows for flexibility, which is particularly important when following feminist methodologies that center the subjective experiences of marginalized people. Such flexibility is apparent in this project in the following ways. First, although Glaser and Strauss (1967) insist on the researcher’s completion of a literature review after the data collection and analysis, I opted to review key literature before beginning interviews. Informed by Charmaz’s (2006) social constructivist approach to grounded theory, this was important both in directing the research questions to help fill the gap of racialized women in Canada in existing research, and in creating a framework for integrating further literature as data analysis occurs to help form my theoretical approach for analysis. This meant that participant interviews played a large role in dictating the
trajectory of the research project by directing me to diverse theoretical approaches and social phenomena that became important tools in helping me to make sense of the findings.

Secondly, I used participant interviews to help build the theoretical approach for this dissertation and to more fully incorporate an intersectional analysis in a way that makes sense to the participants. For instance, if a participant spoke about systems of oppressions that were impacting them in their involvement in anti-violence online activism that were not already addressed by my literature review, I then added these theoretical and conceptual frameworks to my discussion. This allowed participants to dictate areas of knowledge important for both them and this research project and enhanced the scope of my review and understanding of intersectionality. Being open to how these participants described their own experiences and perspectives “acknowledges their prerogative to authorize their own frameworks for producing knowledge specifically relevant to their lives” (Alexander-Floyd, 2012, p.19).

Thirdly, using semi-structured interviews, I made room for participants to speak about their involvement in anti-violence online activism beyond my line of questioning. For instance, from these interviews, participants recalled many events from mainstream media coverage around violence that women face that were important to them for their involvement in activism (see Chapter 4). I used their shared memories of such events, instead of a systematic review of mainstream media news coverage, to shape the analysis and outline of discussion of the findings, as these seemed to be the most important triggers for their activism. Such an approach to elicit participants’ reflections also differs from a systematic review of such media coverage because sharing memories allows for
marginal accounts to be uncovered and these “narratives elicited are not solely concerned with past accounts, but with present perspectives on experience and the role of the past in orienting participants to particular futures” (Keightley, 2010, p. 62). This means participants use their memories and reflections to communicate and orient their present and future perspectives and experiences about a given situation. To prepare for potential falsifying of memories, Keightley (2010) recommends triangulating evidence around events being told, which I do throughout this dissertation to provide context to events that are mentioned and discussed. As another example of participants’ direction of the research project through their responses to the open-ended, semi-structured interview questions, it became clear that aspects of violence as a result of their online activism required focused attention to the ways in which it differently impacted almost all of the participants I spoke with, leading me to dedicate an entire chapter to it (Chapter 6).

Fourth, throughout this process, I tried to be careful not to erase the realities that were shared by one or few individual participants while paying attention to over-arching patterns that were represented among several participants. This flexibility in attending to both individual and shared experiences is particularly important given both the relatively unexplored research question guiding this dissertation and the small sample size used to help explore this question. This is exemplified by the sole participant who indicated that ableism limited their encounters and experiences. Although instances of ableism were reported by only one participant, I dedicate significant space for discussion on this topic to ensure that that this study reflects the heterogeneity of racialized women’s experiences in online activism working to end violence against women.
Fifth, as I am purposely not revealing aspects of participants’ identities that may make them easily identifiable, my analysis remains flexible in that I have chosen to present the interview data via thin descriptions instead of thick descriptions. Thick descriptions were introduced into qualitative research by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) to provide credibility to the researcher’s interpretation of their interviews with participants by providing a rich account of the context (both of the situation and of participant and researcher behaviours). Thin descriptions, however, refer to data collected as a surface-level description of the interview (Geertz, 1973). Although thick descriptions may be more germane to this project given that my analytic approach is informed by ethnographic research and participant observation research (Ponterotto, 2015), a thick description requires details of participants’ lived experiences (Geerts, 1973; Ponterotto, 2015). However, my presentation of the analysis is mindful of the anonymity that guide the ethical approach to this project and, more importantly, were conditions for all participants’ involvement in this study.

Instead, I am guided by Ruha Benjamin’s (2019, p. 119) approach to a thin description, “a methodological counterpoint to the hubris that animates so much of tech development.” In her work, Benjamin (2019) argues for such an approach to read racialized bodies as surfaces. My analytic approach is at least partially informed by her move to conceal certain information about racialized bodies in the way that information is black-boxed to us from digital technology companies. Benjamin (2019, p.117) argues that such an approach:

allows greater elasticity, engaging fields of thought and action too often disconnected. This analytic flexibility, in my view, is an antidote to digital
disconnection, tracing links between individual and institutional, mundane and
spectacular, desirable and deadly in a way that troubles easy distinctions.

Similarly, Heather Love (2013, p. 404) evoked the use of thin description to “consider
forms of analysis that describe patterns of behavior and visible activity but that do not
traffic in speculation about interiority, meaning, or depth.”

This notion of thin description is particularly fitting for my research study as I aim
to conceal the participants’ identities and any identifiers of online spaces or campaigns
with which they may have interacted. Thus, I leave out much of the thick descriptions, or
those aspects that help to make the identity clearer to the reader. However, such an
approach means that this research is limited in that it cannot account for how participant’s
knowledge is influenced by where they live, work, and/or the lands they came from prior
to Canada. This use of thin description approach to the research is not intended to erase
or neglect their bodies and lands involved in this research project, but rather as a way for
me to set a limit on the research being conducted and what is knowable to readers as not
all the details shared with me from participants necessarily need to be shared as part of
settler colonial social science research (Simpson, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2014).

This thin description extends to my close reading of material20 on the digital
media technologies mentioned in this study, including mainstream media coverage, blog
posts, social media presence, and terms of use and privacy policy documents (Bivens &
Hoque, 2018; Murray & Ankerson, 2016). In addition to examining these sources, I relied
on historical news coverage, non-profit and activist-created reports, and secondary

20 I gathered and saved this evidence in a digital archive of screenshots and PDF files. This material is
available upon request.
academic research to further interrogate and interpret the interview data and research findings.

Finally, in my analyses, I am not interested in reproducing depictions of violence or reproducing the unnecessary probing of depictions of violence beyond detailing their occurrences, an approach that Tuck (2009, p. 413) refers to as “damage-centered research.” Tuck (2009) argues that too much damage-centered research on Indigenous communities is harmful to these communities. Damage-centered research, she observed, has been a trend in research on and with Indigenous communities, in which research acts as another layer of surveillance with very little outcomes for the communities. This occurs as research only invites those oppressed to speak about their oppressions (Tuck, 2009). Tuck (2009, p. 412) argues that the impacts include research characterizations that “frame our communities as sites of disinvestment and dispossession; our communities become spaces in which under-resourced health and economic infrastructures are endemic.” Thus, in my analyses, I have edited out specific details of graphic violence while emphasizing the interlocking structures of oppression imbalances. Although I have attempted not to reinforce hierarchies based on different socially-constructed factors such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class, the experiences from the interviews are inevitably immersed in these power dynamics and, therefore, some factors may be spoken of in a hierarchy to reflect the descriptions and experiences provided by participants.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter set out the methodological approach guiding my research process and also laid out the specifics of the research design. I first provided information about my position as a researcher within this interdisciplinary field of study that informed my
research questions, data collection, and final analysis presented in this dissertation. I then
detailed the process of data collection from interviews with nine participants and the
ethical limitations and challenges I encountered. I provided information about the nine
participants whose stories center the following chapters, emphasizing why and how I am
keeping their identities anonymous. Finally, I presented a thorough outline of my analytic
approach, with both theoretical and practical reasons provided to demonstrate why this
particular approach is most suitable for answering the research question guiding this
study. With this as a foundation, I will outline the theoretical approach for this research
project in the following chapter.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach

Intersectionality, as a theoretical approach, informs how I think through, explore, and examine the experiences of online activism around violence against women from participants in this study who live at the intersections of multiple and overlapping systems of oppressions within Canada. In this chapter, I first introduce intersectionality, clarifying power relations of race, gender and sexuality as socially constructed categories that are central to this dissertation, and engage with its criticisms of intersectionality as an analytical tool. Then, primarily drawing from critical race, feminist, and queer theories, I outline how intersectionality informs my approach to examining digital media technologies and violence against women.

Secondly, sparked by the interviews for this study, I introduce further elements of my intersectional theoretical approach. Although gender, sexuality, and race are universal threads throughout this research study, the research insights and analysis discussed are based on a multiplicity of intersecting factors informed by the interviews I conducted with participants. Therefore, this theoretical approach further draws from Muslim, Indigenous, disability, and anti-carceral feminist theories to help account for the overlapping, rather than competing, systems of oppressions structuring the experiences of the women who I interviewed. However, intersectionality is not just about adding each group’s concerns together, but rather about the intersectional relations between them and the larger structural roles that play a role in differentiating the experiences of those situated at different multiply marginalized positions (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Hill Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991). These complementary, but contextually and historically specific theories, are not meant to be mutually exclusive, nor is one privileged over the other.
However, for the purposes of clarifying my theoretical approach, I will introduce and discuss each of the theories separately.

3.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality, coined\(^{21}\) by Crenshaw (1989), is a way of understanding and discussing how the conditions of people’s social and political contexts are shaped by not one, but rather multiple, simultaneous, overlapping, and interlocking systems of oppressions (Arvin et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Hill Collins, 1998; 2017; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; hooks, 2000). Such an approach challenges dominant and conventional logics around research by drawing from a multiplicity of political and social frameworks as well as lived experiences of marginalized groups and individuals, thereby offering rich and often hidden insights (May, 2014). More specifically, intersectionality challenges the essentialist analysis of white feminism and some anti-racist research that emphasizes a single-axis of analysis, prioritizing either gender or race. Moreover, power relations of race, gender, and sexuality are recognized as interlocking social constructions that are shaped by historical, social, and political contexts (Cooper, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016).

For example, I understand race to be “an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 15). In other words, race is both historical and persistent while not being based on fixed meanings. Race is a social construct largely shaped by Eurocentric ideologies,

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\(^{21}\) Although the term “intersectionality” was institutionally coined by Crenshaw in 1989, the idea of a critical multiple axis framework underlying oppression has been used by not only Black activists and scholars (see: Combahee River Collective, 1977; Davis, 1983; Truth, 1840), but also, as Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) note, Chicana, Latina, Indigenous, post-colonial, and Asian American feminists for years prior who have, in addition to Crenshaw’s work, been largely ignored by white feminists.
values, and classification systems of identification (Gandy, 1998). The term ‘racialized’ (or ‘racialization’) emphasizes the historically specific ideological processes where race is constructed along a hierarchy of domination resulting from the struggles of various political projects (Grosfoguel et al., 2015; Omi & Winant, 1994). In other words, racialization is the process of marking bodies where “some bodies are racialized as superior, and others as inferior” (Grosfoguel et al., 2015, p. 637). Whiteness often functions as an unnamed normative category of race to which all other races are compared (Frankenberg, 1993). Whiteness, more than just a phenotypical expression, is also a socially constructed race based on ideology emerging in modernity that justified pre-existing Eurocentric hierarchies and priorities (Frankenberg, 1993). Although Omi and Winant (1994) argue that the process of racialization is in the assigning of racial constructs to those who are not easily coded as white, racially coded meanings are not only based on skin shade but also cultural factors, such as symbols or markers of religious belief (including way of dress). The use of cultural factors in racialization is exemplified by cases of the racialization of Muslim North Americans (Garner & Selod, 2015), who are often treated as one homogenous group in research and media, and Indigenous peoples (Lawrence, 2003), who are not only distinct from each other but also from other racialized peoples (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Importantly, although the signifiers of race are most often found on the body, there is nothing in the body that gives these signifiers meaning (Hall, 1996).

I also understand gender to be a socially constructed system and its performance to be an expression that is fluid and diverse. This differs from the convention of the gender binary consisting of two normative genders (men and women) that suppresses the
multiplicity of gender expressions, imposing a Eurocentric colonial construction of hierarchical logic that serves to colonize many Indigenous and African communities (Arvin et al., 2013; Lugones, 2010). Butler’s (1999) notion of a “heterosexual matrix” organized how bodies are understood through a naturalized and stable binary gender system. In Butler’s (2009) analysis, a gender order appears as a hierarchy where men who conform to hegemonic displays of masculinity generally benefit from inequalities over men who do not, as well as women and gender non-conforming individuals who do not, which further encourages the suppression of gender diversity and fluidity. This patriarchal hierarchy of social structure, also known as cisgender patriarchy, is based on a “presumed biological divide between males and females” (Connell, 2009, p. 9). Yet, social categories of sex and sexuality are not biologically determined, but rather socially constructed categories that dictate ways of becoming gendered as men or women through the performance or expression of hegemonic masculinity or femininity and cisgender normativity (Connell, 2009).

Keeping in mind that race, gender, sex, and sexual orientations are social constructions that are interlocked, mutually constructing identity categories, Crenshaw’s (1989, p. 140) work was pivotal in demonstrating how, for instance, Black women’s legal concerns about discrimination are erased when discrimination is often based on a single-axis of analysis that prioritizes race or gender, thereby “limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group.” In contrast, an explicitly intersectional framework shifts away from a single-axis (often gender-only or race-only) analysis to a multi-axis analysis and helps to examine and explain how the conditions of people’s social and political contexts are shaped by multiple, overlapping, and
interlocking systems of oppressions (Arvin et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Hill Collins, 1998; 2017; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; hooks, 2000). In the case of Black women’s legal fight against discrimination in the US, an intersectional analysis would center Black women’s experiences and address their needs and challenges through a multi-axis analysis involving feminism and anti-racism (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality therefore informs new analytical possibilities for the study of racialized women engaging with digital media technologies to end violence.

However, intersectionality’s uptake across disciplines inside and outside of the academy has led to a “widespread misrepresentation, tokenization, displacement, and disarticulation” of its purposes (Bilge, 2013, p. 410). Several scholars working with intersectionality have recently argued that it has been “rhetorically and symbolically collapsed into diversity, and thus taken up as an inclusion project” (Nash, 2018, p. 13) and deployed as a stand-in to qualify or “to diagnose racial difference” (Puar, 2013, p. 375) and has therefore been emptied of its meaning to those who are most likely to be viewed under the lens of intersectionality (Nash, 2008). This has led to arguments that intersectionality is being neutralized or depoliticized in much contemporary feminist academic scholarship (Bilge, 2013) and has been used as a buzzword, devoid of meaning and ineffective as a tool for structural transformation (Hill Collins, 2015). Consequently, despite being a common term, such “definitional dilemmas” of intersectionality result in no consensus about what critical intersectional theorizing and analysis requires (Hill Collins, 2015, p.1).

As a response to this dilemma, Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) offer six core features of intersectionality that they contend must be present in critical inquiry. These
are: 1) social inequality must be understood as interactions between socially constructed categories; 2) power is mutually constructed by many diverse power relationships, such as racism and sexism; 3) relationality and connections between race and gender should be prioritized over differences between categories of social identities; 4) there must be an awareness of the social and historical context; 5) there must be a recognition of complexity of analysis; and 6) critical analysis must contain social justice motivations that challenge the status quo as an outcome. Therefore, the key factors defining critical, intersectional analysis involve scholars engaging with theory, their citational history, and how they advance a social justice agenda (Bilge, 2013; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016).

3.1.1. Intersectionality and digital media technologies

In this section, inspired by the emerging work of intersectional scholarship being integrated with digital media technologies (Brock, 2012; Costanza-Chock, 2018; Noble, 2016; 2018; Tynes & Noble, 2016), I outline an intersectional approach to digital media technologies. As Brock (2011, p. 1088) asserted, “the Western Internet, as a social structure, represents and maintains [w]hite, masculine, bourgeois, heterosexual and Christian culture through its content.” Thus, inquiry of digital media technologies “requires the incorporation of critical theory – critical race, feminism, queer theory, and so on – to incorporate the epistemological standpoint of underserved users” (Brock 2012, p. 1012). Critical theory, broadly, is necessary for this project because it is:

interested in why there is a difference between actuality and potentiality, existence and essence, and aims at finding ways of bridging this difference. It aims at the establishment of a cooperative, participatory society and asks “basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good” (Murdock and Golding, 2005, p. 61, as cited by Fuchs, 2009).
My theoretical standpoint in this dissertation is informed by such sociotechnical approaches that draw from multiple critical theories, namely: science and technology studies; political economy; feminisms; and queer and critical race theories. Incorporating this range of theoretical approaches while working within an intersectional framework allows me to provide an examination of power relations and inequities embedded in technologies that is both thorough and reflective of the real world experiences of those involved in online activism to end violence against women.

My intent for this dissertation is to examine the power relationships between society and digital media technologies and their impacts on marginalized people. This is because technologies are not neutral artifacts, but rather inherently political (Winner, 1980). Therefore, through an intricate arrangement of power relationships, technologies are designed – intentionally or unintentionally – to exclude certain users, thereby reproducing established patterns of power relationships (Winner, 1980). As one example, Winner (1980) demonstrated that the construction of the low level bridges on Long Island, New York were deliberately designed to exclude buses, and therefore those riding buses, who were disproportionately poor and racialized individuals, from certain geographical areas. The emphasis here is not that the technology (bridges) caused the inequality, but that there are social and political arrangements surrounding the development and design of the technology (Winner, 1980).

Thus, in an effort not to uphold simplistic explanations based on technological determinism that neglect the complex and inter-related historical, political, and economic power dynamics, I approach this research with the view that technologies and society are “mutually constitutive” (Mackenzie & Wajcman, 1999, p. 41). This means that “the
technological, instead of being a sphere separate from society, is part of what makes society possible, in other words is constitutive of society” (Mackenzie & Wajcman, 1999, p. 42). Significantly, technologies are one major way in which our social worlds build order and influence some activities over others. From this mutualistic perspective, decisions made around building order in our social worlds need to be examined and critiqued as part of our interrogation of a given technology (Fuchs, 2009; Rodrigues et al., 2014).

However, we are limited in our understanding of the extent to which we know how digital media technologies are shaping experiences, as they exist under what Pasquale (2015) has called the black box of information. The metaphor of the black box is useful in its double meaning, as Pasquale (2015) argues, because it can refer both to recording devices and a mysterious container of knowledge. In the context of an increasingly corporatized Internet, this black box metaphor characterizes the imbalance of information that Internet companies collect from their users to generate profit (e.g., personal information and user-generated content) versus the scarcity of information the public has on how that information is collected and used, largely because of concerns from public disclosure of what is seen as proprietary business information (Fuchs, 2009; 2017; Gillespie, 2010; 2018; Pasquale, 2015; van Dijck, 2013).

Although such information is purposely obscured by Internet companies, we do know that the contemporary online environment is increasingly corporatized and privatized. In particular, social media platforms, which are a main focus of online activism involving digital media technologies, are restructuring and changing the form of our contemporary capitalist society (Castells, 2007; Fuchs, 2009; 2017). Social media
Platforms are businesses and their techno-commercial practices shaping the discourses available to social media users should be examined (Fuchs, 2017; Gillespie, 2018; Poell & van Dijck, 2015). For instance, in order to thrive, these businesses must maintain a careful approach as they cater to the agendas of both investors and their userbase, while simultaneously grappling with their role as repositories of public discourse (Fuchs, 2017; van Dijck, 2013). It is this delicate balance of stakeholder agendas that drives decisions about use, organization, and content moderation (Fuchs, 2017; Gillespie, 2010; van Dijck, 2013). However, a direct outcome of the primary identity of social media platforms as publicly traded, as opposed to being a public service, underscores deep connections to capitalism and globalization (Fuchs, 2009; Gillespie, 2010). For widely-used corporate social media platforms, then, a series of critical tensions between their public and private roles are emerging. As these platforms adopt advertising-based business models, a “social media logic” has taken shape, referring to the logic guiding and guided by social media design and policies (van Dijck, 2013, p. 52).

Social relationships, as they are engineered and exist on social media platforms, are commodified (Fuchs, 2009; van Dijck, 2013). van Dijck (2013, p. 12) argues that Facebook and Twitter were designed to embed users in a “culture of connectivity,” enhancing and facilitating one’s social networks. Despite the potential benefits of such connectivity, she warns that “sociality coded by technology renders people’s activities formal, manageable, and manipulatable, enabling platforms to engineer the sociality in people’s everyday routines” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 12). For instance, Facebook and Twitter do this by directing and enabling social connections between users through the use of proprietary algorithms (van Dijck, 2013), where algorithms are defined as “coded
instructions that a computer needs to follow, to perform a given task” (Bucher, 2018, p. 2).

As an example, Facebook’s transformation over the years urged users to provide individual data points of personal information towards a more narrative form of content disclosure (van Dijck, 2013). However, gaining popularity, or reaching wider dominant publics, has been engineered so that users who have the skills and knowledge to work with the algorithms and the culture of Facebook are more likely to find popularity with their content (Bucher, 2012; van Dijck, 2013). This prompt to continuous personal data sharing was key to Facebook’s profit making as it relied on selling this data to advertisers (van Dijck, 2013). Correspondingly, Twitter was created as a service with the aim of updating users on friends’ everyday activities, emphasizing interpersonal connections guided by a design prompt that asked “what’s your status?” (Burgess & Baym, 2020; van Dijck, 2013). Based on their business models, this collection of users’ everyday statuses leads to an increasing role for what Srnicek (2017, p. 255) termed “platform capitalism,” or the role that platforms play in the exploitation of collecting more personal data for the goal of more profit.

22 Building on Nancy Fraser’s (1990) critique of Habermas’s idea of the public, I adopt Catherine Squires’ (2002) model based on multiple Black publics and intersectionality. Fraser’s (1990) idea of publics exposes limitations of Habermas’s model, most notably there being a single public sphere, one dominated by white bourgeois males. Instead, Fraser’s (199) model insists on there being multiple, fragmented publics and introduces the concept of “subaltern counterpublics” where members of marginalized groups circulate counternarratives. Based on her research examining Black publics, Squires’ (2002) model presents alternative language to subaltern counterpublics by proposing three distinct forms of counterpublics as responses from marginalized groups to wider dominant publics: counterpublics, enclaves, and satellite spheres. Whereas counterpublics often engage in debate with wider dominant publics, enclaves hide their counter hegemonic ideas from those publics, often for fear for their own safety. Satellite spheres are those that deliberately want to separate from other publics. Such a model is useful for this research because it better accounts for intersectionality, acknowledging counterpublics formed by those who may differ across the intersections of their racial identities (Squires, 2002). In this dissertation, I discuss wider dominant publics, counterpublics, and enclaves through this lens as I did not observe evidence for satellite spheres as discussed by these participants.
Furthermore, even though Facebook primarily promotes interpersonal communication in exchange for user-generated content that can be sold to advertisers (Haunss, 2016; Leistert, 2015; van Dijck, 2013), activists, on the other hand, generally want to avoid public distribution of personal data for fear of surveillance and retaliation (Redden, 2015; Youmans & York, 2012). For instance, local and national law enforcement have spied on Black and Indigenous activists, such as those from the Black Lives Matter and Idle No More movements, as well as individual Indigenous activists, such as Cindy Blackstock, using their private personal information on Facebook and Twitter (Blackstock, 2014; Redden, 2015; Patterson, 2017). Additionally, the manner in which Facebook and Twitter algorithms determine what content comes to an individual’s News and Twitter Trends feed may be contributing to the filter bubble effect, where news and social media feeds reflect what individuals have already liked or expressed interest in (Leistert, 2015; Pariser, 2011). For activists who are trying to expand their reach outside of their own networks, this becomes a potential barrier to collective mobilization.

This theorizing is relevant to examining the ways in which social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, shape their use by those interviewed in this project (see Chapters 5 and 6). However, such an approach alone does not account for how users shape digital media technologies and, further, lacks the critical analysis of power asymmetries interwoven and reinforced in technologies that oppress and exclude certain groups and individuals over others. Thus, I incorporate an intersectional analytical lens of digital media technologies that emphasizes the intersecting racialized and gendered components of the technologies in question, with specific attention paid to the corporate structures and goals guiding the use and design of these technologies.
Although science and technology studies and political economy approaches offer rich insight into the rationales for how technologies are structured, Noble (2016) urges researchers to continue exploring how technologies are embedded within a range of inequities and power relations, and to do so with the integration of intersectional scholarship featuring feminist, queer, and race theories. Intersectionality helps us to examine and to interrogate the complexity and multi-dimensionality of oppressions that are embedded within technologies (Brock, 2011; Costanza-Chock, 2018; Gray, 2012; Noble, 2016; Noble & Tynes, 2016). An intersectional analytical framework integrated with digital media technologies emphasizes the materiality of the technologies, the relationships between people and the technologies with which they are interacting, the role of the cultural context, the historical and political influences surrounding the development and use of technologies, and the ways in which technologies are intersectionally racialized and gendered (Noble, 2016; Tynes & Noble, 2018).

The intersection of individuals’ identities and the technologies they use is demonstrated by arguments that race and technology are co-constitutive of one another. In other words, the cause and consequence of race and technology is not uni-directional – rather, the influence is observed in both directions (Chun, 2012; Dyer, 2017; de la Pena, 2010; Mcllwain, 2019). In the context of Internet-enabled technologies, racial inequities have been embedded into contemporary technologies, thus further reinforcing and reproducing racism (Benjamin, 2019; Daniels, 2009). For example, social media platforms have become amplifiers of racist discourse via their design features and their modes of governance, or material politics, that reproduce inequalities (Lawson, 2018; Matamoros-Fernandez, 2017; Nakamura, 2013). Some of these design features include
the ease in creating anonymous user accounts and the share-ability of social media platforms, which can encourage users to continue reproducing and distributing racist content (Daniels, 2009; Nakamura, 2013). Racist content also circulates heavily across social media when it is cloaked as humorous memes or jokes because social media platforms have unclear policy rules and enforcement strategies that allow for such content to continue circulating (Matamoros-Fernandez, 2017). Thus, much evidence points towards social media platforms, through their design and policies, reinforcing racism on their platforms.

Similar to the intersection of race and technologies, insights from feminist and queer technosciences offer a framework that posits that culture and technology are mutually constitutive, where gender and technology co-produce one another. As a result, technologies are inherently gendered (Haraway, 1988; Landstrom, 2007; Mackenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Wacjman, 1991; 2010). Furthermore, understanding gender as a fluid construct is necessary in shifting away from feminist research on gender and technology that has been negatively influenced by cisgender normativity (Landstrom, 2007). Cisgender normativity and cisgender patriarchy, alongside capitalism, have been ingrained within the technology industry in North America to the exclusion of women (Wacjman, 1991; 2010) and gender diverse individuals (Bivens, 2017; Bivens & Haimson, 2017; Costanza-Chock, 2018). For example, Bivens (2017) demonstrates how gender identity became embedded in, and materialized by, Facebook through years of design decisions around the available categories of gender and options for pronouns available to both users and advertisers. Further, Costanza-Chock (2018) demonstrates how data-centered sociotechnical systems reproduce a binary gender system, resulting in TFV targeting
those using the technologies who do not conform to the gender binary. In other words, gendered stereotypes and sexism are enforced by the design of technologies and reinforced in their use, resulting in the minimization, exclusion, and absence of specific users and groups of users (Wacjman, 2010).

3.1.2. Intersectionality and violence

By definition, this intersectional project is informed by critical race and Indigenous feminist intersectional writers who have broadened my understanding of the violence that racialized women face. Violence against women is typically theorized solely under either a gender analysis or a race analysis, and this approach has limited the examination of violence against women to instances of intimate partner violence (IPV) in cisgendered relationships, sexual violence, or racial violence (Brucker & Law, 2018; Garcia-Del Moral, 2018; Hill Collins, 1998; 2017; hooks, 2000; INCITE, 2016; Jiwani, 2006). Intersectional writers, on the other hand, broaden this understanding of violence by demonstrating that neither the framing of racist violence nor sexist violence alone is adequate in understanding the violence experienced by racialized women (Arvin et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Garcia-Del Moral, 2018; Hill Collins, 1998; 2017; hooks, 2000, INCITE, 2006). In other words, women do not experience violence solely based on patriarchy, but also other systems of oppression such as racism, transphobia, and ableism. Therefore, in the context of violence experienced by racialized women, a single-axis analysis of gender-only or race-only frameworks distorts and further marginalizes the experiences of racialized women because identity markers, such as race and gender, cannot be easily separated from each other (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). When these frameworks are operationalized in isolation of one another, they do not adequately
address the violence that racialized women in Canada experience (Garcia-Del Moral, 2018).

To better account for the experiences of violence that racialized women face, I understand violence to be a social problem that “is shaped by and helps structure intersecting power relations” (Hill Collins, 2017, p. 1461). Violence, as bell hooks (2000) and Hill Collins (1998; 2017) suggest, is an umbrella term for methods that sustain hierarchical rule and domination where physical acts are the most visible, but not the only, manifestations of violence. This approach takes our understanding of women’s experiences of violence beyond male-perpetrated gendered or sexual violence, illustrating how that narrow framework ignores many experiences involving violence against women. As Yasmin Jiwani argues (2006, p. 7), such a narrow framework cannot capture: the levels at which violence occurs and the differential treatment of various kinds of violence. Violence occurs within intimate relationships, between peers, at the societal level, within institutions, and within and between states. Some forms of violence are sanctioned, others more indirectly endorsed, and some are just not tolerated.

For instance, white women are also perpetrators of violence against racialized women (hooks, 2000; Mack et al., 2018) and Indigenous women in Canada experience violence that is not only gendered, but also inseparably rooted in racism and settler colonialism (Deer, 2015; Garcia-Del Moral, 2018; Razack, 2000; 2016).

This widening of the analysis of violence beyond a single-axis is also inclusive of a variety of interpersonal violence, such as speech acts that, especially when repeated over time as discourse, contribute to perpetuating racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic,
and other forms of violence rooted in systems of oppression (Hill Collins, 1998; 2017). Beyond instances of interpersonal violence, violence can also be less obvious and routinized or bureaucratic (Hill Collins, 2017). For instance, representations of violence (often through mainstream media) reproduce violence through discursive practices where some women are viewed as being “unworthy” victims (Crenshaw, 1991; Garcia-Del Moral, 2011, p. 11). Furthermore, structural violence includes all state-sanctioned violence through policies that arise from capitalism, cis-heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy, with such policies enabling and reinforcing violence against women in a settler-colonial state (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2017, hooks, 2000, Garcia-del Moral, 2018). Thus, intersectional writers broaden our understanding of violence against women by demonstrating that interpersonal instances of gender, sexual, and racial-based violence alone are inadequate in understanding the complete picture of violence against women.

This broader definition of violence influences how I understand technology-facilitated violence (TFV)\textsuperscript{23}. Much of the research and media attention on online violence focuses on one single aspect of domination: sexism. This is evident in the terms used to describe experiences of TFV that focus explicitly on the sexual nature of the enacted violence, or its impact on gender, such as “online misogyny” (Jane, 2016, p. 284), “gendered cyberhate” (Jane, 2017a, p. 45), “networked misogyny” (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015, p. 12), “technologically-facilitated sexual violence” (Henry & Powell, 2015, p. 17; 2018, p. 758), and “online sexual harassment” (Megarry, 2014, p. 46). This single-axis approach to sexist online violence risks painting a generalized and

\textsuperscript{23} Using the term “technology-facilitated” as an overarching term for the range of violence that occurs online emphasizes that both technology and violence are key in characterizing the experience (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Dunn, 2020; Henry & Powell, 2018).
homogenous picture of TFV that is ill-equipped to account for women who are more likely to be targets of online attacks than their white, straight, cisgender, and otherwise additionally marginalized counterparts, who are faced with additional layers of oppressions and severity in the attacks (Amnesty International, 2018; Citron, 2014; Gray, 2012; Haimson, 2016).

Throughout this dissertation, I use a similarly broad, yet context-specific, approach to defining violence, with the perspective that the risk of underidentifying instances of violence outweighs the risk of overidentifying cases of violence. By expanding our understanding of violence beyond instances of interpersonal gendered and sexual violence, this dissertation reveals instances of violence that racialized women have experienced that are left out of mainstream public narratives. For example, rather than narrowly limiting violence to racial violence, sexual violence, or physical, emotional, and financial violence faced within cisgender normative intimate partner relationships, my conceptualization of violence against women also encompasses speech acts that express racism, settler colonialism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism (as outlined particularly in Chapters 4 and 6). Although the manifestations of violence experienced by participants in this study varied tremendously, the commonality of oppression is present throughout.

3.2. Muslim Feminisms

The experiences of many Muslim women in North America, especially after the events of 9/11, are shaped by competing discourses that are constantly being navigated and challenged (Hirji, 2010; Jiwani 2006; 2014; Razack, 1998; Thobani, 2010; Zine, 2004). Popular and persistent discourses of Muslim women are embedded within
Orientalist fantasies, where Muslim women are represented as oppressed by their religion (one that is broadly cast as fundamentalist) and in need of being rescued by colonizers from their oppression (Said, 1978). Knowledge of and about the women at the center of these Orientalist fantasies was historically constructed and communicated from one region to another during Europe’s invasion through Orientalism, defined as the academic study of the East, with such Orientalist discourses persisting to the modern day (Said, 1978). This body of manufactured knowledge about the Orient was further shaped by the Eurocentric authority over the collected knowledge. As an example from a speech discussing “the problem of the Orient,” Arthur James Balfour, a prominent member of the British Parliament, spoke with authority and knowledge in identifying that “there are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated” (as cited in Said, 1978, p. 36). This authoritative doctrine was used to unite individuals together against a common enemy: those who are different from Christian Europeans and pose a threat to their political and geographical expansion plans. Although this Orientalist fantasy of colonialist saviours is a Eurocentric fiction, it is true that Muslim women often have little room to articulate their own sense of identity and agency within Islam (Ahmad, 2018). This grain of truth within the broader fiction has allowed for much of these essentializing and Orientalist discourses to be reproduced by white feminists and many Muslim secular-feminists (Mohanty, 1988; Thobani, 2015; Zine, 2004).

Western white feminism’s perspectives on Muslim women are often reduced to the simplistic colonial image of the “Third World woman” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 333). More specifically, Mohanty (1988, p. 337) argues that white feminism’s image of Muslim women is based on the fictional “Third World woman” represented as someone
who is “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.” This image is often presented as a duality against essentialist representations of white women as being educated, having agency, and having control over their bodies. Similarly, Muslim secular-feminists ignore the experiences of faith-based Muslim women because of their assumed collusion with Islamic patriarchy (Zine, 2004). These critiques take on the same Orientalist representation as that produced by white Europeans and neglect the diversity of reasons for, and ways in which, Muslim women express their faith (Mohanty, 1998; Zine, 2004).

A Muslim feminist approach, on the other hand, is well-positioned to attend to the lived experiences of Islamophobia in Canadian women’s lives, as it carves out a space where Muslim women can articulate their own subjectivities (Ahmad, 2018; Zine 2004). Muslim feminism provides a space for achieving liberation that resists patriarchal fundamentalism and secular Islamophobia, attempting to unravel the multiple intersecting systems of oppression impacting Muslim women experiencing violence and challenging dominant hierarchies that sustain these impacts (Zine, 2004; 2006). For instance, the violence that Muslim women experience is often a result of neither sexism nor Islamophobia on their own, but rather gendered Islamophobia. Gendered Islamophobia is made up “of ethno-religious and racialized discrimination leveled at Muslim women that proceed from historically contextualized negative stereotypes that inform individual and systemic forms of oppression” (Zine, 2006, p. 240). These Orientalist stereotypes of Muslim women are tied to homogenizing and historical, yet persistent, relations between European and Islamic societies, where the Eurocentric powers increasingly sought to protect themselves from an imagined Islamic threat (Said, 1978). As a result, in cases of
violence against Muslim women, visible religious markers of Islam are seen as intrinsic to the body of Muslim women and, as pointed out by Ahmad (2018, p. 29):

[W]hen it comes to how Islamophobia works, having a Muslim last name, being born into a Muslim family, living in a certain city or country, speaking a certain language, or fitting a certain physical profile or clothing profile are enough to mark someone as a Muslim and therefore as a target for Islamophobic violence. Although these visible markers of Islam are essential in understanding gendered Islamophobia, such acts are often also racist in nature given that many Muslim women are Black, Brown, Asian, and/or Arab. This is especially true for Black Muslim women, who face anti-Black racism in addition to gendered Islamophobia (Ahmad, 2018).

Importantly, Black Muslim women have been isolated from some Muslim organizing in North America because of both anti-Black racism within these communities and a preference in Muslim discourses that often favours light-skinned racialized bodies (Ahmad, 2018).

This context of gendered Islamophobia in Canada is especially relevant to the discussion in Chapter 4, as interviewees discussed their perceptions of how Muslim women who experience violence are treated by mainstream news media, by the state, and by the anti-violence sector. Although gendered Islamophobia is an important lens through which to view findings such as these, Muslim feminism and critical race theories more broadly cannot arrive at a fuller understanding of Muslim women’s experiences without incorporating anti-colonialism. This is both because Orientalist discourses are

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24 The anti-violence sector broadly includes “shelters, rape crisis and domestic violence centers, and other gender justice organizations, many of which specifically highlight the needs and experiences of marginalized populations” (Bivens, 2019, p. 22).
rooted in European colonialism and responses to Islamophobia and anti-racism often perpetuate the erasure of Indigenous peoples and reinforce settler colonialism (Ahmad, 2018; Arvin et al., 2013; Carlson, 2017). Therefore, specifically incorporating an anti-colonial approach helps me to better explore experiences of gendered Islamophobia and create space for articulating the complex positionality of non-Indigenous racialized women in a way that does not erase the responsibilities of settlers on stolen land, while still providing a platform for these voices.

3.3. Anti-Colonial Approach

Although it informs all of my analyses, I take an anti-colonial approach to this research particularly as it pertains to and involves Indigenous women. This means that I understand Canada’s colonial project of Indigenous peoples as a form of settler colonialism. Such an anti-colonial approach is especially important when it comes to activism involving violence against women. Engaging in anti-colonial research and centering Indigenous women’s experiences becomes necessary when addressing violence so as not to rely on increasing state enforcement and regulations (Hunt, 2016; Mack & Na’puti, 2019). Significantly, “Indigenous women’s knowledge expands beyond the activities done by women and involves a system of inquiry that reveals Indigenous processes of observing and understanding and the protocols for being and participating in the world” (Altamirano-Jimenez & Kermoal, 2016, p. 10). Despite the links between settler colonialism and sexism, such anti-colonial Indigenous perspectives have typically been left out of feminist research (Arvin et al., 2013), anti-racism research and social movements (Lawrence & Dua, 2005), and research and movements centered on gendered
violence (Garcia-Del Moral, 2018), further contributing to a settler-colonial agenda within feminist, anti-violence, and social movement research.

Engaging and centering settler colonialism requires a different approach than feminist or critical race theories, as many Indigenous communities’ main concern is seeking sovereignty (Arvin et al., 2013). The difference in concerns consist of, but are not limited to, the lasting impacts of the settler state policies instituted as a part of settler colonialism, such as: the Indian Act; forced attendance at abusive residential schools; and the continuous breakdown of Indigenous languages and customs, which has greatly impacted Indigenous families, communities, and women (Amnesty, 2004; Lawrence & Dua, 2005; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; NWAC 2002; 2010). Anti-colonial and decolonizing research urges scholarship to reassess the ways in which knowledge production takes on or resists colonial logics while not remaining reliant on settler frameworks and discourses (Arvin et al., 2013; Carlson, 2017; Mack & Na’puti, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Importantly, decolonization is distinct from an anti-colonial approach. Decolonization refers to the repatriation of land to Indigenous communities. As Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 19) urge, decolonization is essential to understanding settler colonialism because “unless stolen land is relinquished, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts under settler colonialism.” An anti-colonial approach is more fitting to the scope of this dissertation as it requires a broader deconstruction of settler colonial thinking and creates space for Indigenous knowledges to flourish, potentially aiding in political mobilization against the continued colonialization of Indigenous peoples (Carlson, 2017; Simpson, 2004).
Throughout this dissertation, my commitment to an anti-colonial approach aligns with many of the guiding principles outlined for white settler researchers (Carlson, 2017). This includes: following First Nations Information Governance principles that reflect a commitment to work with First Nations people in Canada and Indigenous peoples more broadly (see Chapter 3.2.3.); resisting and challenging settler colonial projects and, instead, encouraging the push for Indigenous sovereignty in my critical analysis; providing land and place acknowledgements wherever possible to highlight my accountability to the Indigenous peoples of the lands about which I am speaking throughout this dissertation; and being accountable with my own position and relationship to settler colonialism (see Chapter 3.1).

3.4. Critical Disability Studies

Critical disability studies as an approach is relevant for this dissertation as one participant’s interview revealed how ableism and its intersections with many other overlapping systems of power were significant in her experiences of anti-violence online activism. Therefore, this dissertation draws on critical disability studies to trace intersections and continuities between racism, sexism, colonialism, capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy, and disableism/ableism. Importantly, ableism and disableism are distinct concepts, as ableism “positively values able-bodiedness,” making it compulsory and hegemonic (Dolmage, 2017, p. 7), while disableism concerns “the exclusions of people with sensory, physical and/or cognitive impairments” (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 986), facilitating the disproportionate rate of violence inflicted against disabled women (Cotter, 2018). On the basis of this distinction, I use the term disability intentionally as part of an understanding that disabilities are the result of society’s construction of ability.
Critical disability studies aims to destabilize the meaning of disability that originated from a hegemonic, medical-focused model that aimed to pathologize, essentialize, and depoliticize disability as a problem needing to be cured and/or eradicated\(^\text{25}\) (Garland-Thomson, 2005; Goodley et al., 2019). In contrast, a social-focused approach asserts that the social world was constructed with barriers that foster ableism and disableism (Meekosha & Shutteleworth, 2009). As a result, a social-focused approach arguing that disability requires equal rights of accessibility shares similarities with efforts to remove barriers resulting in racial and gender discrimination, an argument that has been the focus of some early feminist disability scholars (Garland-Thomson, 2005). Building off the insights from this social-focused model, critical disability studies is emancipatory and emphasizes the role of intersectionality (Goodley, 2017; Meekosha & Shutteleworth, 2009; McRuer, 2006).

Critical disability studies aligns best with this intersectional framework as it more explicitly provides a critique of neoliberalism while integrating theoretical insights from feminism, critical race theories, ableism, and heterosexuality as systems of “compulsory able-bodiedness” (McRuer, 2006, p. 2). For instance, and not to obscure their differences, disability and queerness are both socially constructed categories that shift away from a status quo of what is perceived by many to be natural or normal. In fact, in many ways, disability and queerness are viewed as being linked together (McRuer, 2006). Furthermore, regarding racialization:

\(^{25}\) The medicalization of disability is best illustrated through the forced sterilization and the practice of eugenics across North America that reinforce a hierarchy between certain (abled, gendered, and raced) bodies and minds and their dis/abilities (Dolmage, 2017; Garland-Thomson, 2005).
the tenets of Western medicine and science, which stigmatize and pathologize a wide range of cognitive differences as disease or mental illness, can have culturally specific, colonial, racist consequences, where the colonization process turns a previously culturally acceptable variation or even a spiritually honored way of being into a contemptible and intolerable defect. (Ribet, 2011, p. 234)

Importantly, ableist violence upholds and reinforces settler colonial violence, although the term or language of disability may not be common in many Indigenous communities (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2020). Settler colonial violence is upheld through the pathologizing of Indigenous bodies and ways of living that need to be regulated through settler state policies (Hutheon & Lashewicz, 2020). Furthermore, disability is produced especially in remote Indigenous communities as they are more likely to experience compound geographical and environmental devastations because of settler colonialism (Hutheon & Lashewicz, 2020). In other words, settler colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy, and dis/ableism lead to trauma that further disables Indigenous groups and communities disproportionately (Hutheon & Lashewicz, 2020).

3.5. Anti-Carceral Feminism

As a result of, and further informed by, these interrelated approaches, I take an anti-carcel feminist approach to anti-violence, one that is not reliant on law enforcement and the criminal justice system to intervene in, and to be the main response to, violence. In contrast, carceral feminism is a term that has been applied to the mainstream feminist anti-violence movements’ close relationship with, and reliance on, the criminal justice system as the primary response to anti-violence (Bernstein, 2005; Kim, 2018). These earlier ties from the anti-violence sector to gain state support with an
increasingly neoliberal state have led to a focus on criminalization, especially as a response to domestic violence and sexual violence (Bumiller 2008; McGlynn et al., 2012; Gotell, 2007; Kim 2018; INCITE!, 2006). A carceral feminist approach has resulted in increasing the activities of “surveillance, arrest, and incarceration” of the most marginalized populations (Kim, 2018, p. 220), while the legal system in Canada has been largely ineffective and inaccessible in adequately addressing violence, leading to distrust from women reporting instances of violence to police (Doolittle, 2017). As Duggan (2012, p. 18) argues, a crime and punishment approach is one in which:

law and order policies have been promoted with race and gender neutral rhetoric emphasizing the threat of crime to the average citizen, even as actual crime rates have declined. But the impact of such policies has been far from neutral.

For instance, the criminal justice system in North America has been particularly violent towards Indigenous, Black, and disabled communities (Davis, 1998; INCITE, 2016; Kim, 2018; Palmater, 2016; Ware et al., 2014), those who receive aid through social assistance programs (Kim, 2018), and Indigenous women seeking support and safety from violence (Palmater, 2016; Razack, 2000).

Furthermore, the distrust of settler colonial law enforcement by Indigenous women has been a serious point of concern from Indigenous communities, as violence against Indigenous women can only occur with the “tacit collusion of the police and the justice system” (Hargreaves, 2017, p. 3; Palmater, 2016). In fact, the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) have been at the forefront of removing Indigenous peoples from their land, forcing children into residential schools, and continuing their domination with violence against Indigenous women (Amnesty, 2004; Palmater, 2016; Lawrence &
Dua, 2005; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; NWAC, 2002; 2010). Palmater (2016, p. 275) argues that violence against Indigenous women at the hands of police results in “little to no risk for the police as the chances of getting caught are slim, financial repercussions are minimal, and the chance of conviction is extremely remote.” Indigenous women facing violence by police also face systemic racism and further colonization (Palmater, 2016; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; NWAC 2002; 2010). More broadly, seeking and gaining justice and recognition under settler colonial laws further reproduces and rewards settler colonial ways of governance and enforcement, which stands in opposition to the decolonizing and anti-colonial needs and goals of many Indigenous communities and peoples (Coulthard, 2007).

Similarly, Maynard’s (2017, p. 133) extensive history on police violence directed at Black communities in Canada emphasizes that “the law enforcement violence that is experienced by Black women remains largely unseen,” which is, in itself, a form of violence. The nature of violence against Black women was evident through the case of Stacy Bonds, who was targeted for being a Black woman and further victimized by police officers after being apprehended (Bruckert & Law, 2018; Geddes, 2010). Thus, as past research and events indicate that a carceral approach would effectively negate the voices of the participants involved in this study, my research and analyses are solely informed by an anti-carceral feminist approach.

Anti-carceral approaches, such as restorative and transformative justice, seek non-carceral solutions and, therefore, do not rely on the criminal justice system, instead working to “challenge punitive, retributive criminal responses to gender violence” (Kim,
Restorative justice, originating from an approach for New Zealand Māori youth, provides space for those targeted by violence to express the impact of that violence to instigators of violence and their communities, with the goal to restore and rehabilitate those who have committed violent crimes (Kim, 2018). However, this approach still incorporates some involvement with the criminal justice system and focuses on the event of the violent attack instead of the larger context in which that violent act occurred (Kim, 2018). In comparison, transformative justice is an approach that moves beyond any involvement in the carceral state, as it recognizes structural violence that takes place in the experiences of racialized women (Kim, 2018). More specifically, it recognizes the role of the past and the complexity of violence beyond the one incident (Morris, 2000). Transformative justice seeks to find healing for all involved in acts of violence, recognizing that “we are all both victims and offenders” (Morris, 2000, p. 3). However, transformative justice is most commonly seen outside of the non-profit model of anti-violence work, instead being more visible in marginalized communities that have reimagined anti-violence goals and interventions (Kim, 2018).

An anti-carceral approach is important for this dissertation project, given its focus on racialized women and the revictimization of women, racialized peoples, and racialized women in particular in their interactions with the criminal justice system. Further, in the interviews I conducted, one participant explicitly discussed how policies around violence still rely on carceral punishment as a solution to violence (see Chapter 4) and two participants, in their suggestions for improved governance systems, called for new systems: one that was completely sovereign from the settler colonial state and one that centred a more compassion-based approach that started from community-level needs. An
anti-carceral position is also significant in this dissertation in terms of the responses to online violence, the approaches that participants have taken and recommend to others, and the positions that digital media technologies have taken in instances of TFV (see Chapter 6).

3.6. Conclusion

In order to examine and interrogate the experiences and perspectives of racialized women involved in anti-violence online activism in Canada, I approached this research project with an intersectional framework. This approach is informed by a cross-section of relevant and related fields of study that helps attend to the complexity of the macro and micro-politics at play online. This multifaceted approach reflects both the multidimensionality of oppressions that are embedded within technologies and in the positions of those interviewed.

I first introduced my approach to understanding technologies as mutually constitutive of society, where I specifically drew from science and technology studies and political economy theorizing to critique and examine the business models of many of the digital media technologies discussed throughout this project. I further drew from a range of intersectional feminist theories that were selected to help center those I interviewed in this research project. These theories offer an opportunity to place historically marginalized individuals at the centre of the inquiry in a way that acknowledges and embraces the unique contributions of those sitting at the junction of multiple sites of oppression. My incorporation and integration of multiple avenues of critical theory (e.g., feminism, critical race, disability, and anti-colonial) was informed by the interview data,
intersectional scholarship, and activist writing specifically around racialized women in Canada.

In the following three chapters, I present responses to my research questions. Chapter 4 responds to the question of *why* racialized women in Canada are participating in anti-violence online activism. Chapters 5 and 6 both attend to the question of *how*, responses to which form the bulk of the focus of this dissertation.
Chapter 4: “In Canada, we’re still in a white feminist moment”:

Before examining how these nine racialized women in Canada were participating in anti-violence online activism, this chapter explores some of the major reasons and motivations behind their participation. In order to situate the context of their activisms, I examine aspects of why these women are involved in online activism challenging violence against women. I argue that these racialized women were partaking in online activism to resist and challenge dominant and persistent narratives about violence against women that exclude, misrepresent, and further marginalize racialized women, reinforcing the violence they experience. Participants named Canadian mainstream news media coverage, settler colonial state policies, and the anti-violence sector as creating and circulating these narratives.

To situate their activism involvement in a larger historical, social, and political context, I will examine the events and instances that motivated participants in this study to become involved in online activism to challenge violence against women. I base this discussion on participants’ shared memories of events inciting their own involvement with anti-violence online activism. Therefore, this chapter is not meant to be a systematic review of such historical moments of women’s experiences of violence, but rather a snapshot of participants’ perspectives and experiences of prominent discourses of violence against women. Participants discussed how such discourses affected both themselves and the communities they serve, ultimately influencing their decisions to pursue online activism. On the basis of the experiences of the nine racialized women interviewed for this study, such discourses and motivations arose from four major sources: mainstream news media coverage; anti-violence organizations perpetuating
myths that support violence against some women; inadequate government action and support; and the disconnect between personal experiences involving intersectional violence against women and the absence of intersectionality in mainstream discussions of violence against women.

First, participants perceived much of the Canadian mainstream news media as playing a significant role in reinforcing and normalizing violence against racialized women. More specifically, participants recalled a great deal of mainstream news media coverage that they perceived as being racist, sexist, ableist, and cis-heteronormative. Additionally, some participants pointed to the overall gatekeeping power of Canadian mainstream news media, considering their role to be significant in shaping a mainstream news agenda that caters to primarily white audiences. In response, some participants provide suggestions for journalists and news organizations who report on stories of violence against women.

Second, participants perceived many organizations involved in preventing and ending violence against women as catering to predominantly white perspectives in their work, increasingly so after almost a decade under Conservative Party leadership and neoliberal colonial state policies. Under such leadership and policies, these organizations became increasingly ill-equipped in providing the appropriate resources and supports to racialized women experiencing violence. More specifically, the anti-violence sector that was involved with ending violence against women was viewed by participants as primarily reinforcing and amplifying a dominant white feminist approach. Participants

26 Canada has adopted a multiple party system of political leadership which currently has three dominant political parties: the Liberal Party (leaning Centre-Right), the Conservative Party (leaning Right), and the New Democratic Party (leaning Centre-Left).
recalled an overwhelmingly white feminist anti-violence sector that has taken shape, impacting not only racialized women who have experienced violence, but also racialized women such as themselves who are involved more generally in the anti-violence sector.

Third, participants highlighted how they believed policy changes and understandings of violence from the settler colonial state resulted in few gains for racialized women experiencing violence. Participants highlighted how this remained the case for years of Conservative Party leadership and continued even under new leadership (since 2015) with a self-proclaimed feminist Liberal Party Prime Minister. From participants’ perspectives, this shift in federal leadership reinforced the violence faced by racialized, transgender, and disabled women through the centering of white feminist concerns and in political leaders’ reproduction of racist and sexist stereotypes. To help remedy these issues, participants provide several distinct recommendations and suggestions on the involvement of a settler colonial neoliberal state in work aiming to end violence against women.

Lastly, participants discussed the absence of intersectionality in hegemonic and persistent narratives of violence against women from the mainstream news media, the anti-violence sector involved in ending violence against women, and from settler colonial policies and regulations. In contrast with such narratives, participants’ expression and understanding of women’s experiences of violence was much more intersectional. This last section highlights the counternarratives of intersectional experiences of violence against women that participants described as significant for their activism.
4.1. Mainstream News Coverage

Participants expressed a shared concern of mainstream news media in Canada investing little interest in covering stories of violence experienced by racialized women. Here, I use the term 'mainstream news media’ broadly to refer to all forms of news media (e.g., print, radio, online, and televised) published by large media corporations that are broadly and easily accessible to the majority of people living in Canada. Although some participants mentioned specific names of local and national news organizations, others used the terms “mainstream media”27, “the media in Canada,” or “the news” to describe those sources of news that differed from what some participants referred to as “alternative” or otherwise “activist” news sources.

To many of the participants, the cultural construction of racialized women’s experiences of violence produced and distributed by mainstream news media coverage was perceived to be racist, sexist, ableist, and cis-heteronormative. This was especially apparent to participants who noted an overall lack of news coverage of women’s experiences of violence if the women affected were Indigenous, Black, and/or transgender. Participants further recalled how they regarded mainstream news media as having a long and persistent history of misrepresenting the experiences of violence against Muslim, Indigenous, and Black women while relying on and reinforcing racist and sexist stereotypes.

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27 Participants may have also used these terms because my interview questions asked about their relationship with “mainstream media” to elicit their memories broadly around news coverage of violence against women. Some participants provided specific names of news outlets and publications and others did not. I did not interrupt the flow of our interview to ask about specific news sources if they were not provided to avoid interrogating their memories. However, I conducted further research based on the details they shared about certain stories to help situate the context of the memories.
Furthermore, participants expressed that they believed Canadian mainstream news media, through its distribution of content and agenda-setting, as reinscribing the status quo of interlocking systems of white supremacy, capitalism, ableism, and cisgender patriarchy when it comes to reporting on and covering cases of violence. This was evident to some participants in their descriptions of their knowledge of ownership and direction of Canadian mainstream news media, as well as through their knowledge of the relationships journalists have with law enforcement in reporting on cases of violence. Overall, the centering of white feminism was apparent to participants in how Canadian mainstream news media misrepresent and misinterpret experiences of violence that many women face, driving participants to engage with mainstream coverage through activism. At the end of this section, I highlight how some participants expressed resisting this gatekeeping and constant misrepresentation in coverage of the violence experienced by racialized women.

4.1.1. Missing coverage

Participants perceived mainstream news media in Canada as showing little interest in covering stories of violence against racialized women. This was illustrated through remarks about participants’ observations of a lack of attention to Indigenous women and transgender raced women experiencing violence, despite the disproportionately higher rates of violence that Indigenous and non-Indigenous racialized transgender women experience when compared with white cisgender women in Canada (Donato, 2020; Heidinger, 2021). From participants’ perspectives, Canadian news media neglected covering an ongoing crisis of violence against racialized women, ultimately
erasing their experiences through the silencing of racialized women, especially racialized transgender women.

For example, I learned from these interviews that Azami\textsuperscript{28} advocated for and with the needs of families of murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit individuals (MMIWG2+)\textsuperscript{29}, while also actively resisting and challenging dominant settler colonial framings of MMIWG2+ to bring attention to the ongoing and pervasive violence that Indigenous women face. Her activism often targeted Canadian mainstream news media who, as she noticed, continuously erased the experiences of MMIWG2+. From following the scant available news coverage of MMIWG2+ in Canadian mainstream news media over many years, Azami recounted to me that, “for a long time, it seemed that there just wasn’t the interest or appetite [from news media] for these stories coming from [Indigenous] communities and there wasn’t a recognition of their importance.” Her comment aligns with other research indicating a very slow uptake of mainstream media attention to MMIWG2+ in Canada prior to 2013 (Bourgeois, 2014; Drache et al., 2016; Gilchrist, 2010; Longstaffe, 2017). In contrast with this minimal coverage, reports from Indigenous organizations and academic studies indicates that there were at least 582 reported cases of MMIWG2+ across Canada from 1980-2010 (Longstaffe, 2017; NWAC, 2010; Pearce, 2013). Considering such a high number of reported cases, Azami’s observation of the lack of mainstream news media’s attention was noteworthy.

\textsuperscript{28} As described in Chapter 2, pseudonyms are used for all participants interviewed.

\textsuperscript{29} Murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit individuals. Two-Spirit individuals are included here to recognize the diverse concepts of gender and sexuality that exist outside of European colonization.
Similarly, but unrelated to MMIWG2+ specifically, Faye shared with me her perception of how Canadian news media journalists approach stories about racialized women in general, stating that “when it comes to race and gender, oh, there’s nothing to see here.” This race and gender-blind approach was similarly expressed by Petunia, who noted that “it's often the stories of trans women of colour that we won’t get in the media.” Indeed, a 2019 nationwide study in Canada demonstrated that racialized transgender and non-binary individuals experience higher rates of violence than white transgender individuals but are less likely than their white peers to report these instances (Chih et al., 2020). As further reported by D’amore (2020), Canadian news media often misgender and deadname transgender individuals when reporting on cases of transgender violence.

4.1.2. Missing intersectional coverage

When participants recalled observing mainstream news media covering instances of violence against racialized women, the coverage that they pointed to involved stories that reproduced racist, colonialist, and sexist stereotypes, especially in the cases of Muslim and Indigenous women experiencing violence. First, participants perceived that much mainstream news media coverage failed to frame violence against Muslim women as a form of gendered Islamophobia. For instance, Levana recounted her experience supporting women who have experienced sexual violence and struggled with using the term sexual assault at one point in our interview, noting that the violence she was speaking about regarding Muslim women could also be referred to as “racial assault or whatever because it’s often not [just sexual assault]. I say sexual assault but often times it’s because of racialized [aspects].” To clarify, Levana recalled reading news coverage
about Muslim women experiencing violence where the reporting focused exclusively on their gender:

that [experience of violence] is not just because she’s a woman, it starts there for sure, but it’s also intersectional. It might not have happened if she hadn’t been wearing something <sarcastically> oh so offensive like a piece of material on her head.

Levana’s comment draws attention to how some Muslim women who wear any type of veil are targeted by violence from strangers in unique ways when compared to other racialized women (Ahmad, 2018), Muslim men (Zine, 2006), and Sikh men who also commonly wear a religious head covering (Perry, 2014). Levana’s comments also reflect the fact that racialized women’s experiences of violence are often shaped by multiple dimensions of oppressions beyond only sexism or racism (Crenshaw, 1991). In this case, Levana’s perspective of news media’s coverage of Muslim women emphasized gendered aspects of the violence instead of the intersecting racial and gendered aspects of the violence experienced. From the perspective of Levana, there was little discussion in Canada’s news media of how gendered Islamophobia impacts the lives of many racialized women within Canada.

When aspects of racialization are brought up in mainstream news media, coverage also tends to focus solely on cultural aspects. As Jiwani (2006; 2014) and Razack (1998; 2021) note, this media framing works to further justify white supremacy and the project of colonization, positioning Canadian culture as superior where the root of violence against Muslim women is within their cultures that they then bring to Canada. As an example of such coverage of Muslim women, Jiwani (2014) demonstrated that the
racialized women targets of the highly-publicized media coverage of the “Shafia murders” in 2009, were framed as being worthy of public attention because of the emphasis on culture and cultural differences.

On June 3, 2009, three immigrant sisters from Afghanistan, Zainab, Sahar and Geeti Shafia were found murdered along with Rona Mohammed, inside a car that was submerged under the Rideau Canal in Kingston, Ontario. During the trial investigation, it was revealed that the sisters’ father, mother, and brother had murdered them for violating cultural codes and wanting to take on more Canadian cultural values. Many media outlets published these reports as “honour killings” (see CBC News, 2011; Hamilton, 2012; Friscolanti, 2016). Jiwani (2014) highlighted how media coverage galvanized the “honour killings” cultural frame depicting a culture clash between Canadian culture and their racialized cultural affiliations and values, emphasizing the cultural differences between the young women and their murderers. Yet, when these racialized women’s bodies and stories dominate the news cycle as homogenous, unquestioned, and different from those of Canadian-born, these racialized women’s bodies become marked as ones needing to be saved by civilized Europeans (Jiwani, 2006; Razack, 1998).

Secondly, just as Levana recalled mainstream news media fail to take into consideration the complexity of racist and sexist interactions of many Muslim women’s experiences of violence, other participants noted the absence of context provided on the enduring legacy of settler colonialism’s impact on many Indigenous women and the violence they experience. Two participants reflected on how such coverage of cases of MMIWG2+ from much of mainstream news media inadvertently reinforces violence against Indigenous women.
For example, Azami provided me with context as to when she became most aware of the extent that news media coverage fails to report on the connections of cases of violence against Indigenous women, Two Spirit individuals, and the legacy of settler colonialism. She shared an anecdote with me of a time she found herself in a room full of journalists, residential school survivors, and those involved in the Truth and Reconciliation consultations. She told me that she always remembers when one of the speakers at this event stated that “there isn’t a single Indigenous person in Canada that has not been touched by the legacy of residential schools.” One of her takeaways from this statement was that journalists have a responsibility to provide the context and impacts of settler colonialism in reports involving Indigenous peoples “even when you’re too busy and you have this deadline, just a little bit of time [to] explain it in this story, or in the next story, but explain it.” Azami expressed to me that she often thought back to this moment when she shared stories of Indigenous women who have experienced violence as a reminder of how little mainstream news coverage has taken up that call to provide this information and, ultimately, help readers make the connections between such violence and settler colonialism.

My interview with Mardella revealed further insight into the impact of mainstream news reports not appropriately explaining the settler colonial context in cases involving violence against Indigenous women. She recalled that rates of violence against Indigenous women are too often tossed around in mainstream news media coverage with little to no context as to what those numbers mean. As Mardella stated:

“1-in-3 Native women will be raped in their lifetime” or “murder is the third leading cause of death for Native women.” These numbers get thrown around
everywhere and yet there’s no context that explains how they got to that number, what that number actually means, or who came up with that number.

This “1-in-3” ratio of Indigenous women experiencing sexual violence is the most commonly cited piece of data about MMIWG2+ (Deer, 2015). However, this ratio is most likely even lower as a result of the distrust from Indigenous women and communities toward colonial law enforcement, resulting in a lower likelihood of reporting when crimes occur (Amnesty International, 2004; Deer, 2015; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; NWAC, 2002; 2010; Palmater, 2016).

Furthermore, such rates of violence toward Indigenous women change slightly depending on where one is located and how those cases are tracked. The significance of highlighting these disproportionate rates was clear to Mardella, who noted that rates of violence most often used in stories of MMIWG2+ are used by mainstream as:

just this weird floating thing and all it does is terrorize Indigenous women and their communities into begging for more colonial law enforcement and basically trying to live under a colonial code of respectability, you know like “well if you don’t drink and you don’t do sex work and you’re not out on the streets and you’re not poor and you’re college educated, this won’t happen to you.” Like, basically, “go be a good little Indian.”

Her comment suggests that, without providing a context to this ratio of expected violence or why this number was so high for Indigenous women specifically, these narratives risk inadvertently blaming the violence Indigenous women face on Indigenous communities, a comment that has been also made by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars (Holmes
et al., 2015; Razack, 2000). In contrast, as Mardella further pointed out using her own experiences as an example, “the reality is, I was college educated, I didn’t have a substance abuse problem, I had never done sex work before, and somehow I ended up in all of that [violence] too. So, obviously, that [logic is] colonial bullshit.” Mardella’s personal experience pushes against the settler colonial logic implied in the reliance solely upon data and ratios and draws attention to the importance of the manner in which data around MMIWG2+ is collected and reported.

Both Azami and Mardella recalled further instances of misrepresentation of Indigenous communities and women who experience violence based on colonial, racist, and misogynistic tropes, further supporting the construction of blame that violence against Indigenous women comes from within Indigenous communities. For example, they individually remembered observing how Indigenous women who were involved with sex work and/or substance abuse behaviours were being dehumanized and villainized in reports from mainstream news media. Azami shared with me that she vividly remembers the media framing that surrounded the murder of Pamela George30, one of the first stories of MMIWG2+ she noticed making headlines across Canada. Azami recalled specifically that throughout the media coverage:

George was almost always identified as a prostitute and I think that we knew more about these two white men who were on trial for her murder than we knew about her. I never knew until much later that she was a mother of two kids and she

30 In 1995, Pamela George, a 28-year old mother and daughter of the Saulteaux (Ojibway) nation was murdered by two white men, Steven Kummerfield and Alex Ternowetsy. Kummerfield’s conviction was appealed and he was released on parole after serving under 4 years because “officials feared for his safety in a Saskatchewan prison where there is a large Native population” (NWAC, 2002, p. 6). Ternowetsy was also released on parole in 2000 (Rowe, 2001).
was a single mom, that she was also a daughter, a sister. And we didn’t hear much from her family or much from the perspective of advocates. It was more about a focus on these two white men.

Such coverage made her feel “like there was obviously no Indigenous person who was part of the news coverage [team].”

Azami’s observation highlighted how she perceived news media framing of an Indigenous woman involved in sex work as a “prostitute,” a term that Gotell (2008, p. 867) argues is used to present a woman involved in sex work as one who “avoids personal responsibility for sexual safety and who ‘chooses’ to engage in a ‘high-risk lifestyle.’” In much of the coverage that Azami remembers, little detail about George was provided except that she engaged in sex work within the inner city neighborhoods of Regina. In comparison to the “focus on these two white men,” this framing dehumanizes George as well as the many other Indigenous women news media has reported on in such ways, further reinforcing white hegemonic masculinity (Jiwani, 2006; Razack, 2000)

Such dehumanizing and villainous portrayals of Indigenous women engaged in sex work further constitutes what LaRocque (1994, p. 74) calls a “double objectification,” in which Indigenous women, unlike white or other racialized women, are objectified on two separate but interconnected dimensions: for being women and for being Indigenous. Although all women can enter into sex work, sex work has a unique colonial history and legacy (Deer, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Razack, 2000). Not only was forcing Indigenous women into sex work and sex trafficking part of the exploitation of their lands, the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma and chronic poverty created
and maintained by settler colonial nations makes Indigenous women more likely to enter into sex work (Deer, 2015).

Yet, as demonstrated by Azami’s comment that “George was almost always identified as a prostitute,” Indigenous women involved in sex work who experience violence are often framed by mainstream news media as being unworthy of escaping violence because of their involvement in sex work. Azami’s comment that mainstream news coverage highlighted the humanity of the white men who murdered George while ignoring that George “was a mother of two kids and she was a single mom, that she was also a daughter, a sister” draws attention to reporting that invokes colonial stereotypes without attention to the legacy of settler colonial violence. Such colonialist narratives combined with a prohibitionist conceptualizing of sex work negatively impacts the lives of Indigenous women who take on sex work disproportionately when compared with their white peers (Hunt, 2014), to the point that the humanity of a woman like Pamela George is ignored even after her murder.

Moreover, the framing of MMIWG2+ as living a ‘high risk’ lifestyle removes the focus away from those who were actively setting out to violate Indigenous women (Hunt, 2014b; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Razack, 2000; Scribe, 2018). This is evidenced by Azami juxtaposing the framing of Pamela George “as a prostitute” while “we knew more about these two white men,” with George’s murderers presented by mainstream news media as young, educated, white men with families who did not otherwise commit crimes (Jiwani, 2006; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Razack, 2000). George’s constant framing of being an Indigenous sex worker without any information about her life as “a single mom … a daughter, a sister,” as Azami wondered, positioned her in a lower moral order than the
white male perpetrators. The representation of George’s race, class, and gender influenced perceptions of how deserving she was of the violence she experienced (Jiwani & Young, 2006; Razack, 2000). Yet, as Hunt (2014b) has argued, media coverage is hesitant to focus on and name the cause of MMIWG2+ as being white male violence.

Media coverage of the death of 15-year-old Tina Fontaine, almost 20 years after George’s murder, further demonstrates how little reporting on MMIWG2+ has changed in Canada. Although one suspect, Raymond Cormier, was charged in her murder, he was later acquitted in 2018 and no charges have been made in her murder (APTN, 2018). Despite Tina Fontaine’s murder reaching national attention through mainstream media coverage, unlike so many other cases of MMIWG2+ before her, racist and sexist media coverage persisted (Drache et al., 2016; Longstaffe, 2017). For example, The Globe and Mail (Lambert, 2018) and Winnipeg Free Press (2018) published articles on Fontaine’s murder with headlines\(^{31}\) that ultimately blamed Fontaine for her own murder by emphasizing the presence of alcohol and drugs in her system (Lambert, 2018). The resulting offensive stereotypes of George, Fontaine, and so many other MMIWG2+ involved in sex work and/or substance abuse, such as those living in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (Coast Salish Territories)\(^{32}\), has demonstrated that an understanding

\(^{31}\text{The current headline reads “Expert tells Winnipeg murder trial he could not determine cause of Tina Fontaine’s death,” but the URL still (as of 2022) reads “tina-fontaine-had-drugs-alcohol-in-system-when-she-was-killed-toxicologist” and was reported with having the original headline in a letter to the Globe and Mail’s editor from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC, 2018).}\)

\(^{32}\text{Often dubbed as “Canada’s poorest neighbourhood,” Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside was home to a disproportionate amount of Indigenous women as well as a site of common drug use, prostitution, and the spread of HIV in the 1970s and 80s (Culhane, 2003). From the 1970s to the 2000s, over 100 Indigenous women went missing and were murdered in this area. Vancouver Sun reporter, Lindsay Kines (1998), broke the story to mainstream media in 1998 with her series on disappearing Indigenous women. However, Jiwani & Young’s (2008) examination into the news framing of these murders revealed that these stories were often missing any acknowledgement of colonialism.}\)
of how settler colonialism has created the socioeconomic conditions in Indigenous communities was missing from mainstream news coverage, further revictimizing those experiencing violence and their families (Amnesty International, 2004; Deer, 2015; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; NWAC, 2002; 2010). As indicated in Azami’s discussion of Pamela George’s murder, such framing aims to place and reinforce blame on Indigenous women instead of on white male violence and structural inequalities (Hunt, 2014b; Scribe, 2018).

As a consequence of persistent misrepresentation by mainstream media news coverage of MMIWG2+ and Indigenous communities more broadly, Mardella deduced: “I don’t think people realize what even happened in Canada, really just horrible, horrible things.” She continued and reaffirmed that “trying to come to terms with the violence of our women and connecting it to our intergenerational experiences of colonialism is so important.” As many Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have argued, the story of Indigenous women’s violence begins with settler colonialism (Deer, 2015; Hunt, 2016; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Lugones, 2010; Razack, 2000). The context of settler colonialism was perceived by participants to be missing from the mainstream news coverage, thereby potentially erasing the violence experienced by these women as legitimate or as worthy of concern from the general public and settler colonial state policies and, ultimately, reinforcing the violence that they experience as a form of representational violence (Garcia-del Moral, 2011).

4.1.3. Agenda-setting from mainstream news media

Canadian mainstream news media play a central role not only in circulating content around cases of violence, but also in shaping much public opinion of violence
through the process of agenda-setting. Scheufele and Tewskbury (2007, p. 300) address the significance of agenda-setting by pointing to how “political issues that are most salient or accessible in a person’s memory will most strongly influence perceptions of political actors and figures.” Parts of this agenda-setting were apparent to some participants who had close relationships with journalists and news media organizations. What was especially evident to participants was the major players in news reporting and the close relationships many of these major players have with law enforcement when reporting on violence against women.

Faye seemed to be knowledgeable about the news media industry in Canada at the time that we spoke. She said that her frustration with Canadian news media coverage of anything involving race and gender specifically was most likely based on a lack of diversity of those who hold powerful decision-making positions within Canadian news media, which are largely older, white and Conservative-leaning men. Faye specified that “there’s an old guard in media in Canada: the Robert Fifes33, the Jonathan Kays34 of the world,” people in key positions involved in setting the agenda for news media reporting and shaping how the media report on and cover stories about race and gender. This old guard Faye refers to is more generally the Canadian mainstream news media, which are highly concentrated within the hands of few corporate and even fewer publicly-funded owners.

33 Political journalist who was the Ottawa bureau Chief for Sun Media, The National Post, CTV News, and The Globe and Mail where he also hosted a national news political panel, “Question Period.”
34 Former columnist for The National Post and Editor-in-Chief of The Walrus magazine, who resigned from the latter after public backlash from publishing and authoring an article defending cultural appropriation on the grounds of freedom of speech.
Indeed, the Canadian mainstream news media play a significant role in the continued violence experienced by racialized women based on the ideas and ideologies produced and circulated about violence (Jiwani, 2006). News media’s “main sphere of operations is the production and transformation of ideologies” (Hall, 1995, p. 18). Broadcast media serve two major purposes: to diffuse knowledge and to create new informed publics (Couldry & Curran, 2003; Tarrow, 2011). However, news media are also profit-driven businesses and need to balance the need to increase revenue streams with the needs of informing publics (Couldry & Curran, 2003). Postmedia Network, for instance, is Canada’s largest newspaper company, owning the most news sources in Canada followed by The Globe and Mail and The Toronto Star, which make up three of the highest readerships across Canada, all of which are owned by corporate media (Malik & Fatah, 2019). Corporate-owned media business models impact journalism and editorial decisions via agenda-setting (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In the case of violence against racialized women in Canada, when racialized media owners are absent, news media about racialized women are not salient or accessible, thereby influencing the Canadian public’s awareness about the extent of these issues and how potential political actors should react to such stories (Jiwani, 2006).

Calla provides another example of how participants perceived Canadian mainstream news media to reproduce the violence of racialized women through agenda-setting and, more specifically, their reliance on information about cases from law enforcement. Calla shared with me that when she spoke to some journalists about their inappropriate and harmful reporting of the crimes racialized women face, she learned that
journalists regularly consulted police reports for information about cases, and that information was used to create the news report.

One reason that journalists may rely on law enforcement reports, especially in reference to cases involving Indigenous communities, is because of a perceived difficulty in accessing information about cases involving Indigenous individuals from Indigenous communities and reserves (Drache et al., 2016). Journalists reportedly have been less likely to put in the time necessary to build relationships with Indigenous communities, and many Indigenous reserves are geographically difficult to access (Drache et al., 2016). This lack of relationship-building and maintenance between Indigenous communities and journalists was demonstrated in a poll of over 500 First Nations band offices, where 40% reported not having been visited by a reporter since 2015 (Jago et al., 2018). As a result, it is easier for many journalists to rely on more readily available reports from law enforcement than seeking this information from Indigenous communities. However, there are many reasons (see Chapter 3.5.) why law enforcement would not be trustworthy in accurately reporting cases of violence against women, especially if the cases involve Black and/or Indigenous women. Thus, the perspectives of many mainstream news media tend to be biased towards a carceral approach that continues to reproduce violence against racialized women and communities.

Despite the overwhelming disappointment participants expressed with journalists in mainstream news media more generally, two participants described how their engagement with mainstream news media has changed over time. This includes asking journalists to do more research for, and improve their reporting style in, their coverage of violence against women. For instance, Mardella shared that she is:
learning to draw those boundaries and one of the things I’m trying to do is that [reporters] need to give me their questions in advance but also, I give them homework. I’m not willing to do an interview with you if you’re not willing to write a systematic piece on all missing and murdered Native women in your area. Relatedly, Calla described an encounter where she contacted one reporter to tell him to stop the way that he was covering violence against women. She told me “it was the way he wrote it, it was done almost like a romance novel. He was like ‘and then he laid her on the bed, and then he did this.’” When she called him and described the problem with his news coverage, he responded with “I never thought of it that way.” She described the experience of speaking with him as useful because she realized then that journalists were part of the community that could be involved in ending violence and needed better awareness and tools to properly address reporting on instances of violence.

Similar to Mardella and Calla’s recommendations for a more informed news media, and a step in that direction, are Canadian-specific guidelines created for journalists that outline how to report on instances of violence against women (e.g., femifesto, 2015; Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women, n.d.; The Represent Project, n.d.). These guidelines provide tips and recommendations for interviewing women, queer individuals, and Indigenous women and girls who have experienced violence. For instance, two of these resources explicitly discuss the need to build relationships and to take reports on violence from community organizers instead of relying on law enforcement when it comes to reporting on cases of women who experience violence (Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women, n.d.; The Represent Project, n.d.).
Although educating journalists directly is one way to help solve the issue, participants also argued that larger structural issues with much of the Canadian mainstream news media industry need to be transformed, including the reliance on a white racial frame. The white racial frame, as argued by Feagin (2013), is a centuries old dominant racial frame primarily in the context of North America that is useful in unpacking such (mis)representation. The white racial frame, according to Feagin (2013, p. xi):

- includes a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, interconnected interpretations and narratives, and visual images […] This white racial frame, like most social frames, operates to assist people in defining, interpreting, conforming to, and acting in their everyday social lives.

Significantly, this white racial frame operates as reaffirming a particular white-centric worldview in North American society (Feagin, 2013). From the perspective of these participants, mainstream Canadian news coverage and sources surrounding cases of violence against racialized women rely on this white racial frame and reinforce the interconnections of white supremacy, capitalism, colonialism, racism, and cis-heteropatriarchy.

4.2. Ending Violence Against Women Under Two Prime Ministers

Before Nox began her involvement with ending violence against women in Canada, she told me that she worked in a government agency that served those requiring social and disability assistance, a group largely made up of racialized women, many of whom have also experienced violence. This front-line interaction with marginalized groups, however, provided her with little agency to help her clients because of very strict
government bureaucratic processes. As a result, Nox said: “I felt very disillusioned by the whole system.” This disillusionment was shared by most of the other participants, who spoke about the challenges they have endured specifically in organizations involved in preventing and ending violence against women, as well as personal observations as racialized women encountering government controls, regulations, and supports in relation to their experience of violence. For example, Levana reasoned that violence against women is so persistent in Canada because “if you have a system that starts with patriarchy, that starts with colonialism, and with, you know, all of these other factors, which it did, we know it did, then the system is working the way it’s supposed to.”

Reflecting the disillusionment expressed by Levana and Nox, this section begins with participants’ perspectives of federal interventions, largely implemented under Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006-2015), that they believed reinforced and amplified a dominant white feminist anti-violence against women sector. More specifically, participants recalled observing an overwhelmingly white feminist sector that centers narrowly on white able-bodied, cisgender women’s perspectives of violence. Throughout this section, I connect participants’ experiences to a longer history and context of racialized women and/or transgender women being excluded from organizations involved in ending violence against women, typically as a result of policy cuts to supports and services for those experiencing violence. I find both Ahmed’s (2007) understanding of the orientation of whiteness as well as Anderson’s (2014; 2016) conception of white rage useful in explaining the overwhelmingly white feminist-centered anti-violence sector.
In 2015, the Liberal Party of Canada was elected as the head of the federal government, bringing in Justin Trudeau under a majority government (2015-2021) as the new Prime Minister of Canada (PM). Given PM Trudeau’s self-professed feminism, this brought optimism to many women across Canada, especially those who have experienced violence. However, Trudeau’s feminism was, as Faye declared, “not intersectional,” thus neglecting supports and resources to those experiencing violence within more marginalized communities. Therefore, while the new federal government leadership in 2015 marked some change for women’s rights in Canada, participants observed that racialized women experiencing violence were still largely excluded from policies impacting the availability of resources and supports, thus further reinforcing which experiences of violence were worthy of state attention and resources.

Participants’ perceived PM Trudeau’s representation of feminism as adopting a singular focus on white women’s experiences of violence, to the exclusion of racialized women experiencing violence. In the second part of this section, I highlight two aspects of governance from PM Trudeau that participants referred to: the public image of Trudeau’s feminism and the increasing digitalization of public services. Ultimately, from the perspectives of participants, racialized women are continually excluded from policies and resources around ending violence against women. At the end of this section, I present some of the participants’ recommendations or suggestions for alternative modes for anti-violence prevention.
4.2.1. An overwhelmingly white feminist sector involved in ending violence against women

Participants discussed that the sector involved in ending violence against women was narrowly centered around white bodies and white feminist practices and ideologies. First, this was observable to participants who were active within the sector, with Calla noting that “around violence against women, we still have a sector that’s very white” especially in terms of paid positions. As an example, Calla explained to me that she has been involved in anti-violence organizing and education for what seemed to her to be almost her entire life stating: “I’ve grown up in the gender-based violence or violence against women movement”. She had experience working with many anti-violence non-profit organizations in various capacities and divulged to me that when she “moved into sexual violence, the world was so white.” Continuing, she said that “the people who are able to speak about sexual violence, the people that get media attention, the people that get to go to the legal system are white women [and] usually, women of colour don’t even get past the door.”

Similarly, other participants, such as Levana, involved in the sector expressed “just feel[ing] isolated,” observing few racialized, disabled, and transgender women within the sector. Participants’ feelings of the overwhelmingly white feminist positions, and therefore perspectives and practices within the anti-violence sector, align with a longer history of how racialized women have been disproportionately impacted from both contributing professionally to, and receiving support from, the anti-violence sector. For instance, Calla expressed that “we’re in these austerity times and we’re the first people
that go as women of colour.” Her comment aligns with how the scarcity of funding35 created an environment of increased professionalization and competition for financial resources within the anti-violence sector that disproportionately impacts racialized women (Bonisteel & Green, 2005; Brodie, 2008).

More specifically, cuts based on neoliberal imperatives and policy changes from the settler colonial state shaped the structure and services of anti-violence organizations (Bonisteel & Green, 2005; Durazo, 2017; INCITE, 2016). These cuts led to organizations competing against each other for few resources and funding grants instead of collaborating towards the same goal of anti-violence (Bernard & Grewal, 2014; Shaikh, 2012). Many organizations that would benefit from the little federal resources available were further relying on provincial and municipal support, as federal funding trickles down to the provinces and cities to allocate (Status of Women, 2018). The actual distribution of resources is then further complicated by the reliance on limited state funding for organizations to provide services and programming to their communities. The resulting impact for many organizations has been to contort themselves into how the colonial state funding models envision violence.

35 Informed by neoliberalism, Stephen Harper’s nearly 10 years as Prime Minister resulted in the ingraining of many negative policies for all women in Canada (Brodie, 2008; Hamandi, 2015). The Conservative Party severely decreased women’s social protection and economic well-being as a move further away from social policy and a welfare state (Brodie, 2007; 2008; Morrow et al., 2004). Most relevant to the anti-violence sector, in 2006, the Status of Women Canada department saw a 40% decrease in funding and the closure of more than half of their regional offices, where gender-based violence (GBV) is one of its three main priorities (Brodie, 2008; Brodie & Baker, 2010). The cuts led to the closure of the Independent Policy Research Fund that supported approximately $1 million of research projects (Brodie & Baker, 2010; Brodie, 2008). Some have already spoken of this neoliberal sentiment as a backlash towards, or the undoing of, feminist activisms (Bromley & Ahmad, 2006; McRobbie, 2009). The gradual dismantling of social welfare in Canada resulted in the anti-violence sector that white Anglo feminist activists have fought for since the 1970s being severely eroded (Bonisteel & Green, 2005; Morrow et al., 2004).
The withdrawal of funding on women’s issues that involved research and lobbying of the government ultimately left many anti-violence organizations with depoliticized commitments around anti-violence (Bonisteel & Green, 2005; Brodie, 2008; Strumm, 2015). The neoliberal state relies heavily on women-centered non-government organizations to provide a “theory of gender minus feminist critique of power relations,” thereby depoliticizing their commitments to social justice and social transformation (Mohanty, 2013, p. 972). Mohanty (2013, p. 971) suggests that the depoliticizing of social justice commitments:

- requires removing the social significance of racism, classism, or (hetero)sexism as institutionalized systems of power and inequality from the public domain,
- substituting individual prejudice and psychological dispositions or expressions of ‘hate’ instead.

As a result, participants perceived the sector involved with ending violence against women as being more harmful for women experiencing violence who were not white, able-bodied, and cisgender. For example, some participants pointed to the ongoing instances of transphobia that they witnessed still existing in the sector, especially women’s only spaces that ultimately led to excluding transgender women from seeking supports and resources from government funded organizations. As a result of observing consistent transphobia from those organizations, Dalila shared that she had to make the decision to remove herself from collaborating with some of these organizations. She told me that she “made the personal decision that if an anti-violence organizing group did not include transgender women in their violence against women positions, then we had a considerable difference in values that I was unwilling to set aside.” Similarly, Faye
argued that it was her responsibility as a cisgender person involved in anti-violence to actively involve the experiences of transgender women. She said this is because:

it’s usually transgender women who are doing the most work to advocate for ending violence, so the one thing that as allies we can do is share that story but also offer accountability for other cisgender people to be like “this is a thing.”

These comments from Faye and Dalila draw attention to the long history of organizations involved in violence against women excluding transgender women. Although many organizations are inclusive of transgender women’s experiences of violence, some organizations have denied transgender women services and supports, as best demonstrated in the case of one of Canada’s oldest feminist rape crisis centers. In the 1990s, the Vancouver Rape Relief center denied the rights of a transgender woman to volunteer with their organization, stating that they were a space only for women who are cisgender. Although this transgender woman successfully filed a human rights complaint against the organization, and the courts found that the organization had discriminated against her, the organization was allowed to continue promoting the interests of only cisgender women (Nixon v. Vancouver Rape Relief, 2007). The result of this highly visible case has had far-reaching impacts that have continued to fester, as transgender women’s safety and perspectives are viewed as less important than those of cisgender women (Pyne, 2015).

When I asked participants why having racialized women more involved in the anti-violence sector around violence against women was necessary, Kalliope explained to me that “our experiences are different, our concerns are different, our risks are different.” She further expressed to me that:
I’ve had to deal with a lot of material and a lot of learning around tools that have recently been created that have not had women of color in mind or low income people in mind, Indigenous people in mind, and so you could see that there is a gap and that gap is difficult to navigate especially when people are just trying to seek safety.

Her explanation highlights how, in many cases, racialized women experience trauma and revictimization when seeking out anti-violence sector supports that do not center their experiences (Bhuyan et al., 2014; Crenshaw 1991; Durazo, 2017).

Participants also shared two examples of how the needs of many racialized women experiencing violence were unmet: the sector’s reliance on law enforcement as a support and protection for women’s safety; and some of the sector’s use of culturally inappropriate materials and resources for racialized women. First, participants shared with me that they have come across many resources from organizations involved in ending violence against women that recommend all women who experience violence to file reports to law enforcement. As previously discussed (see Chapter 3.5.), the sector involved in ending violence against women that is funded by the federal government is strongly associated with carceral politics that rely on punishment and imprisonment as a solution for all perpetrators of violence. Reflecting more of an anti-carceral approach, and demonstrating that such blanket recommendations to report to police are inappropriate, Levana commented:

white feminists, I would say, they have a vested interest in having a worldview that rapists are just vile and destructive and they just need to be locked up in jail and throw away the key and maybe castrate them. And if something happens, for
sure, call the police immediately. Really? Oh, you don’t think there’s anyone who would think twice about calling the police on someone from their own community? Like, are you not even getting that?

Levana’s concerns about the sector were in its ongoing association with white feminism and carceral feminism. Such an approach further reinforces violence against those already marginalized and does little to fix the structural issues of violence (Bummiler, 2008). Yet, the sector became dominated by voices that conformed to government guidelines that were focused primarily on experiences of white, able-bodied, cisgender women and a particular type of perpetrator, typically presented as a cisgender man and often racialized (Davis, 2000; Rankin & Vickers, 2007; Thobani, 2015).

According to participants, another experience of potential revictimization occurs for racialized women when they are seeking resources during or after experiencing violence. Kalliope shared with me that she worked closely with racialized women who have experienced violence. She told me that after some of these women would seek support from anti-violence organizations, they would be in distress from their experiences with the resources they were provided and Kalliope “had to do a lot of unlearning for folks around some of the language the [materials the organizations] had around shaming, to be honest, and it is often white women who work on those materials.”

The impact of primarily white feminist ideologies on anti-violence was similarly identified by Muslim women interviewed in Toronto (Tkaronto) who reported being on the receiving end of racist encounters from white anti-violence workers (Ahmad, 2018). Some of the examples these women shared of revictimization include white anti-violence workers forcing the removal of their veils, not attending to dietary specifications, and
statements with Orientalist-based assumptions of these women’s violent experiences (see Chapter 3.2.). Yet again, this demonstrates Muslim women’s experiences of violence being negatively stereotyped and essentialized. The behaviours of those white women who adopt white feminist practices reinforce the image of both the Third World and Orientalist woman, suggesting that all Muslim women are submissive and ignorant about their own situation (Mohanty, 1988). The impacts of such racist encounters with white feminists may further lead to Muslim women being reluctant to seek help or to trust the support systems currently in place.

In relation to this ignorance toward the concerns of Muslim women who experience violence, Calla shared with me that she did not perceive organizations involved in ending violence against women as being concerned with conversations about gendered Islamophobia. She explained that “the conversations about the ‘barbaric cultural practices’ and Islamophobia are part of [anti-violence work], because gendered Islamophobia is so high, but people weren’t talking about it in 2011.” Calla’s comments reflect the fact that, under PM Harper’s leadership, there was a high number of statements and policy changes between 2008 and 2013 focused on immigration (Bhuyan et al., 2014). Many policies and bills36 were introduced specifically targeting immigrant Muslim communities. In 2009, a new citizenship guide for immigrants to Canada declared that new Canadians cannot engage in “‘barbaric cultural practices’ such as

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36 Cultural ideals were further solidified through the introduction of Bill S-7, the “Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act” in 2014. This Bill aimed to revitalize Canada’s position against offenses that were not part of “Canadian values,” largely targeting immigrant, and specifically Muslim, communities with threats of deportation or the inability to enter the country (Bhuyan et al., 2014; Thobani, 2015). Notably, the Bill emphasized the toughening of laws against polygamy practices, forced and underage marriages, and honour killings. To enforce these apparent non-Canadian values, a hotline through the RCMP was promised for neighbours to report on “barbaric cultural practices” they witness or suspect (Lakritz, 2015).
genital mutilation and ‘honour killings’” (Stone, 2009). Furthermore, in 2011, PM Harper introduced a ban for those wearing face coverings during citizenship ceremonies (Bhuyan et al., 2014). By introducing such policies and regulations, cultural values based on Orientalist tropes were reinforced and effectively coded into federal Canadian law.

As many authors have pointed out, the amendments made by PM Harper were already established through the Criminal Code (e.g., Bhuyan et al., 2014; Thobani, 2015). Yet, their placement within the two additional Acts required less evidence than under the Criminal Code, making immigrant communities more likely to be inadmissible to the country or even deported (METRAC, 2016; Walkom, 2014). Furthermore, through an examination of major statements and policy changes, it is apparent how neoliberal influence, white supremacy, and cis-heteropatriarchy impacted many immigrant Muslim women in Canada and their experiences of violence. For instance, PM Harper’s Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney stated that this series of bills would send “a clear message that the abuse of our immigration system will not be tolerated” (as quoted in Posadzki, 2011, n.p.). His statement was based on assumptions about immigrants being a drain on the social welfare system (Arat-Koc, 1999), especially immigrants with disabilities who were assumed to be an economic burden on the health care industry and, therefore, too costly to allow Canadian state entry (El-Lahib & Wehbi, 2012; Wong, 2012).

These policy changes not only impacted which immigrant women were allowed to enter the country, but also impacted these women’s access to health and social service programs, such as anti-violence services and resources (Arat-Koc, 2012; Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2000). As an example, these policy changes impacted many Muslim immigrant
women’s safety, creating environments where Muslim women who experience violence would be less likely to report their experiences to authorities for fear of deportation of themselves or their family members (Bhuyan et al., 2014; Jayasuriya-Illiesinghe, 2018; METRAC, 2016). As a result, in instances of violence against women, Muslim women face an intersection of Islamophobia, ableism, and sexism from the state, which is further reinforced by an anti-violence sector with heavy ties to settler colonial federal resources (Bhuyan et al., 2014; Jayasuriya-Illiesinghe, 2018; Zine, 2002). Despite many regulations and policies targeting Muslim women, especially immigrant women and those who may experience violence, Calla did not observe many organizations involved in ending violence against women respond unless they were specifically associated with a Muslim group or community. Although such structural issues seem obvious in hindsight, as noted by Calla, “people weren’t talking about it in 2011.”

Such an overwhelmingly white feminist centered sector involved in ending violence against women can be explained by how white supremacy is operationalized to orient certain bodies and decisions. For example, using the lens of phenomenology, Ahmed (2007, p. 149) questioned how whiteness lived in the background to experience and posited that whiteness could be “described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space, and what they ‘can do.’” In the case of the anti-violence sector’s entanglement with the settler colonial, white supremacist, neoliberal state, a shift towards increasing professionalization oriented the sector towards whiteness. As exemplified by Kalliope’s comments about “unlearning” because “it’s often white women” who run and create materials for anti-violence organizations, those bodies that are passable as more white
and, in this case, aligned with white feminism, are more likely to take up the spaces within anti-violence organizations and benefit from the services provided (Ahmed, 2007).

The unmarked-ness of whiteness has also been termed “white rage,” which is enacted primarily through policies, legislation, and regulation. As noted by Anderson (2016, p. 3), “white rage is not about visible violence, but rather it works its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies. It wreaks havoc subtly, almost imperceptibly.” Anderson (2014; 2016) further argues that the catalyst for white rage is specifically Black advancement towards full and equal citizenship in the US, but more broadly about the move towards multicultural democracy, and that this rage is a backlash and an operationalizing of white supremacy. In the Canadian context, “white rage was enacted to protect and perpetuate the building of a ‘white’ Canadian nation-state” (Deliovsky & Kitossa, 2020, p. v). Deliovsky and Kitossa (2020) urge that white cisgender women be included in discussions of white rage given their complicit, and sometimes direct, role in the ongoing enforcement of settler colonialism, racism, cisheteropatriarchy, and white supremacy in the context of challenging and ending violence against women.

4.2.2. Public image of PM Trudeau’s feminism

During Justin Trudeau’s election campaign and his first few years as Prime Minister, the mainstream media proclaimed various feminist firsts from the Liberal

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37 For instance, during the election campaign, Trudeau announced that all potential federal Liberal party candidates would have to support the party’s pro-choice position for reproductive rights and justice (Wingrove, 2014). Shortly after his win, Trudeau presented Canada’s first gender-balanced cabinet of Members of Parliament (Ditchburn, 2015); appointed the first Minister for the Status of Women under a new name, Women’s and Gender Equality (WAGE) (Status of Women, 2018); promised to apply a gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) to its policy development, requiring policy analysts across all federal departments “to apply a gender-intersectional lens to all policies and programs, ideally at all stages of policy development, implementation, and evaluation” (Paterson & Scala, 2020, p. 54); presented a feminist-informed budget that contained women-focused initiatives including supports for anti-violence
Party, constructing an image of Canada as moving towards more feminist policies and initiatives (Ditchburn, 2015; Wingrove, 2014). Although feminism within the government is not new to Canada (Rankin & Wilcox, 2004), the attention to Trudeau’s feminism was in deep contrast to his predecessor’s policies and public support for women’s issues more broadly. However, so-called feminist strategies and approaches under PM Trudeau lacked an intersectional analysis, reinforcing participants’ discontent for the PM’s image of feminism. As Faye stated: “the PM’s feminism is not intersectional and he doesn’t know the difference because the people around him don’t know.”

To Faye and Calla, the PM’s lack of intersectional awareness around violence against women was particularly memorable, and disappointing, as a result of the public image of the Trudeaus around feminism and anti-racism issues. First, Faye recounted a public event taking place in recognition of Martin Luther King Day where Sophie Trudeau:

broke out in song to her children who were in the audience […] So you just basically insulted every Black person on the planet and there’s got to be a sense of entitlement and just self-aggrandizement to sing a song that has nothing to do with the event to your children. Your children. That’s what nap time is for [laughter]. You know what I mean? Till this day I’m angry about that [laughter]. She needed to apologize for that, I’m not sure that she did.

(Status of Women Canada, 2018); included initiatives supporting queer communities (Dobrowolsky, 2020); started a national dialogue on racism (Dobrowsky, 2020); prepared a strategy to end violence against women as part of their larger commitment to end gender-based violence (Status of Women, 2018); and, finally, initiated the steps for a National Inquiry into MMIWG2+ as part of a move towards healing the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government (Government of Canada, 2015).
This anecdote draws attention to how Sophie Trudeau made an event about honouring Black people to be, instead, about herself and her family, which is reminiscent of the centering of white feminism. More specifically, to Faye, Sophie Trudeau was perceived to be centering her own family’s concerns over the concerns of Black people and the violence that they continue to face as a result of ongoing racism from the state, without either recognizing the very different position she holds in society or offering an apology for her inappropriate actions.

For Faye, this experience was just one example of many she shared that expressed her realization that white women feminists were not always going to have concerns of racialized women at heart. She told me that such experiences helped her start “deconstructing how women could be misogynists too and women can be racist too, especially white women.” Faye’s example of Sophie Trudeau shows the persistence of white feminism in contemporary Canadian politics and an ongoing and continued disappointment from racialized feminists.

Faye shared another example about how she remembers the PM’s lack of intersectional awareness. This memory of hers was focused on the communication material of the PM supporting and empowering girls. She discussed a photo taken with PM Trudeau on the International Day of the Girl and explained how the framing of the photo was problematic, with Faye stating that there:

is this picture of [Trudeau] on one side, I guess his daughter’s on the other, she’s sitting in the chair, in the PM’s chair, but I’m like “why are you taking up so much space?” You can barely see [his daughter]. Like, he should have never been in the picture except maybe a hand, you know? […] the problem is that he just
suffocates the space, just like men suffocate the space. If you’ve ever been in a meeting in academia, or business, or government and you start talking and the men just start talking over you, that’s what it reminds you of, and that’s the messaging and those are the optics [of this communications material]. And I’m just like “there’s nobody there to tell him.” There’s nobody there to tell him, or else they don’t want to tell him or something.

Similar to the example with Sophie Trudeau, Faye perceived PM Trudeau to be centering himself during an instance when the spotlight should have been on those more marginalized.

These examples about the Trudeaus, despite their constructed public feminist image, are a function of what Rottenberg (2014) has termed neoliberal feminism. Rottenberg (2014) posits that the intertwining of both feminism and neoliberalism creates a new feminism that differs from its liberal feminist beginnings. Whereas liberal feminism posed a critique of liberalism, neoliberal feminism does not pose any critique of neoliberalism (Rottenberg, 2014). Neoliberal feminism “helps to neutralize the potential critique from other strands of feminism” whereby concerns of inequality are rooted in maintaining a middle-class, work-family equality with men as opposed to stemming from a structural problem (Rottenberg, 2014, p. 432). Furthermore, feminist activities that mobilize neoliberal discourses have been examined through the formation of a neoliberal feminist subject who is responsible for her own, and her heteronormative nuclear family’s, well-being and care (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019; Rottenberg, 2014). More significantly, neoliberal feminism offers no critique or challenge to the dominant mode of
governmentality through capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism, sexism, and other forms of overlapping oppressions (Rottenberg, 2014).

The lack of PM Trudeau’s intersectional awareness was apparent to participants and further evident in how he approached related policies and regulations around ending violence against women. As Calla told me, even with feminist-informed policies in place, “we’re not moving forward to end violence against women, we really aren’t. We are redistributing a little bit, but that’s it.” An example of this non-distribution of resources towards ending violence against women is through the new gender-based framework that was launched under the Liberal Party’s gender equality political platform38. However, the characterization of the types of violence prioritized is limiting in that it includes those instances that seem only to involve: criminal harassment or stalking; early or forced marriage; emotional or psychological abuse; financial abuse; “honour” violence; neglect; physical abuse; sexual abuse of adults and children; and technology-assisted violence. Although the gender-based framework promises to draw out awareness of root and structural causes of violence against women, these supports are meant for specific women’s experiences of violence (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2019). Such characterization of violence emphasizes patriarchal violence through intimate partner violence and sexual violence as the only forms of violence facing (primarily) women. Furthermore, any violence inflicted upon women that stemmed from racism, colonialism,
homophobia, and other multiple and intersecting oppressions was still missing from the framework, emphasizing a priority of providing supports and resources for those who experience violence only based on sexist oppressions.

Moreover, this characterization of violence leaves no room to address routinized, state, and structural aspects of violence (see Chapter 3.1.2). For example, there is no mention in the framework of violence experienced from the state or mention of a commitment to end MMIWG2+. Although the Liberal government finally accepted the call for a national inquiry into MMIWG2+39, little redistribution of resources and power was actually acquired. Ultimately, this report delivers 231 Calls for Justice that are directed at multiple actors, from governments to different public institutions and everyday citizens (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). However, the process was heavily criticized40 by scholars, advocates, and families of MMIWG2+. For instance, the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) and the Ontario chapter of NWAC, two organizations that were at the forefront of pushing for an inquiry since the 1990s, withdrew their support for the inquiry in 2017 following the resignation of the five key Commissioners involved (Harris, 2017; NWAC, 2016).

39 The National Inquiry was launched in 2016 with the final report published in 2019.

40 Some of the concerns included that the Inquiry relied on a colonial legal framework, despite recommendations from advocacy organizations (ONWAC, 2017; NWAC, 2016). Two of the lead Commissioners were lawyers and the Inquiry took a legalistic approach with the use of formal hearings and testimonies (Walsh, 2017; ONWAC, 2017). Despite this, the Inquiry had no authority to find any individual, organization, or government criminally liable (Walsh, 2017). Another issue was the lack of scope for investigating police violence against Indigenous women (Walsh, 2017). Such decisions contributed to many accusing the National Inquiry of upholding colonial practices, prompting one of the Commissioners to resign (Pember, 2017). The process itself was also criticized by advocates and family members of MMIWG2+ for the lack of communication and transparency in the process (Graham, 2017; ONWAC, 2017), as well as its exclusion of Elders and Indigenous women in the leadership process (ONWAC, 2017). Lastly, a major tension was in the role of the report and its findings and recommendations, that being that governments are not bound to such reports (Walsh, 2017).
Finally, the systemic changes that the gender-based framework recommends includes more training and education of educators, police, and those involved in the legal system (Status of Women, 2019). According to the logic supporting this recommendation, as discussed by Paterson and Scala (2020, p. 59), such violence is: represented as problematic not because of violent perpetrators, but because of a lack of data, under-reporting, and non-responsive representatives of the justice system. Thus solutions are premised on providing victims with better information and improving the gender balance of professionals within the legal system.

In addition to continuing to rely on a carceral approach, this framework presents women experiencing violence as being responsible for reporting their experiences rather than addressing the violence itself, which reinforces victim-blaming. Therefore, the characterization of violence against women that is provided by the settler colonial, neoliberal state still emphasizes intimate partner violence and sexual violence as the only experiences of violence that women face and that need to be addressed. This framework thus pays little attention to the intersectionality of violent experiences, including violence instigated and perpetuated by the state itself.

4.2.3. Digital services and ending violence against women

Two participants expressed their hope for organizations involved in ending violence against women to pay closer attention to how the government is digitizing their public services, potentially making it more difficult for women who experience violence to access benefits, resources, and supports. For example, both Faye and Kalliope discussed their interest in keeping up with how all levels of government were planning to
be making use of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies, given their impacts on those most marginalized. Faye explained that she’s:

interested in discrimination in technology, artificial intelligence and all of that, that’s a really big thing for me right now […] Increasingly the Canadian government is using it for immigration, for security purposes and because it’s so flawed, it’s going to be awful.

Faye’s comment is similar to Eubanks’ (2018) research that illustrates how the US’s move towards increasing digitization and use of artificial intelligence for public services is having disastrous impacts on the most marginalized, such as those going through the social welfare system or trying to find housing as houseless individuals. As research by Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru (2018) has demonstrated, these algorithms regularly discriminate based on race and gender. This is largely because the training datasets being inputted are themselves based in racism and sexism and, therefore, reproduce discriminatory patterns (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Noble, 2019).

In line with this, Kalliope shared that she believed “Canada is definitely pushing for intense digitization across the country” but organizations involved in supporting those facing violence need to be aware of these changes because she wonders “how are we going to be equipped? So maybe access to resources is going to be shifting, the ways in which data is collected is shifting and so, you know, that inevitably puts women at risk.” She further explained that:

the digitization of public servants, that directly impacts shelters, that directly impacts counsellors who are supporting, for example, a woman who is
transitioning from a relationship or they’ve been in a relationship and need to access resources but then those resources are only digital right.

Kalliope’s comment draws attention to the expected impacts of the shift towards increasing digitization of social services, specifically with women’s shelters who need to access resources and files that are completely digitized. For Kalliope, organizations generally need to be aware of such changes to the industry and she would like to see digital service policies and programs consulting with affected groups more. As the Canadian government aims to similarly digitize all their public services, or make public services accessible through online means (see Canada Digital Service, 2019), the manner in which these technologies impact marginalized individuals is a necessary consideration in order to avoid reproducing discriminatory patterns. Kalliope’s comments also illustrate how some of the participants in this study are aware that technologies are not equally beneficial to all because of the biases built in them, especially for those who are marginalized at multiple and intersecting systems of power.

4.3. Recommendations for New Governing Systems

Apart from wanting to see more involvement with the organizations involved in ending violence against women and the increasing digitization of public services and programs, some participants shared their hopes for what future political involvement in ending violence could look like. As a recommendation for an alternative form of governance, Levana spoke to me about her preferred approach away from one that starts with capitalism, white supremacy, and cisheteropatriarchy. Her vision of a governing system was one based on compassion “where it is community-based, where we start with the foundation with support of all, where we want to have healthy communities.” Her
vision most closely aligns with a transformative justice approach (see Chapter 3.5). Yet, her experience expressing this anti-carceral feminist vision in anti-violence networks dominated by white feminists was met with Levana being ignored and even removed as a friend or follower by many in shared online spaces.

Another participant revealed to me that she hoped that work on MMIWG2+ could be sustainable in the long run and conducive to a system of self-governance that did not need to rely on colonial government for funding and resources. Although she recognized that many people are doing the work of putting together the data and information of MMIWG2+, she noted that most of these people were a part of settler colonial governments themselves. She also noted that, from her experience interacting with information from some of these databases, most did not include information from those who identify as Two-Spirit individuals and there were no cases beyond settler colonial borders. In contrast to such databases, this participant envisions a dedicated activist and research space that has no ties to colonial governments, but is instead run and organized by Indigenous communities alongside family members of MMIWG2+, with no exclusions based on settler colonial borders.

4.4. Counternarratives of Violence Against Women

Participants created and circulated their own counternarratives that challenge dominant framings and ideas about violence against women. Whereas participants perceived dominant and persistent narratives of violence from the mainstream news media and from settler colonial policies and regulations, their understanding of violence aligns with the understandings arising from intersectionality (see Chapter 3.1.2). For instance, participants’ counternarratives emphasize including the incidents and causes of
violence as part of a larger conflict over power, such as Faye’s approach to her analysis of violence: “I became interested in power and power connections and the expressions of power […] that’s the lens through which I probably look at these things from. Like, who’s in power? Who feels disempowered? Who does this? Who does that?” Faye’s interest in power relationships in relation to violence differed from dominant narratives of anti-violence in mainstream media coverage or within a primarily white feminist sector that works to prevent and end violence against women.

More specifically, these participants were drawing attention to intersectional experiences of violence against women. The first area of violence that was emphasized through my interviews\(^ {41} \) with these nine participants was interpersonal violence that involved more than gendered or sexual violence, such as: racist sexism; Islamophobia; MMIWG2+; racialized homophobia; transphobic racial violence; online racist trolling (see Chapter 6); and refugee and immigrant women’s experiences. The second area of violence that was emphasized by participants was violence from the settler colonial state. The experiences they mentioned included: intergenerational colonial trauma; police brutality of Black women; a lack of structural social supports for those experiencing violence who are poor, immigrants, disabled, and/or transgender; and the role of comprehensive and sex positive sex education programming. These experiences of violence emphasize how gendered oppression is but one of the multiple and intersecting oppressions facing women.

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\(^ {41} \) Examples are inclusive of evidence already presented in this chapter and evidence that will be presented in Chapter 6.
4.5. Conclusion

In answering the first part of my research question of why racialized women participate in online activism that challenges violence against women in Canada, this chapter has demonstrated that these nine participants are resisting and challenging the continued exclusion and marginalization of racialized women from framings and supports for prevention and safety in Canada that are largely based on white feminism. In the first part of the chapter, I shared the dominant and persistent narratives of violence from mainstream news coverage, the non-profit sector involved in ending violence against women, and from settler colonial state policies that participants believed to privilege certain women’s experiences of violence. When violence is misperceived and misrepresented through the lens of white feminism, the specific types of racism, ableism, and homophobia, for example, that women experience are less likely to be recognized and attended to with appropriate intervention and prevention strategies. Furthermore, rather than recognizing the structural and political factors and institutions that produce and reinforce violence against racialized women, such violence continues to be viewed solely in the dominant (i.e., white, straight, cisgender, able-bodied) cultural context, leading to stereotyping and further revictimization.

In the second part of this chapter, I outlined counternarratives of instances and experiences of violence that these participants were trying to make visible through their activism. These fell into two broad themes: instances of violence from perpetrators analyzed from an intersectional lens, and instances of violence that were structural – that is, state-related and systemic aspects that enable and reinforce violence against women, especially as it intersects with racism perpetrated by the settler colonial state. As
alternatives to the dominant framings of violence, the counternarratives from these nine participants illustrate that violence experienced by racialized women requires a broader understanding of violence. Violence targeting racialized women, from their perspectives, is not just about the sexism they face, but rather experiences based on racism, sexism, transphobia, and ableism. Moreover, the violence faced by racialized women also comes from the settler colonial state, which needs to be taken into account in discussions and support for ending violence.

By asking participants to provide context for their involvement in online activism, this chapter argued that participants’ involvement in online activism to challenge violence against women in Canada was in reaction to continued oppression by those in powerful positions, with these individuals and groups shaping the discourses and resources available for racialized women who experience violence. In contrast with this often single-axis approach, an intersectional approach reveals and aligns with the complex, context-specific, and persistent oppression shared by participants in this study. The overall sentiment from participants was the need for a move away from current approaches and toward an intersectional approach to end violence against women. This collective sentiment was effectively summarized by Calla, who asserted that “Canada is still in a white feminist moment,” a comment that is especially relevant given the neoliberal white feminist policies of PM Justin Trudeau and their ongoing impact on racialized women experiencing violence.

With this contextual picture of many of the reasons influencing these participants’ activism, the following chapter shifts focus towards how participants used various digital
media technologies to circulate their counternarratives and mobilize others towards challenging and ending violence against women.
Chapter 5: “You need to know how to connect or interact with people”

The previous chapter outlined some of the major contexts as to why participants engaged in online activism to challenge and end violence against women in Canada. In what follows, I discuss how these participants were involved in online activism towards these goals. I argue that participants employed various digital media technologies as part of their activism to challenge dominant narratives and coverage of violence (see Chapter 4) as a way to: facilitate the dissemination of their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of violence against women; intervene in public discussions of violence with their counternarratives; and/or expand their networks of support towards collectively ending violence. However, participants noted that creating content online did not ensure that they reached their activist goals. Rather, some participants described that they still faced issues of gatekeeping by the design and cultural norms associated with Facebook and Twitter, ultimately shaping their activism.

In the first part of this chapter, I reveal that, unlike much of the focus of media and research attention on online activism around violence against women (see Chapter 1), participants in this study were not primarily creating and using hashtags for their online activism. Instead, participants expressed using resource-based websites, podcasts, and social media profiles and pages to broadcast their counternarratives. These were user-generated, low-budget, operating outside of traditional media systems, and a way for activists to harness the power of the media to tell their stories, perspectives, and experiences of violence without gatekeepers of traditional mainstream news media editing and misrepresenting their content.
However, participants ultimately all relied on corporate social media platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter, to circulate their content and widen their networks of support. Therefore, the second section of this chapter examines participants’ engagement and interactions with social media users, namely through: intervening in dominant publics; creating and sharing memes; direct tagging of key actors; bridging and sharing resources; and building and maintaining online enclaves of support.

Finally, this chapter illuminates ways in which Facebook and Twitter presented a range of barriers for many participants and were, therefore, biased towards certain users while further marginalizing others. For instance, some participants were better equipped to navigate social media platforms for their online activism than others. This distinction was evident along three areas that created very different experiences for the participants: having already established networks of support; the time, skills, and resources required to engage with others via social media platforms; and the assumed abilities of all users.

Further, although some participants were better able to use social media in their online activism, Facebook and Twitter ultimately shaped the visibility of their activism through the design and cultural norms of these platforms.

5.1. Beyond Twitter Hashtags

Though participants were acquainted with widely-used hashtags around violence against women, including #MeToo, #MMIW, and #BeenRapedNeverReported (see Chapter 1), six of the nine participants indicated that they did not steadily contribute to these hashtags, nor did they often create their own with the intention of forming a trending hashtag. Participants who did use these trending hashtags did so strategically, using already established hashtags to signal what their post was about. An example of
this practice is evident in Dalila sharing that she would use hashtags “for signaling in a more concise way what content is being covered in a particular piece of media.”

Participants were more likely to create topical hashtags that resulted in having more staying power than ad-hoc trending hashtags. For instance, those who did create their own hashtags seemed to draw attention to ongoing issues related to violence that were less ephemeral than political uprisings and on-the-street protests. Calla, who at the time of our conversation had just over 10,000 Twitter followers on her personal account, had been a part of a team that created a hashtag campaign related to ending violence against women. They used a topically focused hashtag instead of an issue-based ad hoc hashtag (e.g., #MeToo or #BeenRapedNeverReported), which was then used by a small Twitter network, primarily composed of those who knew Calla and were connected with her network. However, she was surprised that months and even years after the initial launch, she would still see the hashtag being used on Twitter, stating proudly: “it’s something we didn’t think would be a forever campaign but people still use that hashtag.” The longevity of the hashtag she and her team created is significant, as trending hashtags are largely ephemeral.

Most participants, however, perceived Twitter hashtags in general to have little value for their activism. For instance, Azami told me that she used to follow trending hashtags but that:

I don’t necessarily know how much people rely on those kinds of hashtags for stories about violence against women anymore, but I think at a point it used to be really helpful, especially when you’re just being introduced to an idea. I think that’s when it’s most useful.
Similarly, Dalila shared that she occasionally used hashtags “in instances where a group is live-tweeting an event” because “the use of a hashtag makes the conversation easy to follow for those who may be unable to attend in-person.” However, Dalila also shared that she recognized that some individuals may use those trending hashtags to share their personal stories of violence, but that was not the type of content that she would seek out herself. “Personally, I rarely check in on conversations related to those hashtags,” she told me, “because I find the conversations to be 1) not conversations, 2) too fast moving/overwhelming, or 3) rarely different than my personal feed.” These comments suggest that participants’ use of hashtags differed from how other activists have reported using hashtags, such as for sharing personal stories of one’s experience with violence (see Chapter 1).

Instead of using trending hashtags, participants in this study revealed that they preferred the relatively low-cost, user-generated digital media platforms of creating their own personal resource-based websites, social media platform pages and profiles, and podcasting for their online activism. Not only were these spaces convenient for participants to access and to use, but there were also few to no media gatekeepers involved, as they are with mainstream media. Ultimately, such platforms afforded relatively more space for participants to challenge dominant framings of experiences of violence against women.

5.1.1. Personal resource-based websites

All participants created personal resource-based websites to digitally host counternarratives of violence against women and included additional information about their backgrounds, their involvement in activist campaigns, and information about
specific campaigns or events for their activism. Although some of these websites contain blogs, blogs were not the only aspect of their websites and, thus, these websites presume less interaction with the audience as they were more created for broadcasting content.

Personal websites provided participants with a space to share their counternarratives of violence without worry of being misrepresented or misinterpreted by editors and journalists. As an example, Calla shared with me that allowing journalists to tell her story of her involvement in anti-violence made her feel “really tokenized” and she “was really upset” when the journalists would repeatedly minimize accomplishments around her activism and, instead, emphasize her personal experiences of violence. However, with the support of her friends, she created a website to use as a space where others could refer to her activist projects, her story, and resources about violence on her own terms and in her own words. Calla further explained that she “started using it as a way to actually control narratives that I felt were taken away from me.” This example is illustrative of how Calla used websites as a site of resistance by defining her own personal biography. Likewise, Faye explained that she uses her website to “just talk about my experiences and perspectives, which are mine and mine alone and I own them so, who’s going to tell me I can’t talk about my own experiences, right?” Significantly, these comments expressed how personal websites were an alternative to news media journalists, allowing individuals to frame messages according to their own needs.

Creating websites is a common tactic used by many activists seeking to maintain control over the framing of their movements, as demonstrated through the creation of Indymedia.org (Kidd, 2003), Idle No More blogs and websites (Simpson et al., 2018), and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement websites (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). In the
example of BLM, an anti-violence movement, the mainstream media narrative has largely associated the movement with a single issue: police brutality against men, to the exclusion of a more intersectional narrative (Cobb, 2016; Garza, 2014; Hill Collins, 2017). As one of the movement’s founders commented, “in our communities, black trans folk, gender-nonconforming folk, black queer folk, black women, black disabled folk—we have been leading movements for a long time, but we have been erased from the official narrative” (Cobb, 2016, para 24). Supporters of the movement seemed to be largely unaware of the people and values behind the movement and erased the labour and experiences of so many Black people, such as queer Black women and their concerns of violence.42

In response to the reductionist mainstream media narratives of BLM, BLM’s three founders, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tomet, published their origin story as a blog post on Feminist Wire (Garza, 2014), followed by creating a similar permanent standing section on the main BLM webpage called BLM “Herstory” (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). This herstorical approach taken by Garza, Cullors, and Tomet in providing their origin story on an independent feminist blog and on the BLM website chronicled and archived the movement from their perspectives (Lindsey, 2015). Sharing their voices and telling their own stories on websites, as opposed to having their story being told for them, operates to challenge narratives in dominant public spaces (Hill Collins, 1990; Doane et al., 2017). An individual having the power to construct her own biography, retelling her own personal narrative, essentially frees her from dominant narratives that sought to

42 In 2016, during Toronto’s annual Pride Parade, BLM Toronto activists staged a sit-in to draw attention and awareness to the exclusion and marginalization of racialized groups from Pride celebrations. During the sit-in, BLM Toronto activists presented a list of demands that were created in consultation with queer and trans racialized communities (CBC News, 2016).
maintain racialized women’s oppression (Hill Collins, 1990), as indicated in Calla’s desire to “control narratives that I felt were taken away from me.” In this context, creating personal resource-based websites offered participants the opportunity to tell their own stories of anti-violence activism and violence more generally on their own terms.

5.1.2. Social media pages and profiles

Participants similarly relied on the low cost and convenience of social media platforms for hosting their counternarratives, specifically creating Twitter profiles and Facebook pages. Facebook pages were used by participants instead of personal Facebook profiles because pages better accommodate brands, businesses, and organizations who want to interact with online Facebook users, allowing participants to keep their Facebook profiles more personal and more private. However, unlike Facebook profiles that cater to individuals such as the participants in this study, Facebook pages are designed as “a free way for businesses, brands, celebrities, causes and organizations to reach their audience,” where the primary benefit is using Facebook’s advertising tools to further one’s reach (Facebook, 2020, para 3). Twitter profiles were created and used by participants in the same ways as Facebook pages. Most participants created pages and profiles for individual campaigns to continuously provide commentary and share media, indexing the information and having it available outside of filtering algorithms of trending hashtags. Sometimes this continued long after the intended lifespan of the campaign and, therefore, these pages and profiles served as a digital archive of participants’ content.

Twitter profiles and Facebook pages for online campaigns were useful for participants in indexing counternarratives, allowing other users to follow and keep up with posts. For participants involved in anti-violence teams, using a social media profile
or page was more convenient for multiple people from the same team to post content from one account. As indicated by Faye, “we started beefing up our Twitter, our Facebook and really putting stories out there that had to do with women and race and sexuality and all of these things, transgender individuals.” These spaces offered participants room to provide continuous and ongoing content related to their resistant narratives towards challenging and ending violence against women.

Twitter profiles and Facebook pages were not just populated with participants’ own content, but also strategically included retweeting and sharing content related to violence from other racialized women. For instance, when referring to what Calla shared and retweeted about instances of violence, she replied: “I’m not willing to amplify people that are not going to have a mix of an analysis about these things.” Many participants discussed retweeting and sharing posts about violence from those who were also racialized women because of the overwhelming white feminist discourse on social media, which has been the case for trending hashtags such as #YesAllWomen, #SolidarityForWomen, #MeToo, and #MMIW (Brown et al., 2017; Diehl, 2019; Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016; Kuo, 2016; Loza, 2014; Trott, 2020).

Compared to personal websites, these social media spaces were less about static content and more about interactive and ongoing conversations with others (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Therefore, as opposed to personal websites, Twitter profiles and Facebook pages are more likely to host updates, events, calls to action, and resources more likely to appear in followers' news feeds, while retweeting and sharing information/resources from other similar networks to their followers.
5.1.3. Podcasting

In addition to participants who created and used personal websites and social media pages and profiles, three participants also created podcasts to provide context and calls to action on stories about violence against women that are left out of mainstream media. For these participants, exploring podcasting as a way to share stories about marginalized groups and the violence that they face seemed to have more potential to raise awareness about nuanced and intersectional understandings of violence than possible had participants relied solely upon mainstream media.

Referring to creating podcast episodes that averaged 40 minutes, Azami told me she “had a significant amount of time” to discuss issues of violence. She further stated that podcasting:

is the perfect way to tell stories on Indigenous communities because you have the time to go really in depth and to fully tell a story but you have the time to also connect the dots back to the bigger story and you really help people understand a part of our history that a lot of people don’t know about.

Her approach differed from her perception of mainstream news reporting on Indigenous communities and the violence that they face (see Chapter 4.1.2.) in that she wanted to take the time to humanize victims of violence, especially by providing stories and experiences of MMIWG2+. For instance, in a podcast episode, Azami discussed an incident of violence against an Indigenous woman as violence committed against “a woman or a girl who had a family, she was a mother or a daughter or a sister or an aunt who had the community that was still missing them and searching for justice.” After sharing stories of MMIWG2+ through multiple formats, including pitching news articles
to mainstream media and creating Facebook videos where she remembered “just feeling a bit unsatisfied or disappointed because of not being able to include all of it in a meaningful way,” Azami found podcasts to be the most suitable for her goals. The stories and experiences she wanted to share required more time and space to explain and present nuance to avoid reinforcing racist, colonialist, and sexist violence against these communities.

However, Azami noted a downside of telling such nuanced and intersectional experiences of violence against women, especially Indigenous women. She told me that the stories she shared on her podcast generally about Indigenous communities were not primarily meant for an Indigenous audience. Rather, these stories were shared explicitly to bring awareness to settlers to the ongoing and pervasive problem, and connections of Indigenous women’s violence, with settler colonialism. She explained that:

we don’t need to be educated in the same way about the trauma that we’ve experienced and we don’t need to understand the history of residential schools or the legacies of colonization because these are realities that we live with and are still living with.

Azami’s comment reflects Mardella’s earlier comment (see Chapter 4.1.2.) that non-Indigenous people seem to have little to no knowledge of “what even happened in Canada, really just horrible, horrible things,” and the connections between the violence that Indigenous women experience and the impacts of settler colonialism. To help correct this, Azami’s use of podcasting was aimed at providing this context to non-Indigenous listeners.
Similarly, Faye, reflecting on her podcast content and the feedback she has received from listeners, asserted: “I think that for a lot of people we are an entry way into activism, we’re like entry-level activism.” Although not all podcasts are used for such explicit activist purposes, podcasts used by marginalized groups often function as online spaces for audiences to learn about, and engage in, challenging systems of oppressions (Florini, 2015; Swiatek, 2018; Vrikki & Malik, 2019). These two stories of podcast use demonstrate an intended audience of those who want to learn more about intersectional experiences of violence more broadly, rather than those who are already well aware of these concerns, such as those living with the impacts.

Smartphones provide users with a host of both free and paid apps that support podcasts and, in 2020, 84% of Canadians reported owning a smartphone (Statistics Canada, 2021). With such widespread adoption of smartphones by those living in Canada, independent podcaster now have the potential to reach wider publics through broadcast media without the same editorial gatekeepers of mainstream media (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). Although larger corporate broadcasters also create podcasts, independent podcasters have room to flourish in this space as podcasts function primarily as a medium for users and creators to communicate and to connect (Berry, 2006; Sullivan, 2018; Vrikki & Malik, 2019). In the context of their podcasts, participants aimed to raise awareness about the intersectional experiences of violence against women with more personal discussions, aimed at a specific audience, that they perceived to rarely exist in dominant publics. For those participants who took up podcasting for their activism, independent podcasting is one way in which they have been able to ensure such largely
neglected stories are available through broadcast media (Tiffe & Hoffman, 2016; Vrikki & Malik, 2019).

Despite some similarities between podcasting and traditional forms of broadcast media, a major difference between the two is that one does not need to be a professional radio broadcaster to start a podcast. None of the participants in this study who started podcasts had any previous experience working with podcasts beyond being casual listeners. For example, Dalila told me that “we didn’t know what we were really doing at the time.” Likewise, two of the three participants who created podcasts relied on support from others they knew who had access to the audio and digital tools needed to create their podcast. One participant shared with me that she was loaned professional digital audio recording tools from an organization that she knew from previous collaborative work. This allowed her to get started with podcasting as she saved up to buy her preferred audio recording equipment. Notwithstanding the learning curve and audio equipment involved in producing and creating podcasts, three participants I interviewed found podcasting to be an effective way for them to share experiences of violence as a part of their activism to challenge and resist dominant framings of violence that center white feminist concerns.

5.2. Social Media Platform Building

Despite the various ways in which participants chose to host and broadcast their counternarratives and general content for their online activism, they revealed that they still needed to use Twitter and Facebook43 to disperse this content to others, gain support, and connect with others around ending and challenging violence against women.

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43 This finding may be due to one of my recruitment methods using Twitter and Facebook to find prospective participants.
Participants relied heavily on these corporate social media platforms largely because of their overall popularity, convenience, and low-cost way of quickly connecting to a wide group of diverse people. More specifically, Facebook and Twitter provided these participants with access to some online networks, including: networks of anti-violence activists; wider networks for potential increased support to push for social change; and networks of key actors, namely, journalists and politicians who regularly use these same social media platforms. Most significantly, reaching wider networks was important to share their content beyond those already involved in the community of ending violence against women, as explained by Nox:

I guess sometimes a challenge is expanding our viewers because maybe we start off with people who are involved with this work, violence against women, it’s often those organizations and those people who are interested in that that will respond right, it’s not always the general public.

For the participants in this study, sending their content beyond those individuals who may already be involved in the community required strategic use of social media. Such strategic use was noted in Faye’s comments based on her experiences with podcasting: “if you’re starting a podcast, don’t think you’re just going to get some equipment, record every week and just push it out. Oh no, this takes social media building.” Her comment reflected a trend within the growing\(^{44}\) podcasting industry where, although podcasting is relatively accessible for those individuals with a reliable high-speed Internet connection and audio recording equipment, global brands enjoy much

\(^{44}\) As of 2019, over 30 million individual podcast episodes were available to download or stream worldwide (Winn, 2019).
more significant success than independent podcasters as they have access to high-quality audio and professional editors (Berry, 2015; Sullivan, 2018; Swiatek, 2018; Vrikki & Malik, 2019). Therefore, low-budget podcasts must actively compete with global brands for the attention of podcast listeners.

Moreover, the growth in podcatcher applications (mobile applications involved in finding and listening to podcasts) and their algorithms further influence the relationship between listeners and audiences through their search and filtering processes (Morris & Patterson, 2015). Podcatcher applications emerged as a way for different mobile application companies to offer listeners a more convenient way to sift through the plethora of podcast shows and episodes that are available to them with the use of algorithms and content filtering (Morris & Patterson, 2015). These applications aid listeners in filtering podcasts, organizing available podcasts, and even recommending podcasts based on the listener’s previous podcast activity and categories (e.g., sports, politics, technology). However, widely downloaded podcatcher applications consistently favour podcasts from larger broadcast producers over those from independent podcasters (Morris & Patterson, 2015). Furthermore, those podcasts that are most likely to be promoted and recommended on major podcasting application platforms were created, hosted, and produced predominantly by white cisgender men, mirroring the lack of diversity in mainstream broadcast industries (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). Therefore, it is challenging for relatively unknown podcasts to heighten their visibility amongst all the other podcasts available, even with considerable social media skills (Sullivan, 2018; Vrikki and Malik, 2019).
In addition to their use in distributing podcasts, social media platforms were also used by participants to help distribute and broadcast their personal websites and social media pages. This was done by participants to help ensure their websites and pages appeared higher in Google’s ranking algorithm, which determines where the website shows up when someone searches for particular keywords. Google’s search engine has become nearly ubiquitous in use as a default internet search engine and is co-constructed based on user engagement, via clicking on hyperlinks (Noble, 2013). Despite such involvement from users, Google’s algorithmic practices are biased towards the interests of advertising, as Google allows for paid advertisements to be sorted and filtered through their algorithms in a way to prioritize their rank in the search engine (Noble, 2013). Thus, social media platforms offer one way for participants to connect their content more directly with wider online publics by inviting more traffic to their website and pages, thus helping this content to appear higher in Google searches. However, this strategy is also limited because of proprietary algorithms, including those favouring advertisers, that impact the visibility of the website.

In addition to Google searches, Twitter and Facebook facilitate some activists’ reach to wider publics. As a demonstration of their reach, just over 15 million (49% of) Canadians used Twitter every month in 2018 (Twitter, 2018) and just over 80% of Canadian adults reported having a Facebook account in 2017, with over 70% accessing the platform daily (Gruzd et al., 2018). Despite the broad reach of these platforms, many Twitter and Facebook users rely on the platforms’ recommendation algorithms, which impact which pages, profiles, and hashtags are visible to whom and when. Since 2008, Twitter’s Trending Topics algorithm has promoted certain hashtags to its users, tailoring
them to users’ following, interests, and locations by default (Twitter, n.d.c). Although Twitter’s trending topics are generally and naively understood to “set the agenda of the public debate at the local, national and transnational level,” they do not necessarily reflect public concerns on Twitter45 (Milan, 2015, p. 54; see also Leistert, 2015; van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Moreover, as Bivens (2019) noted, Facebook page algorithms filter content in a way that suppresses page content to page followers. Those who own pages are encouraged, through Facebook design and policies, to pay extra in order to promote their content not only to their own followers, but also to expand their reach to networks beyond those who already like and follow their page (Bivens, 2019). The combination of the sorting algorithms and the sociotechnical phenomenon of filter bubbles – algorithmic decisions based on a user’s personal use history - have resulted in activists requiring an understanding of how best to navigate social media to increase visibility of their activism and concerns (Pariser, 2011). As mentioned previously (see Chapter 3.1.2.), corporate social media platforms are generally biased towards certain types of activism – those that have simple narratives, are relatively low-risk, and are not contested by mainstream media – potentially shaping the types of activism that become visible via social media platforms and further captured by mainstream media (Castells, 2007; Guha, 2015; Lim, 2013; Milan, 2015). Because most of the participants in this study want to share complex narratives that diverge from mainstream media depictions of violence against women,

45 For example, hashtags related to #OccupyWallStreet, the Ferguson riots, and WikiLeaks-related hashtags were absent from Twitter’s Trending Topics despite being newsworthy, while fake news has often trended on Twitter (Leavitt, 2014). Additionally, some users can pay to bypass Twitter’s algorithm to reach trending status (van Dick & Poell, 2013).
gaining visibility from mainstream media and wider publics through social media becomes more challenging.

The following section outlines five major strategies that participants used to expand their alliances and challenge and resist perceptions of violence: intervening in dominant publics; creating and sharing memes; direct tagging of key actors; bridging and sharing resources with other networks online; and building and maintaining online enclaves of support.

5.2.1. Intervening in dominant publics

Some participants used Twitter to intervene in already established online dominant publics to reach online users who may otherwise not engage specifically with topics related to anti-violence. Such online dominant publics consisted of widely-used political hashtags and trending conversations. For example, Calla tried “to use hashtags that are more universal” than hashtags specifically related to instances of violence. She explained how she used “political hashtags a lot because I want people to make a connection to the gendered aspects of poverty or to the gendered aspects of other social inequalities. So, I’m trying to make those connections.” In this comment, she draws attention to connecting her counternarrative messages into dominant publics about politics. Widely used political hashtags are areas of potential intervention for anti-violence because social media presence and communication have become essential during election campaigns (Crawford, 2009). Additionally, this tactic helps to draw audiences’ awareness of the connection between violence against women and political hot topics, such as Calla’s examples of poverty and its funding.
Another way participants intervened into already established online publics was by linking issues of violence with current popular culture moments. “I think part of our responsibility as ambassadors to the podcast,” said Faye, “is to get involved in the conversation and know the conversations that are happening.” As an example of this, Calla explained to me:

when you’re talking about pop culture, you sometimes allow the pop culture moment to be connected to what’s “on the hill.” So you’re talking about [the violence targeting a Black celebrity], but you’re talking about #MeToo too. You’re talking about violence against women, too. So that’s good for people that are fans [of that Black celebrity] that are like “oh right I can now have this conversation about men’s manipulation of their partner and that that’s not okay.”

Incorporating popular culture references additionally served practical purposes for those who spend their time discussing violence. Through the circulation of popular culture references from their own profiles and pages, participants such as Faye engaged in strategies of social and political critique, fostering communal ties. This strategy was useful to draw in those already engaged in conversations around popular culture.

The use of popular culture interventions here is not to be confused, however, with strategies of popular feminism and popular feminist responses to sexism in North America. Popular feminism46 exists along a spectrum where corporate and commercial feminism manifest and circulate widely through mainstream media and digital spaces,

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46 Popular feminism and neoliberal feminism are connected and exist simultaneously (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). Popular feminism and neoliberal feminism are similar in how they value and express individualism, entrepreneurialism, and a feminism devoid of intersectionality, but popular feminism also differs from neoliberal feminism in that its visibility is more public “where examples appear on television, film, on social media and on bodies” (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 4).
displaying liberal ideas about the universality of gender without challenging and disrupting deep-rooted structures of inequality or intersectionality (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). Such expressions of feminism along this popular feminist spectrum make feminism accessible and digestible to wider publics (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). Such popular feminist messaging is a specific kind of political action that includes themes of empowerment, confidence, capacity, and competence, best illustrated in the highly visible and widely-spread hashtags used to draw attention to feminism, such as #MeToo. Such forms of popular feminism benefit from being accessible to broad publics. However, they are simultaneously limiting to those publics by often highlighting only single-axis approaches, such as presenting violence against women as being an issue solely related to sexism (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Brewer & Dundes, 2018).

The integration by participants of popular culture into activism that challenges such popular feminist narratives, then, is more consistent with Hall (1981, p. 235), who argued that popular culture “is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured” and contested. For instance, racialized podcasters intervening in dominant publics about popular culture and current events and affairs with their intersectional, resistant perspectives can be viewed as part of a larger anti-racist project (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). For example, podcasts discussing topics about popular culture and current affairs from the perspective of marginalized individuals providing their intersectional perspectives challenges dominant narratives by differing in content, approach, and presentation from mainstream media, which discuss such issues largely through formal discussions with invited, high-profile figures (Vrikki & Malik, 2019). As a result, not only are the
counternarratives presented by participants in this study who used independent podcasts challenging the public perception of what violence against women looks like, but also challenging who has been excluded from speaking about these issues in mainstream publics and the perceived manner in which it is appropriate to do so.

5.2.2. Shareable and interactive media

Some participants created shareable and interactive media for social media to further interact and engage with their followers, as well as potentially increase their followers and visibility for campaigns. For instance, Petunia shared that “[the engagement on our activist campaign] increased substantially from just producing content to also content that we can interact with, whether it’s like funny or cute photos, and countdowns to remind them that events are coming.” This comment demonstrates her knowledge of social media platforms and a range of practices that she uses to draw in wider audiences towards her activism.

Some participants specifically created shareable media in the form of memes to raise awareness about diverse experiences of violence, provide their reactions to these experiences, and potentially widen their online networks of support. Creating and circulating memes was helpful in drawing in new followers, as one participant explained:

I saw people using [memes] and I thought it was accessible for young people to understand rape culture. So it’s a way to break down rape culture without personalizing it to being “that person raped that person” but we’re like, “how are we talking about rape culture?”

This participant’s strategy used a familiar and shareable format of a meme to further provoke their followers and their networks by exposing sexist framings of
violence. The spread of this participant’s message continued as users shared her memes with their networks and continued to remix the media by adding in their own commentary, humour, and even providing new meanings, thus helping to increase both the reach and potential longevity of the memes.

Internet memes and online videos use visuals, imitate popular culture, and are often replicated by others to further engage with audiences while also sharing their opinions and perspectives, typically through the use of satirical humour (Phillips, 2015; Shiffman, 2013; Tay, 2021). Before becoming part of popular culture47, memes thrived in online trolling subcultures (Milner, 2013b; Phillips, 2015). Importantly, Milner (2013b) points out that many online trolling subcultures circulated memes that centered the perspectives of white masculinity by deploying and using problematic representations of racialized women and other oppressed groups.

Despite this history, memes have also been argued to be sites of contestation (Frazer & Carlson, 2017; Milner, 2013a; Miltner, 2015; Saramo, 2016). For example, the creation and spread of memes has been identified as part of larger anti-colonial social media projects from case studies of Australian Indigenous (Frazer & Carlson, 2017) and Canadian Indigenous social media use (Saramo, 2016). Saramo’s (2016) analysis of Indigenous campaigns on Twitter found that the creation and spread of memes were effective in contextualizing the stories and the ongoing state violence that perpetuate MMIWG2+ in Canada48. These memes helped to raise visibility of MMIWG2+ and were

47 The creation of the “Know Your Meme” website in 2009 helped to push memes into mainstream circulation as this website helped would-be outsiders of meme references to understand the origins of particular viral memes (Phillips, 2015).

48 These memes consisted of a photo of an Indigenous woman either holding up a sign that read #AmINext or with words posted digitally on top of the image, shared via Twitter.
covered even by mainstream media, demonstrating the creativity, power, and collective
resistance of many Indigenous women and their refusal to be portrayed as persistent
victims of violence (Hunt, 2014; Saramo, 2016). Additional Indigenous social media
users created their own memes or shared the ones created through #AmINext,
collectively “resisting colonialism in their everyday lives, not just waiting for the state to
‘save’ them” (Hunt, 2014, para 2). Instead of being shallow representations of politics or
trivial pieces of media content, memes used in contexts like these can be a visual
statement of protest and collective action that is more likely to be picked up by
mainstream media outlets and, therefore, extend the meme creator’s message into even
wider networks (Milner, 2013a; Miltner, 2013).

Although Petunia did not create her own memes, she noted that sharing memes in
the context of challenging violence against women was still useful for expressing a
“common language.” She told me specifically about the small network of Facebook
activists that she connects with globally via reaction memes:

[the discussion] will be like “oh give me your reaction memes” and, literally
we’re reacting to this sexist, misogynist, this misogynoir that we’re seeing but
we’re using humour to have a conversation and that’s something that’s the coolest
thing that I’ve seen. It’s hilarious, but we’re able to critique this thing using like
common language. It’s kind of funny.

Petunia’s story reflects “doing feminism in the network,” or ways of doing, making and
sharing ideas about feminism through challenging sexism via social media platforms
(Rentschler & Thrift, 2015, p. 330). Similar to Petunia’s example, such networked
community-building unfolds through the construction and sharing of memes as feminists
engage in collective acts of social and political critique, fostering communal ties using humour (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015).

Although memes have historically been used to silence others and reinforce racialized and gendered violence when they are disguised as humour, and thereby escape the policies of content removal (Matamoros-Fernandez, 2017; Milner, 2013b), participants in this study have reclaimed the same tools to challenge and resist narratives of violent oppression. Ultimately, these shareable memes further illustrate what Tay (2012, p. 1) has termed “LOLitics,” or the act of everyday citizens using humour and shareable content such as memes to engage others in broader social and political concerns. Participants in this study created and shared memes to raise awareness about violence and to build ties across underrepresented and marginalized groups online. The use of light-hearted and popular subject matter highlights how these participants both raised awareness of violence and did so in a way that potentially helps to reach audiences who otherwise may not have taken interest in such issues (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015).

Further, participants indicated that the strategic incorporation of memes and humour can also help people such as themselves to cope with the overwhelming instances of violence they observe. Such strategic use of memes and humour also challenges the notion of the feminist killjoy, or the feminist presented as problematic and “killing joy” for pointing out issues such as racism and sexism (Ahmed, 2010, p. 20). Calla discussed her own strategic use of memes and humour to help overcome such issues, stating that:

    if I only tweeted about all the things I do [about violence], people will get really depressed and I would get depressed, so I need a mix of talking about my
favourite queer shows or favourite cartoons and then also talking about these issues.

5.2.3. Direct tagging of key actors

Some participants also creatively used social media platforms to interact with other users and to widen their networks by specifically targeting and responding to mainstream media journalists and politicians who were active on Twitter. For instance, Faye understood that social media was only partly about posting content, with effective social media use also involving strategic online engagement. Her strategic awareness of promoting online content was further demonstrated through her comment that:

we built a community from scratch, we built it on Twitter. We provided a platform, we provided a chief piece of content, put it on the website, promoted it, and we definitely strategically sent it to city councillors, mayoral candidates, journalists and so on and it just spread like wildfire.

Similarly, Calla explained her strategic use of social media through Twitter, which has fewer gatekeepers and allows directly tagging key actors, both of which were advantageous to her. She said: “you can push back. When I’m on Facebook, I’m just talking to people about [a politician] but I can actually, on Twitter, tag [them].”

These comments from Faye and Calla are reflective of one major way in which online and networked communication technologies have altered the connections between elites and non-elites (Highfield, 2017). On Twitter, elites and non-elites can connect with each other in ways that were previously unavailable. As alluded to in Calla’s comment, these connections are more likely to occur on Twitter because Facebook requires users to mutually confirm their ‘friendship,’ whereas on Twitter, anyone can tag any other user
regardless of whether the individual tagged will react or respond. This is accomplished by using a Twitter mention (i.e., @ plus the user’s Twitter handle), which directs posts to a specific account that then receives an alert to see the message. As noted in Faye’s comments on building a Twitter community, politicians, journalists, and other key players are all typically active on Twitter, including the federal government and government departments (Highfield, 2017). Thus, by directly tagging or mentioning such key players, some participants were able to reach influential online publics, serving as an entry point to access broader conversations and directly involve people in power.

Both Faye and Calla told me that tagging journalists has led to conversations about improving the framing of violence against women and, notably, even being asked to contribute their knowledge to future pieces. For example, Calla said:

“I’ve had a conversation with [journalists] and they may not always agree [with me], but at least they’ll make the time to talk and I think that’s important and so that’s been good. But, do I think it’s perfect? No. But I’ve had good experiences, yeah.

Similarly, Faye had positive experiences after interacting online with journalists, ultimately leading to her own publication in mainstream media as a result of actively tagging journalists in her tweets. She told me that:

the [local major newspaper] asked us to write a rebuttal because of all of the stuff we were tweeting about it. Twitter. The [local major newspaper] caught our Twitter rant and how we were talking about it and how terrible [they were reporting on it].

5.2.4. Bridging networks and sharing resources
Bridging with other online groups and sharing resources with them was another strategy that some participants found useful for their online activism. Pulling from resource mobilization theory, Lim (2018) characterizes the activity of bridging in social movements as being where two distinct networks with similar shared values and goals share resources. Three participants shared that they connected with already established individuals from their networks to help expand their own online networks. Faye told me that receiving cross promotion and referrals from other podcasts that were broadly also about social justice issues helped to widen her own podcast’s reach to wider publics. She told me that “one of the guests on [this other independent podcast] mentioned [our podcast] and I was just like ‘ooh, we’re getting somewhere’.” The podcasters she referred to had more subscribers and downloads than her podcast and, at the time of our conversation, her podcast advertised over 100,000 downloads a week. It is unknown if the referral directly impacted the subscription and download rate, although she did specifically state that this relationship was positive for the growth of her own podcast.

Calla used a similar strategy on Twitter when she reached out to and connected with a well-known organization with a large following (at least 20,000 followers) to help broadcast an event she was hosting that was broadly related to her activist campaigns. She told me: “we partnered with [the company] […] and they livestreamed our event and they amplified it so that meant, like, I think 20,000 people saw it.” These comments reflect the ways in which connecting with other strong influencers was important in building participants’ online networks. However, participants needed to already have established ties with these groups or individuals. Both Calla and Faye explained that they knew these influential individuals and groups before the launch of their online podcasts.
and campaigns. The strategic use of bridging or cross-networking, then, is less useful for those who did not already have those connections established (see also Chapter 5.3.1).

5.2.5. Building and maintaining online enclaves of support

Another significant aspect of how some participants navigated corporate social media platforms was to build and maintain online enclaves of support. Whereas counterpublics engage in discussion and debate with wider publics, enclaves take place in communication channels that are hidden from dominant publics (Squires, 2002). Such spaces are hidden, relatively safer spaces from the dominant sphere used to circulate hidden transcripts, characterized by discourses that take place “beyond direct observation by powerholders” (Scott, 1990, p. 4). From my interviews, three participants discussed the role of Twitter and Facebook direct messaging (DM) channels as private networked enclaves for their activism. Furthermore, two of the Indigenous participants I spoke with discussed the role of Facebook family and friend networks as pivotal to their activism related to MMIWG2+ organizing. Despite existing within corporate social media platform spheres, the use of Twitter and Facebook DMs and closed personal online networks by participants allowed for communication hidden from dominant publics, thus marking these channels as similar to the manner in which Squires (2002) characterized enclaves.

The most common type of enclave used by participants to support their activism involved creating and maintaining online enclaves through the hidden communication channels of Twitter and Facebook’s instant messaging and chat features. Twitter and Facebook both have instant and private DM features, which allow users to communicate with each other through private networks instead of the visible posts or comments more
common on social media profiles and pages. These features provided participants with an online space for close contacts also involved in anti-violence activism to circulate counterhegemonic ideas. Calla, for example, referred to the significance of these private message groups for her activism: “so I have a couple of amazing DMs where we kind of keep in touch and it’s like two groups of women and mostly about our violence against women work and support.” Kalliope expressed a similar experience with DMs: “I have two really close friends that we only DM. We DM each other every day on Twitter about work but also what we think about things going on in the world around ending violence against women.” These online private spaces differed greatly from the public spaces available to participants and allowed them to support and grow their activism by maintaining relatively private communications hidden from the public sphere, thus serving a purpose similar to that of enclaves.

The use of enclaves for such work fosters resistance through the production of counternarratives and strategies in hidden spaces that can then be circulated in dominant publics when ready (Squires, 2002). In the context of social media platforms, enclaves are also spaces where “small-scale online deliberation takes place, furthering consensus among members and amplifying any pre-existing sentiments, beliefs, and opinions they share” (Lim, 2018, p. 423). The use of enclaves to foster counterhegemonic ideas was particularly evident in Faye’s comment about sharing articles that highlighted the need for activism around violence against women: “The discussions we were having [in these DM groups], we would share articles and say ‘isn’t this fucked?’” Similarly, Petunia told me that she “can give a much more honest critique of something” in such online enclaves.
than in more public spaces. This sentiment is further exemplified in Kalliope’s comment about sharing her thoughts publicly on Twitter:

Twitter, it’s become a little too professional for my liking the last year and half. Do you know what I mean, like people who are following me who are Director of XY […] you know I have to be a little more careful and so there was times where I was going to share my own experiences and I just deleted them. So I did tweet at one point, there was a couple of moments where I had like shared something and then like in the middle of the night I was like “nope” and I just deleted them. Not today [laughs].

These comments demonstrate the challenge in navigating a “context collapse” on social media platforms (Marwick & boyd, 2010, p. 114). A context collapse refers to the collapsing of multiple social groups into a singular online networked group of friends or followers (Marwick & boyd, 2010). In Kalliope’s example, she noticed that, as her online profile became more visible because of her activism, her Twitter followers started to increase. She was being followed by people who she perceived to be professionals and wanted to maintain professional relations with and, thus, she told me she often avoided tweeting. DM chats, on the other hand, were described by Kalliope to be “brilliant and intense” potentially because trust was shared within the group setting, with this setting being under the control of those already within the private message group.

Direct messaging features on Twitter and Facebook also provided participants with space to work with a select few others for their activism before making their content public. For example, Faye would regularly entertain long discussions through DMs with friends about the local context of violence against women. The idea came to her that they
should produce and promote some of their private discussions for the public. She told me: “we were in a Facebook Messenger group together. This is where the podcast came from and I said ‘guys, this sounds like a podcast to me.’” Discussing frustrations about the context of violence between themselves within an enclave created fertile ground for the idea to create and launch a podcast that challenges and resists dominant public discussions about deeper contexts of violence. Lim (2018) similarly argued that such hidden (to dominant publics) processes are a significant part of activism, where counterstrategies can develop before spreading beyond to wider publics.

Another benefit expressed by participants is how Twitter and Facebook’s DM features provide the reach that was necessary for these online enclaves to be created and maintained. Within Twitter and Facebook private messages, participants have access to a widespread network and also have more control over who has access to the conversations that take place within these private spaces. As Calla explained to me, she could never leave Twitter permanently, because “Twitter’s where some of my community is.” This comment shows the role of her online community, its importance for grassroots organizing, in her activism. Similarly, Kalliope explained that she only used Facebook because of the people also using it:

I have to force myself to be on Facebook but I’m just not into the platform anymore and the only reason I’m saying I force myself is because that’s actually where a lot of people I know are still into that and so I have to remember that for like movement building stuff and for a lot of organizers, they’re still on Facebook, so that’s the only, literally the only, reason why I go on Facebook. Like I would
not be on Facebook if folks did not use it to communicate with one another. Like I don’t participate on it.

Even though both Calla and Kalliope expressed wanting to avoid or leave these platforms, the benefit of connecting with their networks outweighed those decisions to remove themselves completely. Reflecting these participants’ use of social media DMs as convenient enclaves for activism and community building, Squires (2002) contends that enclaves emerge in networks with low resources, and if these enclaves are already active on certain platforms, continuing to use them would be convenient.

Although the social media platforms these participants relied on for their DM enclaves are not end-to-end-encrypted⁴⁹, some of these participants still perceived benefits in their use despite potential security breaches. The use of more secure channels as enclaves is common in activist work, such as how BLM activists (Jardine, 2015) and feminist activists (Mendes et al., 2019) have made use of end-to-end encrypted platforms such as WhatsApp, Signal, and iMessage. However, those participants in this study who used Facebook and Twitter DMs did so out of convenience, as they were connecting with those already using social media platforms and sometimes joining existing enclaves on these platforms. This was not a result of lack of awareness of the security issues involved, as one participant requested to be interviewed through the encrypted application Signal (see Chapter 3) and two of the participants specifically discussed encrypted communications with me during our interviews despite not using them for their enclaves. Further, during my interview with Faye, she shared with me that she had always been an

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⁴⁹ End-to-end encrypted communication prevents any third-party hosts or hackers from intercepting messages.
Android user but was considering an iPhone specifically because she was interested in using the iMessage application given it is encrypted by default. These examples demonstrate that some participants seemed to weigh out the costs and benefits of the conversations and how much privacy would be required, suggesting that they do care about privacy and security from corporate surveillance. However, in the context of the DM enclaves used in their activism, these concerns seemed less important. Instead, the benefits of maintaining private conversations with their networks connected via social media outweighed the potential costs of privacy breaches.

In addition to DMs, another common type of enclave mentioned by participants was the use of personal Facebook networks to find and raise awareness about cases of MMIWG2+. According to two participants, such personal Facebook networks were significant for spreading information amongst Indigenous families and friends of MMIWG2+. Mardella and Azami, two Indigenous women from different Indigenous communities in Canada, had a clear preference for Facebook over Twitter because of the strong, close network ties between and within many Indigenous communities. Although Twitter was useful for certain aspects of their activism, such as providing, sharing, and commenting on ongoing local, national, and international mainstream news coverage in real-time, participants preferred Facebook because it was where many Indigenous people were specifically gathering, organizing, and sharing stories of unsolved MMIWG2+ cases hidden from dominant publics.

Mardella described herself as being regularly active on Facebook because being on it was unavoidable. One major aspect of Facebook she appreciated was its ability to connect with geographically dispersed Indigenous communities. She told me how central
Facebook has become for many Indigenous communities to share stories of missing family members with other Indigenous communities, to build networks of support, and to organize collectively around MMIWG2+. She declared:

I’m really thankful that Facebook exists [laughs] that sounds silly to say but we’ve been having these problems [of MMIWG2+] for 40, 50, 60 years and if not longer. We’ve never been able to talk to each other about it because we’re all so geographically dispersed and so, there’ll be a little conversation over there and a little conversation over there.

Mardella described to me how many experiences of MMIWG2+ spread through these Facebook networks long before they reach, or if they ever reach, local mainstream media news reports. For instance, cases of MMIWG2+ are often far from the radar of the few law enforcement agencies investigating these crimes:

[law enforcement] realized they didn’t know who this girl was and didn’t even know she was missing and so they contacted me kind of frantic like you know, do you know about this girl, and I did and the family had been putting up fliers in the community and on social media and so it was kind of bizarre that law enforcement didn’t even think to check [laughs].

Mardella’s observation was similarly expressed by Azami, who shared with me how she heard about instances of MMIWG2+. She said:

I think one of the most notable things about [this MMIWG2+s] story was that I didn’t hear about it because there had been a news report or anything, I actually heard about it because her aunt posted this photo on Facebook.
These comments further exemplify how mainstream news media relying primarily on law enforcement reports on cases of violence are perhaps missing out on many cases and perspectives of MMIWG2+ (see Chapter 4.1.3.).

Significantly, these participants shared content on MMIWG2+ within Facebook networks instead of using the more widely-known, public facing hashtag #MMIW. Depending on one’s privacy settings, content shared amongst Facebook friends is limited in its potential reach. Despite this more limited reach, participants seemed to choose their private Facebook networks as a result of their established use by Indigenous communities for community building and sharing information on MMIWG2+. Overall, Mardella told me that “social media helps us build those networks, and it’s definitely helped Native women to be less marginalized and invisible than we have been in the past.” Even as Facebook has consistently refused to remove racist pages about Indigenous people (Matamoros-Fernandez, 2017) and removed many Indigenous people from the platform because of Facebook’s “real name” policy\(^\text{50}\) that did not respect many Indigenous names (Haimson & Hoffman, 2016), these participants’ comments demonstrate that many Indigenous people rely on Facebook’s networks to maintain connections around cases of MMIWG2+ and for connecting with other Indigenous people more broadly.

Rianka Singh’s (2020) research examines and identifies ways in which feminist digitally mediated resistance goes beyond online expressions of popular feminism (e.g., hashtag feminism). Instead, her research found that there were groups who were purposely not wanting to amplify their online activism. Similar to Singh’s (2020)

\(^{50}\)Since its inception, Facebook has asked users to provide their “real” names over pseudonyms and nicknames. However, this policy was not enforced until around 2011, when accounts were reported and deleted for not abiding by this policy (Haimson & Hoffman, 2016).
research, this study shows that marginalized groups can create digitally mediated enclaves of resistance even within large, corporate, and often discriminatory platforms, and the examples provided by participants indicate that these more private spaces can be used by marginalized groups to great effect.

5.3. Social Media Biases

The evidence above has demonstrated various ways in which some participants incorporated Twitter and Facebook to connect with, and reach, wider online networks for their online activism. However, some participants were better able to navigate Facebook and Twitter designs and social media logic than other participants with these strategies. This section outlines three major social media biases identified through participants’ descriptions of their experiences and perspectives when relying on using Twitter and Facebook for their activism.

First, most participants were not building social media networks from scratch, but rather relying on their already established networks. For those who had very small online networks to begin with, reaching wider ones was more challenging, with this being easier for those who already had, or could easily gather, a large network. Secondly, not all participants had the same level of skills or availability of time to integrate social media strategies into their online activism. For those who did not already have social media prowess – for instance, to navigate filtering algorithms that may prevent some posts from appearing to one’s entire network – participating on social media required additional digital labour that created challenges to continue participating in online activism in the same way as those with such prowess. Finally, one participant, who is visually disabled, revealed challenges navigating social media platforms in terms of accessibility. These
findings indicate that participant experiences of online activism differed based on the resources, abilities, skills, and time available to them, demonstrating how social media platforms are biased towards those who can work within capitalist social media logics to reach their goals.

5.3.1. Established networks

Participants who described already having strong online networks of support were more likely to discuss their successes and positive involvement with social media platforms. For instance, Dalila saw the benefits of using social media to mobilize her network: “the benefit of using online platforms is that organizations and individuals are able to leverage their existing networks to easily spread awareness of their activism.” Faye was also strategic about involving her networks. She told me that when she first wanted to disperse her content, “I would tag everybody I knew” on the posts. She clarified that:

well, I wouldn’t [tag everyone] now, I think it’s frowned upon now, but then, in 2017, nobody did that so nobody knew what to think about it [when I did that]. But they knew me. And they knew my sort of personal brand and were willing to listen [when I did that].

This comment demonstrates how her already established networks were significant in mobilizing her content online. However, this ease in sharing content across networks was not similarly expressed by all participants.

Levana hoped that pursuing online activism would help her meet other like-minded activists online. She told me she tried a few ways to connect with other like-
minded networks of support and to circulate her own content, but she faced challenges. She told me:

that’s one of the issues, like when you’re tagging certain organizations that should at least, if they’re not going to endorse [the post], at least they can retweet it for fuck’s sake. But no. No. So, just the cricket sounds, you know. So I would tag people locally and across Canada and for sure for sure they wouldn’t be responsive, maybe the odd time they might.

Levana further explained that she felt “the disappointment in not having the support.” She shared with me that she did not have many social supports regarding her activism work and connecting with others online was one of the main reasons she turned her attention to creating online events and online campaigns around ending violence against women. Yet, her experience has been met with silence and little to no support from much of the online feminist networks with which she tried to interact. For those wanting to incorporate online tools into their activism, especially social media platforms, these findings suggest that already having a strong network of support on social media platforms is conducive to more engagement with wider publics. Certainly, the visibility of #MeToo, led by celebrities (most notably Alyssa Milano) drawing wider audiences, differed greatly from the many similar hashtags created before then that did not have similar white, cisgender, celebrity support (Bailey et al., 2019).

5.3.2. Digital labour

Not all participants I interviewed possessed the same digital skills and knowledge around building and maintaining social media networks. Although all participants created some content online, only five participants had previous experience using online tools for
public relations, digital marketing, campaigning, journalism, and using social media for online marketing purposes. For those participants who did not have these skills already, additional labour and time was required to enhance their skills with the prospective of increasing their visibility via social media platforms.

Petunia reflected on the generational impact of those who grew up with social media platforms and can more readily pick up social media skills and strategies. She told me: “as young folk who routinely use social media or media online or who use it as a telecommunication tool, I think it’s just easy and inevitable for us to do the activism and share the messaging on there.” Petunia’s comment further reflected a common sentiment of a digital divide, primarily based on one’s skill, between those who grew up alongside the growth of everyday personal computing and those who did not (Hargittai, 2002). More specifically, young people with higher levels of education are more likely to use the Internet for profit-enhancing activities (Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008).

Social media platforms are dominated by aspirational young women entrepreneurs creating original content as part of their invisible labour (Duffy, 2015). These digital divides were somewhat mirrored in this project, where those of age 40 or younger (7 out of 9 participants) were more likely to express familiarity with being online for everyday personal and professional needs. Although women over 40 years old in my sample expressed less familiarity, they were also likely to reflect on being “digitally savvy” and specifically having a high level of understanding of how to navigate social media logics. What was common in those who expressed being similarly “digitally savvy” was being comfortable with consistently using social media platforms based on previous experience they had before using such media for their online activism.
Incorporating social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter into online activism required some participants to make use of an already established skill in interacting with others to mobilize their activism. This was expressed by Faye when discussing her approach to social media building through making connections. Faye told me: “so that’s the magic formula so to speak; you need to know how to connect or interact with people.” Faye further explained that connecting and engaging with people online comes easy for her and she did not see it as difficult or as additional work to her activism. She said: “I’m a very personable person and I can connect with people, and so they feel what I’m going through [when I’m posting]. The other thing too is that I’ve been doing this for a while.”

The latter comment from Faye reflected her familiarity and confidence in connecting with people offline, relating that to her experience connecting with people online, and how this aids in personal branding. Personal branding, promotion, and audience interaction are all part of the rhetoric of individualism under a neoliberal context to which online feminist content producers have had to adhere while pursuing their collective action efforts (Pruchniewska, 2018). Such self-branding for many working on feminist issues has been closely linked to a logic of postfeminism because “the ideals and accomplishments of the postfeminist subject – independence, capacity, empowerment – are entangled with similar ideals about the contemporary media-savvy interactive subject who is at ease in navigating the ostensibly flexible, open architectures of online spaces” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 56). However, none of the participants I interviewed indicated wanting to gain profit from their self-branding activities and content around violence (see Chapter 4), with such attention to potential classist issues
further reflecting an intersectional lens to feminist concerns. Despite not doing so for profit, in order for participants to reach their goals of widening their networks and circulating their content that challenges dominant narratives of violence, participants’ strategic management of their presentation of self was still necessary to obtain buy-in from the local community and the target audiences for their content (Pooley, 2010). However, for those who did not easily and already possess such skills, extra labour and time was required to learn how to engage with others online.

As Terranova (2012) argued, the digital economy of the Internet is labour intensive, as one needs not only to have a website, but to have one that is well designed and updated, which takes intense ongoing labour that is typically uncompensated. Taking on this extra free labour was not equally available to all participants, as Nox indicated that for her: “it’s hard to find the time [to post on social media]. You end up shifting your social media post to the end of the day because you think ‘okay, I’ll get to that after I’ve met these deadlines.’” Her explanation demonstrates her lack of time to use online tools and strategies effectively to engage in activism, especially since her online activism is an extension of her professional role, where she is already under-resourced and understaffed.

Furthermore, intervening in online dominant publics and discussions around popular culture, politics, and current affairs was effective for some participants, but such strategies required these participants to be up-to-date with current affairs and popular culture. For participants not already engaged in popular culture and politics nationally or more locally, engaging in such topics online was beyond their purview. For instance, two participants seemed to me to want to engage online specifically on anti-violence
initiatives and calls to action, which made gaining traction beyond their already established networks more difficult without varying their content and strategically intervening in dominant publics.

Even for those participants who were confident in their social media skills, engaging with online activism seemed to be taxing with very little benefit. Mardella expressed how challenging it was for her and many others, cautioning others to think twice about taking part in online activism: “I’ve been broke for years, I’ve been suicidal for a chunk of it, like, it’s taxing in so many ways that that’s why people don’t stick with it.” Similar to some participants in this study, past interview-based research with feminist activists indicates that their online activism often involved “invisible, precarious and time-consuming labour” (Mendes et al., 2019, p. 73, see also Fairbairn, 2020; Fotopoulou, 2017). bell hooks (2015, p. 145) expressed a similar sentiment on such time-consuming work when discussing the importance of racialized women telling their own stories as acts of resistance, stating that “one must write and one must have time to write.” As racialized women are the ones who tend to take on a disproportionate amount of the online labour to challenge, critique, and ultimately moderate social media content that is misogynistic, racist, and transphobic (Nakamura, 2015), the fact that time arose as a barrier to some participants’ online activism in this study comes as little surprise.

5.3.3. Accessibility

Social media platforms are not always accessible for those with a wide range of visual disabilities who rely on assistive technologies to read and interact with digital screens. Levana has mobility and visual disabilities, both of which made participation in activism away from her home, such as at rallies, marches, and community get-togethers,
incredibly challenging. She had hoped that connecting online would help her find other activists and causes to support:

I was trying to find ways to be involved, be that activist part of me, you know, but I couldn’t go to an event in a major city so to speak, I’m not very mobile. So I thought of a couple of ways that I could make connections or build community or that kind of thing or help in the public education sphere around violence against women, just online with all my disabilities and without much, actually any, support. So, I created some things [online].

However, Levana told me that her experience relying on assistive technologies, like screen readers\textsuperscript{51}, has made her participation in online activism incredibly challenging instead of helpful. She told me:

not all online platforms are also necessarily equally accessible. So if you have platforms that are difficult for a person to move through, if there’s a visual impairment or anything like that, then it’s a lot more time consuming to try and access.

Her comment reflects that even the screen reader compatibility for all websites is not always transferable between devices, meaning that some websites are only compatible with a certain screen reader, but not all. Levana explained that “the assistive technology I would say is about 50% effective and I’ve used all of the various ones, the really expensive ones, and still [it’s ineffective].” Moreover, blind and visually disabled users are constantly required to purchase new screen readers to support the readability after

\textsuperscript{51} Screen readers are an assistive technology that provides audio narration or refreshable Braille of all on-screen text.
new software updates, thus adding financial barriers for individuals with such disabilities aiming to do activist work online (Billah et al., 2017; Ellis & Kent, 2011).

Furthermore, one third of the participants created and shared memes and online videos that do not rely heavily on textual information, introducing additional accessibility concerns for those with visual impairments who wish to become involved in online activism. As Nakamura (2008) has argued, media content is turning away from text and towards the visual, shaped by user preferences and infrastructural transformations. More challenges occur, then, for blind users or those with visual disabilities to interact and participate online when only images are shared. When images are used on a website, screen readers narrate the image caption if the content creator inputs alternative (alt) texts for the image. However, these are often optional inputs and not a mandatory field on many website platforms, leaving many websites inaccessible to blind and visually disabled users. Although creating shareable content, like memes and online videos, can contribute to contestation and resistance to dominant narratives, this emerging strategy is not accessible to all users.

Social media platforms may not purposely want to exclude prospective users based on their disabilities, but Twitter and Facebook have taken approaches that still marginalize visually disabled users, ultimately impacting activists like Levana. When Twitter was created in 2006, it was designed with a text-based interface, making it arguably the service of choice for some disabled users (Ellis & Kent, 2010). However, in 2011, Twitter added image capability to its design, allowing users to add image files to their tweets (Dorsey, 2011). In 2016, Twitter introduced an alternative text feature, but the design is one in which, like most website platforms, users must make the decision to
add in an alternative description to any image they include (Twitter blog, 2016). As a result, many blind and visually disabled Twitter users have reported using the platform less than before as a result of the challenges involved in being able to participate in image-heavy content sharing (Morris et al., 2016).

In 2014, Facebook’s first attempt at addressing accessibility was the introduction of a VoiceOver keyboard shortcut for its News Feed (Facebook, 2016). Since then, Facebook has started to experiment with the use of artificial intelligence to automatically generate a textual description of images for those who cannot see the image. Facebook introduced their Automatic Alternative Text feature in 2016 (in English) with an update to automatically textually describe actions taking place in images and identify individual faces (Facebook, 2016). This suggests that Facebook is attempting to address some accessibility concerns through options for a range of visual disabilities.

However, when most of the participants (both in this study and online activism more generally) are using Twitter as well to expand their social networks and reach, the accessibility-last approach apparent in the design of social media platforms severely limits blind or visually disabled people from participating in online activism. This further demonstrates the challenges that marginalized users face when corporate social media platforms do not follow a critical disability lens or a “crip technoscience” lens, which refers to technologies developed with disabled peoples that are used and re-worked for their own specific needs (Hamraie, 2015; Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019). Such an approach actively “seeks to disrupt ableist and capitalist military-industrial systems” (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019, p. 6). Levana’s experiences with relying on Facebook and Twitter in order to become more involved in activism challenging violence against women provide
evidence of how these platforms can be an outlet for those unable to do such work in person, but are still biased towards certain users while marginalizing others.

5.4. Conclusion

In online spaces that are increasingly whitewashed (Daniels, 2009; 2016), speaking and writing are powerful acts of resistance against dominant forces that otherwise wish to keep racialized women silent (Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015). More specifically, “[m]oving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible” (hooks, 2015, p. 9). As has been demonstrated in this chapter, speaking and writing as forms of resistance via online activism are powerful acts of resistance with variable impacts that are shaped by the online spaces used. As alluded to by some participants, the promise of online activism can sometimes be outweighed by biases inherent to online spaces that create a variety of barriers to activists.

In this chapter, I have argued that some racialized women are countering their frustrations with mainstream media, the settler colonial state, and the sector involved with preventing and ending violence against women for their role in reinforcing violence against racialized women by using a variety of digital media technologies. Significantly, this chapter revealed that there is much more going on beneath the surface of trending Twitter hashtags. Although much media and research attention has focused on the use of Twitter hashtags, participants in this study describe primarily using websites, social media pages, and podcasting to tell stories of instances of violence that were often missing from mainstream media and political discourses. As indicated by participants,
many aspects of their activist work would be much more challenging to observe taking place, for both researchers and the broader public, by focusing solely on trending aspects of activism, such as through trending hashtags. What is uncovered here are hidden aspects of activism that are created by and mobilized by racialized women, demonstrating that much more activism is taking place than that covered to date by mainstream media and researchers. The experiences of participants in this study indicate that these more hidden forms of online activism warrant further media and research attention.

Although much of their work was hidden, participants also relied on Twitter and Facebook specifically for their reach. This reliance on corporate social media platforms to disseminate their messages to wider publics ultimately shapes the experiences of violence that are made visible to dominant publics, as social media platforms are biased towards certain types of users and uses that sometimes contrast with aims of activism. Participants spoke specifically of challenges and barriers they faced regarding leveraging already established networks, the labour involved in building connections and interactions with others online, and the assumed abilities of all users of social media platforms working to further their reach and online networks. As social media is increasingly becoming a key part of the public education and awareness strategies for organizations involved in ending violence against women (Fairbairn, 2020), the challenges these participants shared pushes against the dominant narrative that just having access to internet technologies and social media networks can automatically increase one’s participation in activism.

Although this chapter depicted how these participants were struggling with gaining visibility online, the following chapter outlines how these participants were also
simultaneously hyper-visible to perpetrators of violence as a result of sharing and making visible their content in online networked spaces.
Chapter 6: “Men don’t get this, white women don’t get this”52

This chapter focuses on the ways in which most participants expressed experiencing technology-facilitated violence (TFV) because of their online activism. Here, participants unravel a variety of TFV experienced as a result of becoming hyper-visible to perpetrators online as they engaged in their online activism. Further, participants discuss the ways in which they have attempted to deal with these instances of TFV, typically because they perceived social media platforms to be ill-equipped to do so. Although my original set of questions did not specifically ask participants about violence they experienced, when I asked them to expand on their negative and challenging experiences with online activism, the theme of TFV became apparent in almost everyone’s responses. Three participants, all of whom had experience working as service providers in the non-profit sector involved with preventing and ending violence against women, mentioned the role TFV plays in intimate partner violence (also referred to as domestic violence) cases that have occurred to those they are supporting. However, this chapter focuses on the TFV these participants experienced as a result of their own online participation of challenging and ending violence against women. Although two out of nine participants did not mention any such instances, it is not assumed that these participants did not experience any TFV as a result of their online activism, as I did not ask participants directly about TFV. Instead, the following findings reflect those who voluntarily shared their experiences of TFV over the natural course of the interview. As TFV was discussed by seven of nine participants without any prompting, the findings of

52 Portions of this chapter were published in The Canadian Journal of Law and Technology (see Rajani, 2022).
this study indicate that TFV is a common, but perhaps not universal, experience for online activists working to end violence against women in Canada.

Responses from participants in this study also reflect varied understandings of what constitutes TFV. In other words, some named a particular experience as TFV while others did not name the same or a similar experience as TFV. During my interviews, Kalliope indicated that “it’s important to talk about technology-facilitated violence.” She elaborated further that TFV:

is just a really unfortunate circumstance of the continuum of violence, right. There’s no borders, physical and virtual [around violence] and so what I was noticing was […] if it’s violence you’re experiencing in your physical reality it obviously manifests in Internet spaces.

Similarly, another participant used the phrase “technology-related violence against women,” further indicating the significance of the centrality of the technology involved in their experiences of violence. Not all participants used such language, however. When other participants referred to such experiences, some referred to it as receiving “abuse” and “being racially targeted” or having “racist trolls.” Perhaps, had I asked more specifically about TFV to all participants at the time, their responses may have included these within that umbrella definition.

This chapter illustrates a range of violent experiences these participants described as a result of their online activism, all facilitated and shaped by social media platforms, specifically Twitter and Facebook. Significantly, when research centers those situated at intersectional margins of oppression, we start to uncover narratives, such as those alluded to in Calla’s words used in the title of this chapter, illustrating the violence racialized
women experience online. Significantly, the violence participants described goes beyond instances of anonymous trolling and is not just about misogyny.

To demonstrate the intersectional complexities of TFV that racialized women face, I draw on a recent Canadian case study. During the time of writing this dissertation, on June 30, 2021, author, activist and then leader of the BC Civil Liberties Association, Harsha Walia, tweeted a response to a news story about the burning of two Catholic Churches where more than 1000 Indigenous children’s bodies were uncovered. This tweet led to a vicious onslaught of TFV (Olaniyan, 2012). Her tweet read “burn it all down” to which she later stated her intention was a criticism of the genocide of Indigenous peoples and communities (Olaniyan, 2021). Her tweet, however, was met with violence by many.

In this case, messages she received through social media were misogynistic and racist, and she also received death threats and threats to report her to the RCMP (Olaniyan, 2021; Saxena, 2021). The sexism in the responses she received was apparent as people called her sexist names (Saxena, 2021). Additionally, the racism in the threats was apparent as many also commented on her immigrant background and their disdain for immigrants, and even accusing her of being a terrorist. Many of the threats she received also depicted graphic violence and her personal information was leaked onto anonymous online bulletin boards (Saxena, 2021). As a result of these attacks based on more than just her gender, not only did Walia retreat from social media and her home at the time, but she also resigned from her position with the BC Civil Liberties Association, to which she later stated she felt the environment from the BCCLA board of directors pushed her out of her position (Saxena, 2021). Thus, one of the only people to be fired
from her job in response to the uncovering Indigenous children’s graves was Walia, a racialized woman who was speaking out, challenging the status quo, and standing up for decolonization.

In this chapter, I critically examine how participant’s online activism was shaped by their experiences of TFV as racialized women speaking out about, challenging, and ending violence against women. I assert that we need to expand our understanding of TFV beyond a focus on sexism and the threat of the anonymous troll. I argue that the resulting violence participants experience, and the lack of avenues available to address those experiences, further shapes the visibility of their activism, as some resort to retreating from social media public spaces.

First, this chapter unravels a range of TFV experienced by participants that consists of more than just violence targeting their gender, but also their race and diverse sexual orientations. Participants further expressed how experiences of TFV did not come solely from anonymous trolls, but were also perpetrated by known individuals who did not hide behind anonymity and who were otherwise familiar to participants. Participants also discussed experiences of unanticipated or unexpected instances of TFV that resulted from the blurred lines of online and offline spaces and the context collapse of networked publics (see Chapter 5). The digital mechanisms and characteristics that were so integral to their online activism simultaneously resulted in their experiences of TFV. Specifically, both Twitter and Facebook were similar in co-constructing a culture of toxicity from anonymous and known sources aimed at racialized women involved in anti-violence online activism.
Secondly, I interrogate the challenges and limitations of responses to participants’ experiences of TFV. Participants primarily discussed the challenges from Twitter around TFV as well as from their workplaces in either supporting their experiences or helping to support others experiencing TFV. Participants discussed how both Twitter and their workplaces were not deemed to be supportive of their experience of TFV. Consequently, the limitations in responses to TFV further impacted who could participate in anti-violence online activism, where some voices were more privileged over others and certain types of violence were rendered invisible. These responses to TFV reinforce the idea that TFV only consists of experiences of clearly visible and recognizable instances of racism or sexism. Ultimately, already marginalized individuals become even further marginalized from their participation in online activism because of their various experiences of TFV and the limitations of supports available.

6.1. Experiences of Technology-Facilitated Violence (TFV)

Facebook and Twitter were used by a range of perpetrators to facilitate and amplify various forms of violence towards most of the participants because of their online activism to challenge and end violence against women. As Petunia explained to me, “I feel like the Internet should be a safe space for us to do this advocacy, but people are actively targeting women, especially those who create conversations about [ending violence against women] online or use the hashtags.” The almost ubiquitous nature of digital media technologies provides additional avenues for perpetrators to inflict violence in new ways including, but not limited to: online harassment, threats of physical violence, online stalking, doxxing, and/or image-based sexual exploitation (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Henry & Powell, 2015; Mason & Magnet, 2012). Researchers typically attribute
this situation to poorly designed digital media configurations, highlighting such features as: enabling the anonymity of users; the ease with which users can find and build online communities around a topic of interest; the blurring between what is private and public; the flattening of different social networks; and unclear and poorly enforced policies that reinforce such violent actions (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Massanari, 2017; Salter, 2018).

In the following section, I outline how participants experienced various forms of TFV based on my conceptualization of violence (see Chapter 3.1.2.). I describe how racism, colonialism, ableism, homophobia, and cis-heteronormativity, and their intersections with sexism, informed these cases in ways that have not been typically discussed in most other research. In cases of TFV from anonymous sources, experiences varied from ad hoc attacks, occurring only when participants posted online about anti-violence, to ongoing collective attacks. The participants in this study reported that their experiences of online violence became more severe as aspects of their marginalized social identities were revealed online.

In cases of TFV from identifiable sources, multiple and overlapping forms of oppression such as racism, colonialism, and sexism were just as apparent. However, additional instances of non-anonymous interpersonal and workplace violence were also reported, which involved perpetrators that were easily identified as men or white women feminists within personal and professional networks.

Finally, participants described instances of what I call unexpected or unanticipated TFV, where they inadvertently caused or received TFV. These experiences and perspectives further complicate any notion that women simply experience misogyny
online from anonymous male perpetrators. They also experience transphobia, homophobia, ableism, and racism from perpetrators, including women and other persons known to them, and may inadvertently cause instances of violence themselves.

6.1.1. Anonymous experiences of TFV

Social media platforms’ policies and design features, which allow for the creation of easily disposable accounts, have been cited as key contributing factors to the online violence women experience (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Massanari, 2017; Salter, 2018). Many of the participants in this study voiced this perspective, but they also highlighted the variability of violent attacks as well as the unique experiences of such violence for racialized and/or transgender women. Participants indicated experiencing a range of targeted, anonymous backlash to their creation and publicizing of events, campaigns, and content associated with challenging or ending violence against women. Such experiences varied from ad hoc attacks, occurring only when participants posted online about ending violence, to ongoing collective attacks that occurred regularly. Six participants experienced TFV from anonymous sources, or sources otherwise difficult for them to easily identify. Despite being anonymous, these perpetrators were perceived, through their disposable account user names, profile photos, and through the content they sent out, to be male. However, the violent attacks participants received were not just based on misogyny. Additional characteristics of these anonymous attacks included the use of sexist, racist, homophobic, and/or transphobic messages to derail conversations and create a climate of fear for the targeted individuals.

For example, three participants described experiences of either one-off attacks or a constant barrage of messaging and “trolling” as their work to end violence become
more visible online and through media attention. Two participants’ experiences were mild compared to those of some other participants. For instance, Nox shared her experience of ad hoc, targeted, anonymous TFV during her online promotion of events around anti-violence. In response to her online promotion of awareness-raising campaigns, she reported “the odd one or two men who have created backlash.” Some men, she explained, “haven’t been sympathetic at all to the cause and don’t understand why there’s a need for it, and are sometimes bitter towards women for whatever reasons of their own.” Despite experiencing such TFV, Nox added “but I’m fortunate that it’s been minor.” Her description reflects an example of “drive-by harassment,” which is a random one-off expression of harm from a perpetrator (Jeong, 2018, p. 33). The more subdued nature of her experience may be attributable to the fact that the tools and social media profiles used to promote her online campaigns were not easily linked to any identifiable individual who could become the target of backlash. The imagery used on the accounts was generic – a logo designed for the campaign – and, although she was responsible for the creation of the account, multiple people had access to the account and contributed to content creation and message response.

On the other hand, some participants noted an increase in TFV when their personal identity markers became more visible online, such as their gender. Calla recalled that her attacks occurred:

either because I’m femme and my photo is femme and it’s a lot of sexual solicitation. Yeah, it’s a lot of like, you know, “I want to lick your feet” or stuff like that. Or, the harassment, sometimes it’s really graphic.
She was also targeted by an online attack that she believed came from members of a men’s rights group that included a constant barrage of emails and phone calls to her workplace, alleging that she was an abuser along with “extremely graphic and vile details.” She told me that these were not taken seriously by her workplace, but they were frustrating and hurtful to her, nonetheless. She assumes that the perpetrators were able to track down her place of work because she was so highly visible on social media platforms and her profiles detail her location. She experienced anonymous TFV in the form of “sustained orchestration,” where abuse is crowdsourced (Jeong, 2018, p. 33; see also Massanari, 2017). Her experience was representative of many anecdotes shared via mainstream media and scholarly research that highlight the networked nature of experiences of TFV (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). In other words, many individuals networked to organize and target their hostility towards one person or social media profile (Jane, 2014a; 2014b; Jeong, 2018). This has also been called “trolling,” which refers to behaviors most often used to extract an explosive reaction from victims (Phillips, 2015; Shepherd et al., 2015).

Similar to the Harsha Walia case example presented earlier, these examples from participants suggest that speaking publicly about challenging and ending violence is enough to attract TFV, even with efforts to hide the exact identities of who is involved, as in Nox’s case. These examples further demonstrate the backlash to the presence of women in online spaces, especially racialized women involved in denouncing racism and sexism (Nakamura, 2015). Moreover, for those in the non-profit sector involved with preventing and ending violence against women, either professionally or through volunteer work, social media activity is increasingly part of public education (Fairbairn,
Thus, in trying to promote their campaigns associated with their everyday work online, (racialized) women working in activist spaces are more likely to be targeted with TFV. These instances of TFV are more complicated because they occur in the workplace. They are compounded by the fact that the racialized women in this study, like many other racialized women involved in anti-violence non-profit work, work in under-resourced and low-paying jobs in the non-profit sector, which has had to deal with austerity for decades and may be inadequately equipped to deal with such instances of TFV (Rodgers & Knight, 2011).

Anonymous perpetrators also attacked different aspects of Calla’s identity regularly. She described feeling as though her experiences were unique from those of her white women counterparts:

when I see white women talking about it, I’m like “I bet you don’t get what we get.” But we don’t talk about it. If I talk about the racism and the homophobia and the sexism I get every day, that’s all I’ll talk about. Everyday.

These comments echoed the conclusions of a case study that illustrated the differences between the experiences of white and racialized women on Twitter (Jeong, 2018). Racialized women who changed their Twitter profile photos to those of white men noticed a drop in hate speech they received. Indeed, any vitriolic messages they received ceased to be racist and sexist, taking on a more benign quality that caused mere annoyance as opposed to genuine fear (Jeong, 2018). This was further demonstrated by Gray (2012), who showed that the online violence she and other Black women experienced as gamers was indeed sexist, but abruptly turned racist and sexist once their voices indicated the possibility of being Black women. In my study, anonymous
perpetrators were likely attacking racialized women disseminating content around anti-violence based on visible identity markers from their profile, enabling and reinforcing the forced removal of racialized women from online dominant public spaces.

Participants also discussed how sexism, transphobia, and homophobia were part of their experience of TFV because they produced content that was queer and trans-positive. Petunia noted that she enjoyed using Facebook because it helped facilitate new connections with others who were also participating in anti-violence work. Such connections were also a way, she hoped, to grow her own followers and build an online community of solidarity and support around ending violence against other racialized, queer women. In fact, she mostly received positive comments and feedback on her work in online spaces. However, despite these positive aspects of social networking, Petunia also experienced anonymous forms of TFV. She noted one instance where a Facebook post on a page she owned attracted violence. This post was about a campaign celebrating transgender lesbian couples and many of the images and stories shared were of racialized women. “Someone commented on a post I shared,” Petunia recalled, “with explicitly transphobic remarks.” She continued by saying:

someone must have shared our post in some sort of TERF Facebook group and they were just coming to our page to comment stuff, I guess finding the stuff they were upset about to comment on, specifically trans lesbian posts.

Her mention of TERFs references those who identify as feminists but who advocate for the removal of trans individuals from cisgender women-only spaces, sometimes based on essentialist ideas about biological determinism (Williams, 2014; 2016). Although the term first appeared online in 2008, its sex-essentialist and anti-trans
ideas were reported existing in some feminist spaces as far back as the 1970s in North America (Serano, 2016; Williams, 2016). TERF ideology is a white feminist discourse that erases violence against transgender women53 (Da Costa, 2021). The policing of gender norms intersects with sexual and racial norms in this instance of TFV as perpetrators continue to undermine the visibility of racialized, transgender lesbians in online spaces. Moreover, this seemingly purposeful and strategic infiltration of a once ‘safe space’ to network and share content is in line with other research that shows that social media online spaces are positive for some trans and queer individuals, but also spaces where homophobic and transphobic violence regularly occurs (Cho, 2018; Haimson, 2016; Scheuerman et al., 2018).

In addition to attacks based on their identity markers and the types of content they shared, some participants’ experiences of anonymous TFV were informed by sexism and racism and their intersections with colonialism. Mardella, an Indigenous activist involved in issues of MMIWG2+, revealed that she received overwhelming support from within her communities, but noted that one of her major challenges was receiving vitriolic abuse she believed came from outside Indigenous communities: “usually every major news article that [does a story on me and the digital tool I created], afterwards, I’ll get racist trolls.” She added: “I’ve gotten a lot of weird implied stuff […] the harassment, sometimes it’s really graphic. It’s a lot of sexual solicitation.” This comment exemplifies another example of “double objectification” (LaRocque, 1994, p. 74), in which Indigenous women are objectified for being women and for being Indigenous.

53 Some prefer the term “trans women exclusionists” because the values behind their transphobia are anti-feminist and misogynistic and therefore should not be associated with feminism (Serano, 2016, p. 240).
In Mardella’s example, one perpetrator made reference to sexual solicitation, linking Indigenous women with sexual availability and implying that this makes them deserving of violence. Her anecdote connects to the enduring representation and treatment of Indigenous women as “being marked as racially inferior to white European men and women as well as less worthy of respect than Indigenous men” that has culminated in reproducing and reinforcing violence against Indigenous women (Garcia-Del Moral, 2018, p. 944; see also Chapter 4.1.2.). The violence Mardella experienced was not just misogynistic, but also deeply embedded in racist tropes and the underlying violence of colonialism.

Finally, one participant with physical and visual disabilities noted that she would still attract anonymous targeted TFV even when she created and promoted events about celebrating women more generally. Her experiences of violence included fear for her safety on multiple occasions. “I was getting all of the death threats,” Levana said, “all of the rape threats, it was not, it just wasn’t fun, especially when they would say stuff like ‘I know where you live’ and just really scary shit.” This implied violence, as opposed to direct threats, is an example of “colorably threatening harassment” (Jeong, 2018, p. 33). Here, the mere promotion and celebration of women was suppressed by individuals who appeared willing to go to great lengths to silence such perspectives in a way that protects perpetrators’ own safety and security. In high-profile cases such as Anita Sarkeesian54

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54 In 2014, Anita Sarkeesian, Canadian blogger of the website Feminist Frequency – a blog that examines and analyzes sexism in video gaming – was driven away from her home when she received threats from anonymous perpetrators who claimed to know her home address and the home addresses of her family members.
and Jessica Valenti, we have seen how these threats have gone so far as to drive outspoken women not just off social media, but also away from their homes and jobs (Consalvo, 2012; Valenti, 2018). In this case, the intimidating nature of the threats against the participant was heightened by a physical disability that made it difficult for her to flee.

Moreover, because of her position as a disabled, racialized woman in a capitalist, white supremacist, sexist, and ableist hierarchical society, Levana may well have less access to healthcare and other social supports (Ribet, 2010). This problem is compounded by the reliance on law enforcement for immediate crisis support. Not only has going to law enforcement for help with TFV not always proven helpful, but law enforcement has been exposed for their complicit enactment of racist and sexist violence that would make racialized women less likely to seek such supports (Maynard, 2017; Palmater, 2016).

Overall, racialized, disabled women may not have the same social capital in networks of support and financial resources compared to many targeted white celebrities, who are often focused upon in coverage about TFV.

The online perpetrators described by participants in this study made deliberate attempts to remain anonymous, suggesting their awareness of the damaging effects of their behaviour and a willingness to invest the significant time and resources it can take to anonymize one’s presence on Facebook. For instance, Petunia’s description of transphobic violence on a Facebook page was levied via the very same networking features about which she was initially excited. The intended outcome of her activism was

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55 In 2011, feminist author and blogger, Jessica Valenti had to flee her home with her daughter after she was informed her name was circulating on a registry of women to target, along with her personal home address.
to draw the attention of supporters; however, the actual outcome was that the post drew
the attention of the very perpetrators of violence she was trying to subvert. These
interruptions in the circulation of supportive messaging – and, indeed, the intimidation
targeting vocal supporters – have the impact of silencing transgender perspectives and
people in online spaces. Although this attack occurred on Facebook, where accounts are
meant to be linked to real individuals, Petunia described her difficulty in identifying
transgender-exclusionists: “you go on their Facebook profile page and you’re like ‘hmm.’
Because they have these super private pages that just have cartoon characters or
something like that and you can’t message them.” It seems plausible that these profile
pages were created by individuals who deliberately anonymized their online footprint to
hide their real identity and prevent activists like Petunia from holding them accountable.

Platform policies, affordances, and limitations create a number of barriers that can
discourage users from creating anonymized accounts, an outcome consistent with
maximizing platform profitability as a lack of personal information relating to accounts
can make social media platforms less valuable in the market of third-party advertisers
(van Dijck & Poell, 2013). That said, these barriers do not preclude the creation of fake
accounts for the purposes of perpetrating violence, suggesting that the perpetrators
reported by the participants were committed to spreading their violent acts without
consequence (Crawford & Gillespie, 2014; Gillespie, 2018). Such perpetrators may also
be part of online subcultures that share information about avoiding technical barriers that
can impede enactment of online violence (Massanari, 2017). Going to lengths to
anonymize one’s account can help perpetrators to avoid the consequences of being linked
to a perpetrating account, including exposure to legal repercussions.
Attempting to eliminate women from speaking out in public spaces is not new, but creating toxic spaces online is now more easily facilitated through anonymous accounts. This type of violence is intentionally ambiguous, seeking to induce fear in the subject while simultaneously protecting the perpetrator from consequences by creating conditions of plausible deniability. Such attacks explicitly target marginalized individuals visibly producing and circulating content to end violence. The anonymity of the perpetrator also introduces more challenges in clearly determining the threat level. For instance, fear of the threat of violence kept Petunia from having a public Twitter account. In fact, she kept all of her personal social media profiles private. “I’m able to control my profile,” she reasoned, “I’m able to control my Instagram because it’s private, my Twitter because it’s private, my Facebook because it's private. But as soon as you open it up you don’t know what you’re opening it up to.” For online activists intending to spread messages for anti-violence activism, having a public social media presence holds many benefits, including expanding their online networks. These benefits, however, also make online activists more vulnerable to unwanted attention and violence.

6.1.2. Identifiable experiences of TFV

Participants also discussed their experiences of TFV from those who were easily identifiable. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, social media platforms undeniably offer advantages for online activism efforts, especially around maintaining and building online relationships with established networks of friends and those within broader anti-violence communities. However, when I asked participants to elaborate on the challenges they faced in organizing and mobilizing towards online activism to challenge and end violence against women, some specified that a significant challenge they faced was being
violently targeted by those that they otherwise expected to provide support. In some cases, this consisted of white women feminists who were also involved in challenging and ending violence against women in Canada. Others consisted of racialized men who were friends and family members to participants. It could be difficult to identify these people with 100% certainty, given the ease with which accounts and fake accounts can be created. However, like those interviewed in Jane’s (2021) research, participants in this research project indicated that they were able to identify perpetrators of TFV because participants either knew them personally or had encountered them in offline spaces.

Calla experienced and witnessed violence on Twitter primarily from those who she identified as white women feminists. In expressing her perspective of Canadian feminist Twitter, she urged me to “watch feminists, and who they retweet, who they connect to, what their alliances are” as that “tells you a lot about this movement.” She recalled from her own observation that “it’s interesting watching this white woman [who self-identified as a feminist] bully a lot of women of colour online.” She further mused that this particular woman “drags a lot of people and organizations [also working in anti-violence]” referring to the phrase dragging someone in the mud, or to purposely publicly shame someone online.

Calla’s comments echo several high-profile incidents in the US, where white feminist backlash was unleashed on racialized women online. Using feminist hashtags and feminist online reports about the state of online feminist activism, some white women feminists have excluded the experiences and perspectives of racialized women, further marginalizing them and their experiences online and around violence (Daniels, 2016; Jackson & Banaszczyn, 2016; Loza, 2014). Perhaps in response, many racialized
women have used the same tools, namely social media and hashtags more specifically, to publicly draw attention to the exclusion of racialized women in white feminist organizing. In reaction, some white feminists with large online followings blamed racialized women for ultimately being responsible for making Twitter “toxic” for any feminist progress (Goldberg, 2014). Mainstream journalists circulating these discussions focus on the role of racialized women in creating the toxic environment with their criticisms of feminism (Goldberg, 2014). In many cases, such coverage tends to reinforce racist stereotypes about angry Black women, rather than engaging with, and responding to, the critiques being raised (Daniels, 2016).

Calla also noted that, apart from what she described as bullying racialized women, Canadian white feminists that she observes and interacts with on Twitter “have to get better at their trans inclusion shit. It’s been a fight on Canadian Twitter feminism.” For example, three participants made note of witnessing Canadian white feminists circulating transphobic messages within Canadian Twitter feminist communities. Calla’s overall response to these transphobic attacks from individuals whom she would otherwise suspect as being an ally in the cause was that it “breaks my heart.” This is to say that, instead of being supported by other feminists involved in ending violence against women online, Calla experienced violence at their hands. These trans-exclusive instances are similar to those expressed in Chapter 4.1.2. from participants’ experiences with many women-only antiviolence organizations, demonstrating that this type of violence is not unique to online spaces.

Such violence is encouraged by online technologies. Calla made note of the logic behind women “dragging” other women on social media, illustrating this point:
social media is built on dragging people […] So when we drag people, it gains
followers sometimes, right? And so it’s a tactic, right? So a part of it is: I’m going
to attack you and then I’m going to gain more followers […] I think also, we need
to check this hunger to have a platform, like a hunger for more followers and how
you get more followers because sometimes more followers bringing our attention
is taking someone else out.

Here, Calla draws attention to how seeking and gaining popularity is a feature, not a bug – it is inherently embedded into the existential purpose of social platform design (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). So, if dragging increases popularity, or if being dragged does, social media users are likely to act accordingly.

Often the activists who can align their narratives with mainstream media narratives end up being those who are noticed and highlighted with more visibility (Guha, 2015; Milan, 2015; Philips, 2018). Although the issue of racialized women calling for more accountability from white women feminists has circulated through mainstream media and popular online social media spaces, the daily occurrences of racism, sexism, and transphobia that racialized women face online is frequently ignored by mainstream media journalists and white feminists (Park & Leonard, 2014). Incidents of toxicity on some white feminists’ Twitter accounts may be critiques reflecting these women’s inability to reckon with white supremacy, settler colonialism, and capitalism – and with the relation of these structures to white feminism – but such critiques appear much less likely to receive mainstream coverage (Daniels, 2016; Loza, 2014).

The exclusion and vilification of racialized women by some white women feminists follows a long history of racialized women being pushed out of anti-violence
spaces that are too often pervaded by racism and white supremacy (see Chapter 4.2.1.). In the context of TFV, however, these actions are taken in a more visible manner through public Twitter and Facebook posts and comments, with the effect of keeping racialized women outside of feminist networks and online spaces dedicated to ending violence. As noted previously, online design features can amplify polarization through likes, shares, and retweets that can bolster one side over another, but not necessarily the side that is most in need of increased visibility. When white feminists are characterized as TFV victims, it is much more difficult to highlight TFV (often from white feminists) targeting racialized women in the anti-violence online space. As Crenshaw (1991) pointed out in relation to offline spaces, we start to see how the differences among women can lead to tensions within feminist networks in online spaces.

Similar to Calla, Mardella also disliked Twitter, avoiding the space altogether and even referring to it as a “toxic” space for many Indigenous people she knew. Unlike in Calla’s description of dragging between white feminists and non-white feminists, Mardella emphasized how different a call out culture (i.e., a culture of being publicly shamed) is within some Indigenous communities. She explained that:

the call out culture is gross, and that’s in other communities too. But, because we’re still living under ongoing colonization and because our families and communities have been traumatized and disempowered in so many ways, we don’t know how to relate to each other anymore in a good way and especially around recognizing and honouring each other’s differences. So yeah, I just don’t participate there.
Although, as Mardella stated, all communities contain some call out culture, she emphasized how calling others out over social media has been particularly harmful for many Indigenous people she knew. Respecting that Indigenous people and communities across Canada are not monolithic and have diverse values, Mardella observed how Indigenous individuals attacking one another has become a survival mechanism in settler colonized spaces. She observed an online call out culture on Twitter that was unproductive in terms of building bridges amongst networks involved in Indigenous activism more broadly.

Such an online call out culture of some Indigenous people oppressing other Indigenous people is a part of a cycle of violence that stems from settler colonialism, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, and the intergenerational trauma caused by the effects of residential schooling, the child welfare system, the Indian Act, and ongoing racism toward Indigenous people, both from non-Indigenous individuals and the government (Korff, 2020; NWAC, 2015). Some of these disputes are further caused by government colonization strategies that have created an environment where Indigenous peoples need to prove their identity, and yet many Indigenous peoples’ cultures have been undermined via residential schooling, with familial ties eroded as a consequence of the Indian Act (Korff, 2020; NWAC, 2015). More specifically, the Indian Act of 1868, residential school abuse, and the child welfare system in Canada have all been linked directly to the dramatic deterioration of many Indigenous communities \(^56\) (Blackstock, 2020).

\(^56\) Under the Indian Act, from 1920 to 1948, residential school attendance for Indigenous children was a mandatory goal of assimilating Indigenous children, instilling in them Christian European values as a form of cultural genocide (TRCC, 2015). Reports to the federal government and survivor testimonials demonstrate the rampant sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and death toll as a result of Indigenous children being enrolled, often forcibly, in residential schools, the last of which closed in Canada in 1996 (TRCC, 2015). The abduction of Indigenous children continued, however, even as residential schools closed down across the country, through the Sixties Scoop and other social welfare programs placing...
LaRocque, 1994). For instance, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1991, p. 362) identified the lasting cultural impacts of residential schools including:

- the loss of language through forced English speaking,
- the loss of traditional ways of being on the land,
- the loss of parenting skills through the absence of four or five generations of children from Native communities,
- and the learned behaviour of despising Native identity.

These findings were further confirmed in the report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC, 2015). Mardella’s comment points to more subtle cultural manifestations of these lasting impacts of settler colonization that remain visible in relationships between Indigenous communities and community members on Twitter.

Violent experiences perpetrated through a call out culture, however, are not unique to Twitter. Calla saw Facebook as more toxic than Twitter because she was constantly under harassment from friends and family. “I find with Facebook,” she observed, “people drag each other so hard. I find it less toxic on Twitter actually.” Calla noticed more negative judgement on Facebook than from her Twitter networks, even though her Facebook networks consisted of more close friends and family members than Twitter. Calla noted how she perceives Facebook’s design to facilitate judgement and critique, stating:

There’s like a one-upmanship thing, where it’s all “I’m more this than you” and, “oh you said this thing but did you remember this thing?” It just feels like

Indigenous children in mostly white homes. When residential schools started closing, the federal government turned to the provinces to provide services to Indigenous communities, resulting in the mass adoption of Indigenous children into child welfare Canada, also known as the “Sixties Scoop,” which took place between 1960 and 1990 (TRCC, 2015). Blackstock (2007) examined the role of child welfare programming and found an overwhelming number of Indigenous children being taken away in comparison to non-Indigenous children.
everybody knows you, it feels really smaller [on Facebook]. Twitter, it feels like there’s more anonymity to it. People don’t think they know you so you can shape your own story a little bit more.

Facebook’s design seemed to further perpetuate Petunia’s experience of receiving online attacks through call outs from her close Facebook networks, including attacks directed at her when she posted generally about feminism or anti-violence. Petunia’s networks of Facebook friends and family differed from her Twitter network of followers, where those potentially closest to her and who knew more about her were connected with her on Facebook. Twitter, on the other hand, made her feel more anonymous as her network of followers were primarily made up of acquaintances and strangers. This led Petunia to remark that the some of the TFV she experienced on Facebook was originating:

from men like family members, men from school and stuff. They won’t be scary violent but they troll, but that could just be a nuisance but they do it, and they try to push your buttons […] they do it because they just like to see women mad, which is very, “dude, do you get off on this?”

These anecdotes reflect Cho’s (2018) findings on why racialized, queer youth avoid platforms like Facebook in favour of others, like Tumblr. Cho (2018) revealed how specific design features of Facebook related to its objective to collect and profit from personal user data extraction created an environment that resulted in negative experiences for queer racialized youth, such as being outed to family and friends. These imperatives shaped the design of Facebook to one that is public by default, meaning that users are tied not only to their ‘real’ identities, but their content is easily networked and made more
visible to family members and friends, many of whom do not accept queerness. This further demonstrates how activists trying to build a brand around themselves run into difficulty when relying on their personal Facebook profile to connect to larger networks while simultaneously dealing with interpersonal attacks coming from family members and friends.

Despite the differences in the networks for some of the participants, both Twitter and Facebook were similar in co-constructing a culture of toxicity from known users towards those involved in anti-violence online activism. Participants shared experiences of TFV inflicted by those who were easily identifiable to them, including white women feminists and family members or friends. Significantly, these individuals were otherwise assumed to be a part of their supportive networks. This group was easily identifiable because they often used their personal accounts to “call out” and “drag” other users, and overall create a “toxic” environment for participants. Thelandersson (2014) asserts that Twitter conflicts such as these are just a form of self-reflexivity and a safe space for feminists to learn and engage with intersectionality. Yet, from the perceptions of participants in this study, such experiences are less individual conflicts and more instances of TFV tied to the larger, contextual role of forms of oppression that take place within feminist anti-violence spaces. In this context, many identifiable online perpetrators act paradoxically as “simultaneously oppressor and oppressed” (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 556).

6.1.3. Unexpected experiences of TFV

The visibility and amplification of the activists’ online work via social media networking, specifically through a “context collapse” of social media networks, brought
about what I call unexpected forms of TFV. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a context collapse refers to the collapsing of multiple social groups into a singular online networked group of friends or followers (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The TFV described in this section arose from the practice of describing violence. Some participants rely on sharing stories of violence on social media as a strategy to raise awareness of violence experienced by racialized women. However, for those who have been targeted by violence, details about these stories can be retraumatizing.

Participants pointed to some backlash from people who had experienced violence, objecting to some of the content they were sharing, especially graphic details of violence. Initially, Azami assumed that by employing an intersectional and specifically anti-colonial analysis, her podcast about violence facing Indigenous women would serve as another reminder of the ongoing and persistent violence Indigenous communities face in Canada. She did not expect it to take on a violent quality of its own:

One thing that I have heard from Indigenous communities or people is that it’s difficult to listen [to these stories on the podcast]. Actually some people say they can’t listen to it and I understand that, and I told my own family in particular that they shouldn’t feel like they have to listen to it because we don’t need to be educated in the same way about the trauma that we’ve experienced and we don’t need to understand the history of residential schools or the legacies of colonization because these are realities that we live with and are still living with. It was not backlash but maybe an unintended kind of result that for Indigenous people in particular it could be triggering or traumatizing to listen to.
Azami’s comment demonstrates that the digital media tools and content she created were meant for an audience who had little to no awareness of violence against Indigenous women and their communities. In this case, messages were intended to reach those audiences who were unaware of these experiences of violence, yet some of the users the message reached were Indigenous people themselves. However, because of the lack of control over how such content spreads online, her intended audience was not guaranteed. As a result, although Azami felt that non-Indigenous people needed to hear these stories to understand the realities of such violence, an unexpected outcome of her anti-violence education was that some Indigenous people could endure retraumatization if they chose to listen to these stories.

Similarly, the ubiquity of trending hashtags, such as #MeToo, advocating for anti-violence have been picked up by mainstream media, but these developments have left some of the participants in this study with mixed feelings. Nox, for instance, spoke about how #MeToo drew attention to the issues of violence against women that have gone unnoticed for a long time. “I think it’s so phenomenal,” she said, that through social media you can start movements so easily and it’s allowing a safe platform essentially for people to share their stories. So, it’s becoming much harder for partner violence, intimate partner violence to be hidden, because there’s a space in which to talk about it and there’s other people sharing those same experiences and that gives you a lot more courage to share your story and it’s being viewed by the general public all over the world.

Nox’s comments are reminiscent of much of the media and research narratives that emphasize the positive potentials of feminist online activism, specifically around hashtag
feminism (see Chapter 1), such as findings that women find solidarity with, and comfort from, other strangers who have experienced similar violence or contribute to a collective affective response to their shared experiences of violence (Clark, 2016; Keller et al., 2019; Megarry, 2014; Mendes et al., 2018; Rentschler, 2014; Thrift, 2014).

Calla, on the other hand, found the trending and virality of #MeToo to be overwhelming at times. She said:

So #MeToo, I remember being at home and seeing it and [the hashtag] would keep popping up, and I was like “this is a lot.” And especially when you do the [activism], people want to tell me this stuff all the time and guess what? I get to decide, when I hear those stories, how I hear those stories, who’s going to tell me those stories.

This quote further illustrates how the violence that occurred following the social media cycle of #MeToo served as a site of re-traumatization for some (Henry & Powell, 2015; Noel, 2020). For those involved in the front-line, there was a noticeable increase in calls from women to rape crisis centers following #MeToo (CBC News, 2018; Joseph, 2018), further stretching the resources of an already poorly resourced and understaffed anti-violence community (Rogers & Knight, 2011).

Some may choose to avoid certain types of media, but social media feeds are unpredictable. Unexpected exposure to graphic depictions of violence can be a retraumatizing event for those who have experienced violence when these are shared as constant reminders of the ease with which violence occurs (Noel, 2020). Additionally, on social media, others may speak in support of perpetrators, which can cause further revictimization to those who have experienced similar violence. Many users, including
some of my participants, wanted their social media use to be focused on their activism, but also a form of entertainment and a way of staying connected with family and friends. Yet, a consistent and pervasive context collapse prevented participants from making their own choices about when and how they viewed violent content.

In another instance of unexpected contributions to TFV, Calla was told that she was contributing to the dispersal of violent messages online after she shared images of violent messages she received because of her activism. She shared a screenshot of some of the constant vitriol she received with her online community. Some people within her network were triggered by this screenshot, which detailed the explicit and graphic violence she was enduring. Calla told me that her response to those who were triggered by her posts was: “well, yeah, it’s really triggering when I get it.” Although sharing traumatic stories can be helpful in demonstrating solidarity (Clark, 2016; Lokot, 2018), not all survivors want to be exposed to others’ graphic experiences of violence while they scroll through their social media news feeds. There is a trade-off between sharing the content and potentially triggering those who see it, but there is also a risk of further silencing those experiencing violence by not sharing them. However, with social media platforms, there is little control over where such messages, which contain the potential for both harm and liberation, may land.

Such unexpected TFV illustrates that participants both experienced violence and caused it. For some people – including some of these participants – who describe experiencing re-traumatization from reading descriptions of violence as a form of violence, this creates a significant dilemma about how they can do their work without harming others. Similar problems arise in mainstream media, where news coverage of
sexual violence cases become sensationalized to attract viewers and readers. Instead, activists have urged mainstream media to use a trauma-informed approach when reporting on instances of violence, and it seems as if these approaches could also be applied to those who are using social media to discuss cases of violence (see Chapter 4.1.3.). Such instances also complicate the labour of racialized women in purging racist and sexist content from the Internet because, by calling attention to the instance of violence publicly for it to be removed, they could also be contributing to the violence that others face (Nakamura, 2015). Therefore, although we could assume that educating the public on racism and sexism benefits everyone, the result is a form of trauma-inducing violence experienced disproportionately by racialized women (Nakamura, 2015).

Similarly, some participants experienced violence from survivors of violence in need of support. Calla admitted that her experience of online “harassment sometimes doesn’t come from people who were trolls, it comes from survivors who are in a really bad place that are like, ‘I need you to help me, you need to fix this.’” She recollected one such experience:

I’ve had people even show up to my office that saw me online. One person showed up hysterically crying, telling my staff that I need to meet with her, why haven’t I emailed her back, she messaged me on social media. I only work with this [local] community but it seems that because of my online profile that I should meet with her and that I owed it to her to work with her and I should work with everybody […] I can show you the amount of messages I get that are graphic experiences of their own forms of violence which are horrible.
In this example, information about Calla’s workplace was easily accessible online on her professional website. Violence from those who have experienced violence demanding help indicates a mirroring of the offline constraints and limited support and resources faced by so many in Canada, as demonstrated in Chapter 4.2.1. But when these women who experienced violence perceived themselves as having been rejected for help, the participants themselves sometimes became the target of further violence in a ripple effect. Those who have experienced violence and need support have become violent towards online activists in ways that include traumatizing strategies, like stalking or coming to an individual’s place of work to demand support and providing unsolicited graphic details of violence. However, the survivor’s articulation of violence needs to be understood within a larger systemic violent structure that perpetuates and reinforces the violence that women face, for instance, when support services are consistently defunded and unavailable to those in need of support.

Some of the women I interviewed are being harmed by instances of TFV, leading to the abandonment of activism in online spaces or activism altogether. This does a disservice to their activism and to the larger collective goal of increasing visibility of the anti-violence activism of racialized women. As things stand, white feminists receive more likes and retweets, as their networks seem more likely to be larger and to include more elite and key actors or influencers than those of racialized women. Within all experiences of TFV described, the violence was facilitated and amplified by the participants’ use of Twitter and Facebook to increase the visibility of their messages about anti-violence. Yet, unlike the discourses of online violence primarily focused on white women and their experiences of violence, my study reveals the various ways in
which TFV involves more than just sexualized gendered oppressions, and more than just anonymous mobs. My participants’ perspectives and experiences differed in specific ways that were tied to their race, abilities, and gender. Violence for these participants was facilitated and amplified because of, but not solely based on, anonymous accounts, context collapse arising from social media platforms’ networking features (e.g., the like, retweet, and share functions that encourage the distribution of emotionally-charged, polarizing, timely, and/or controversial content). Despite the promise that social media provided the participants in this study, many also continued to face oppression facilitated and amplified by social media technologies.

These results underscore the importance of expanding definitions of TFV to center considerations beyond sexism. Otherwise, we are missing out on experiences impacting women from some of the most marginalized communities. These interviews provide insight into experiences of violence in online spaces that we should pay attention to and that differ from white, straight, cisgender, able-bodied women’s experiences. For many women, other visible aspects of their social identities, such as their perceived race, are targeted as well their gender and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991). However, research and media attention primarily focuses on the cases and experiences of white women (Hackworth, 2018). Indeed, the experience of online violence based solely on sexism is a unique experience to white, middle class, able-bodied women. However, TFV that participants experienced was not just concerning misogyny and did not just come from anonymous perpetrators. Instead, the TFV that the participants in this study experienced stemmed from multiple sites of oppression. Their responses reveal that, although research and media often dismiss “trolling” and online violence as the work of anonymous
individuals, perpetrators of TFV include friends, family, and other activists. Indeed, the
participants themselves may have sometimes, unintentionally, perpetrated TFV.

6.2. Addressing TFV

The manner in which participants addressed experiences of TFV were as varied as
their experiences of TFV. Participants expressed mixed feelings specifically about
Twitter’s policies around content moderation. On the one hand, they appreciated Twitter
taking down individual posts directing violence at them. However, on the other hand,
Twitter was not helpful to these participants in removing privately sent messages or
banning the individual perpetrators altogether. Additional tools were available to help
prevent some instances of anonymous TFV, but participants had to have a verified
account status to access these. Such status, and therefore the tools available with the
status, is not available to all users and leaves many without these options, revealing a bias
towards those users who are expected to experience violence and what that violence
looks like. Finally, participants also discussed how they removed, exposed, or intervened
with perpetrators themselves who were attacking them online. Participants explained that
some of these interventions were helpful to them in the short term, but overall, the lack of
interventions from the platforms significantly limited their ability to continue their online
activism. Such a lack of oversight into the various experiences of TFV that women face
reinforces the idea that TFV only consists of experiences of clearly visible and
recognizable instances of racism or sexism.

Following discussion of the ways in which social media companies addressed
participants’ experiences of TFV, I highlight participants’ recommendations for
addressing and intervening in experiences of TFV. Many emphasized the need for
collaboration among social media companies and anti-violence organizations, specifically ones that involve racialized women’s experiences and perspectives. Their recommendations also emphasize how technologies, culture, and society impact the experiences of TFV and, therefore, TFV cannot adequately be solved solely by individual social media companies.

6.2.1. Twitter-related interventions

This section illustrates how participants described not being adequately protected or supported by content moderation decisions and policies from Twitter when they experienced TFV. First, from participants’ perspectives, Twitter’s interventions in instances of TFV on their platform seemed to focus on removing content only if it was publicly visible, providing little or no support for instances when violent content was shared through private messages. Secondly, participants expressed that design features to better deal with some instances of TFV were provided to those who applied for and were granted verified Twitter accounts. Twitter verification is primarily reserved for public figures, brands, and organizations, thus reinforcing the idea that TFV only consists of instances that more consistently happen to those who Twitter deems are public figures. Finally, as Twitter reporting mechanisms were inadequate for combatting the range of TFV experienced by participants, some participants responded to their experiences of TFV themselves. Some of these interventions involved deleting messages and blocking accounts. In other cases, participants looked to their various personal networks to intervene in their experiences of TFV.

First, participants found Twitter’s rules effective in responding to some instances of TFV, most notably one-off attacks in the form of tweets. For instance, Levana shared
with me: “I would report [the post] and Twitter would, of course, each time, they were
great, they would take them down, that particular post.” Each social media platform
provides their own mechanisms for reporting content that violates that platform’s
policies, and each has its own rules governing how to respond (Crawford & Gillespie,
2014). Twitter provides information as to how it classifies instances of online violence
under one of five categories: harassment; physical violence; exposure of personal and
private information; the posting of spam; and hate and discrimination against a protected
category (Twitter, n.d.b.). Reports to Twitter can be made on behalf of oneself, a
dependent, or on behalf of a friend. Despite the reported cases\footnote{As an example, Twitter has a long history of, through its vague policies, allowing white supremacists to
continue using the platform, while suspending and banning activists involved in #MeToo (Romano, 2017).} where Twitter has been
reluctant in enforcing their policies of online violence to all users equally, Levana
benefitted from the reporting design features when reporting violent posts.

In contrast, Twitter’s response was far from great in cases where Levana wanted
direct or private messages removed and the accounts of perpetrators sending her such
vitriol to be removed from the platform. Levana cautioned that, “if [the violent content]
was private, too bad for me, right, because they [Twitter] don’t care about what takes
place in private.” Violent messages sent through private messages were perceived not to
be a main concern for Twitter. This is further evident in how Twitter’s form to report on
the instance of violence asks users to provide the URL of the concerning tweet. Private
messages do not have a public URL to share and Twitter does not accept screenshots as
evidence for reporting (Matias et al., 2015; Twitter, n.d.b.).
Levana also explained to me that, from her experience, Twitter “wouldn’t do anything to the person who posted the [violent content].” In this case, her perpetrators were anonymous, most likely using single use fake accounts to perpetuate their violence. Twitter’s lack of response was similarly noticeable in a three-week sample of reported harassment on Twitter in 2014, with Twitter responding with direct action, such as giving out warnings, suspending, or deleting an account, only 55% of the time when content was reported (Matias et al., 2015). Similarly, an Amnesty International (2018) report revealed that when women reported experiences of TFV to Twitter, they were often met with inaction. These experiences are worthy of concern as many individuals have long reported experiencing violence on Twitter, and Twitter’s consistent inaction potentially leads many users to abandon the platform. Although blocking is an available feature on Twitter’s platform, perpetrators can easily create multiple accounts from which to post, thereby eliminating the effectiveness of blocking one account.

Twitter characterizes themselves as a platform open to all with little attention given to moderating content or users and, thus, Twitter is largely unprepared to deal with the proliferation of violence on their platforms (Gillespie, 2018). As in cases like the attacks on Gamergate\textsuperscript{58} or those facing some celebrities, Twitter has been slow to take action against, and to ban those implicated in, the violence (Lawson, 2016; Salter, 2018). In fact, Salter (2018) argues that Twitter’s design of being an online public space where users can easily interact with one another, as well as their inconsistent and lax approach to content moderation, facilitates such campaigns of targeted violence. However,

\textsuperscript{58} An online orchestrated campaign of violence targeting female gamers that took place primarily from 2014 to 2015.
“platforms must moderate” and they face many challenges determining what content to keep and what to remove from their platform in a way that keeps advertisers, corporate partners, and users all satisfied and continuing to use the platform (Gillespie, 2018, p. 5).

A close examination of the platform’s content moderation strategies reveals that such reporting mechanisms are not merely technical features, but function through the interplay of algorithms, users, platform policies, and broader political forces (Crawford & Gillespie, 2014; Gillespie, 2018). The purpose of creating such a multi-modal mechanism is to help platforms easily moderate reported user-generated content. However, the responsibility of reporting is on those who initiate the reporting mechanisms with the click of a “report” button (Crawford & Gillespie, 2014). Further, the reporting mechanism leaves little room for users to provide context of the report, resulting in platforms, either through algorithms or human-algorithm hybrids, to make final decisions about reported content and how best to respond (Crawford & Gillespie, 2014; Matias et al., 2015; Roberts, 2016). Decisions to delete or keep content are not made consistently as moderators weigh the potential profitability of the spread of some content, choosing to leave some of the vitriol existing on the platform (Harvey, 2019; Roberts, 2016). In addition, some Twitter users are afforded more resources for combatting these issues than others, such as those with a verified account.

The process of content moderation, when humans are involved, may also further perpetuate the unexpected TFV experienced by users, such as the participants in this study. Content moderators are often low wage workers who spend their days reading and watching some of the more hateful content on the Internet, having to make decisions about which of this vitriol is in accordance with social media policies or not (Gillespie,
Those involved in content moderation involving violence report experiencing secondary trauma (Mathias et al., 2015; Nakamura, 2015), as well as re-traumatization for those who have been targets of violence before (Henry & Powell, 2015). Such work is also time-consuming and emotionally taxing, which is why social media platforms pay people full-time for performing this labour alongside filtering algorithms (Gillespie, 2018; Jeong, 2018; Matias et al., 2015; Roberts, 2016).

Having a verified account on Twitter was more useful to participants in navigating many instances of anonymous TFV. Two participants I interviewed had verified accounts on Twitter, meaning they were deemed to be public figures by Twitter. Thus, their profile pages host a badge or symbol marking their accounts as being vetted as authentic, instead of an imitation account. One participant revealed that, because her Twitter account was verified, she had more access to online tools available to manage some of her experiences of anonymous TFV than she did before she was a verified user. Referring to advanced features available to verified users that help filter posts that use certain words, names, or phrase, she told me:

that’s a privilege that I’ve had because [having a verified account] filters out your messages a little bit and you don’t see all the harassment so you only see people that are real, so you don’t see like really gross stuff.

Users with verified accounts are also provided with additional settings to limit experiencing TFV, such as the ability to restrict receiving messages from accounts that

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59 The option for users to be verified on Twitter has been available since 2009 and was traditionally available to those deemed as public figures holding accounts “maintained by users in music, acting, fashion, government, politics, religion, journalism, media, sports, business, and other key interest areas” (Twitter, n.d.). In 2016, Twitter opened up the process of verification for anyone to apply and explain why they feel they need it. Twitter’s verification process was briefly closed to new applicants, but as of 2021 has re-opened (Twitter, n.d.).
are not being followed in return, and offered extended features available for reporting, including more text space to report on the context of reported violence and the ability to share screenshots as evidence (Amnesty International, 2018; Matias et al., 2015). However, such features may still be ineffective in blocking or filtering out content from those identifiable and known to the participant and whom they were likely following. Furthermore, users applying for verification status at the time of my interviews (2018) were also required to have their account set as viewable to the public, meaning that verification status and the features that come along with it are not available to those who keep their accounts private (Twitter, n.d.a). Users were more likely to be granted verification status if they were a notable user, one with a large number of followers, and had consistent public Twitter activity over the last six months before applying for verification (Twitter, n.d.a.). Ultimately, the decision to grant verification status is up to Twitter, thus providing additional supports to intervene in instances of TFV for certain users that are not available to all users.

Finally, participants also engaged in more direct actions, such as deleting or responding to perpetrators as a form of short-term and immediate relief from TFV. When participants received anonymous and one-off instances of TFV, they would most often delete the individual posts and comments, doing their best to ignore the violent messages that were directed at them. Petunia’s immediate response to comments about transgender lesbians, before the attack was crowd-sourced by many perpetrators, was to delete them. She said: “I got this random comment being like ‘oh these are all for the male gaze, you should be ashamed of yourself’ and I was like ok, delete.” The comments she received were attempting to devalue transgender lesbians and to shame Petunia for posting and
sharing such content. Petunia’s immediate reaction to delete this type of comment demonstrates that she has no interest in engaging with those who are disparaging her posts and values.

Although effective for Petunia in this case, there are benefits and challenges to this type of intervention. Deleting comments is a form of distancing that may be suitable for some women experiencing TFV and also involves the least amount of effort on their part (Jane, 2017). Participants deleting violent content remove it from their social media pages, preventing their followers from viewing it unless a screenshot was taken or the post has been otherwise archived and then shared. Despite providing short-term relief for participants, this deleting strategy also potentially makes it more difficult to provide evidence of instances of such TFV once the content or accounts are removed, unless screenshots and records were kept. Further, even if a user has screenshots, they are unable to use these as evidence of TFV unless they have a verified account.

Instead of deleting content, Faye indicated that she sometimes responds to easily identifiable perpetrators of violence publicly. She recounted that she uses social media “whenever I get racially targeted,” sometimes publicising the names and the content of violent messages she receives from known perpetrators. She shared one anecdote in which a white feminist she knew asked her a racist question, to which Faye responded by posting the message on her social media accounts. Her strategy resembles Jane’s (2017; 2020) research finding that women use naming and shaming tactics to bring perpetrators to extrajudicial account. However, arguably, sharing these experiences publicly to spread awareness of the type and frequency of vitriol certain users receive does little in stopping it from occurring, as there is no guarantee that the perpetrator will see it and respond in
turn (Weiss, 2016). Moreover, strategies of sharing vitriolic messages may also inflict unexpected TFV to followers (see Chapter 6.1.3). Nevertheless, such a strategy to hold someone publicly accountable for their violent actions may also inadvertently reinforce the idea that TFV consists solely of those experiences that are publicly circulated, thereby overlooking instances of TFV that are either removed by the participant, dealt with privately, or escalated to the platform behind the scenes.

In other instances where perpetrators of TFV were easily identifiable, some participants opted to engage with them privately. Calla shared an encounter with a white feminist on Twitter who she witnessed viciously attacking other racialized women online. Calla divulged that, after some self-reflection, she wondered whether or not to respond to this individual publicly before deciding to engage with her privately. She told me that she wrote to this white feminist in a direct message on Twitter stating: “listen, I see you doing this and I understand that it helps make your platform bigger.” She further explained to me that “I’m not really interested in that drag culture and I’ve been really watching myself when and how even I call in people.” Her use of a “calling in” strategy refers to assessing situations of oppression from those we know and respect from a point of compassion (Trân, 2013). However, instead of perceiving “calling in” as the exact opposite of “calling out,” Trân (2013) argues that calling in is specifically for those people who we would want to be in our community. For Calla, calling in was a useful strategy to engage with this perpetrator, perhaps because they travelled in similar professional or activist networks around anti-violence activism.

The examples of strategies that participants undertook to respond to instances of TFV are revealing of the labour of racialized women who are asserting their value as
social media content moderators against misogyny, racism, homophobia, and transphobia. As Nakamura (2015, p. 112) argues, the efforts of these individuals to reduce the violence on social media platforms benefit everyone: “the work itself matters partly because of who is performing it, and why.” Yet, this labour is not sustainable for racialized women as the threats and harassment escalate and the options for intervening and prevention are largely ineffective (Nakamura, 2015).

For instance, two participants’ experiences of TFV were so severe that they left social media platforms altogether. Calla told me she has taken breaks from Twitter when TFV was at its most severe for her, although these were not permanent. She remembered: “there was a two-week period I took off of Twitter. I was like, I’m done. I took a break.” Further, Calla recognized that her ability to leave temporarily rather than permanently is not available to everyone, given that she has some privilege over others in her situation who lack a strong offline and online community of support. This was revealed through her strong association with private social media message groups where, as described earlier, “her community” was. For Calla, the benefits of the connections she has formed and maintained with few others over social media outweigh the costs associated with anti-violence online activism as a racialized woman.

The opposite was the case for Levana, however, who disclosed that she had a small personal support network in her life. When Levana recounted her experiences of TFV, we had to take a moment's break as I could hear in her voice the start of tears. It was painful for her to recount her stories in detail to me, but at the same time, it seemed as if it was important for her to have someone to listen to her stories with no judgement.
She told me that “I’m getting too much crap, there’s not enough benefit.” As a result, Levana shared that she was close to leaving Twitter more permanently.

Participants leaving social media platforms demonstrate the mix of exhaustion and frustration they experience dealing with instances of TFV along with the little support available to them. This is a reflection of the minuscule support those who have experienced violence receive from government resources and the anti-violence sector (see Chapter 4). As more racialized women involved in anti-violence online activism leave corporate social media platforms, their participation in online public spaces is further impacted. Given the benefits of social media use beyond activism, such as for connecting with others, entertainment, and participation in online life, removing themselves from social media participation demonstrates how perpetrators continue to silence racialized women by erasing them from online public spaces, contributing to further colonization of corporate social media platforms.

### 6.2.2. Recommended interventions

Some participants shared with me their recommendations towards better responses and interventions to the range of experiences of TFV they face. First, Kalliope’s suggestion was for social media companies to be more proactive, rather than reactive, in their approach to ending TFV. She wanted to see far more collaborations and relationship building between social media companies and community organizers. She explained that:

we [those involved in anti-violence work] should be a part of leading or I honestly think co-designing [these tools]. I think the biggest piece is how can you do it together and not have hierarchical structure or how can we build connection with
one another? So I think our [women of colour] issues are different and in many ways we find that they’re put in a bag that’s just women’s issues but that’s not the case in our physical world and its definitely not the case in the digital space.

Twitter has collaborated with women’s organizations before, most notably the Women’s Action Media Center (Marcotte, 2014). However, this relationship was formed following the events of Gamergate, after permitting TFV to circulate on their platforms as Twitter increased visibility, suggesting that violence is normalized on these platforms until enough public attention is gathered (Harvey, 2019). Moreover, the hierarchy in decision-making between the Women’s Action Media Center and Twitter was unclear in terms of who made final decisions beyond suggestions for improvement and how permanent this collaboration was. Finally, Kalliope’s comment further draws attention to how TFV cannot be solved solely as a “women’s issue,” as such framing results in prioritizing white cisgender able-bodied women’s issues. Specifically, she asserted that racialized women need to be included and involved at these decision-making tables to minimize future violent experiences (as discussed in Chapter 4).

Furthermore, as interviews with participants and other research has shown, some instances of TFV rarely stay on one platform, creating a pipeline of hate across multiple spaces (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015; Jeong, 2018). Addressing TFV, then, cannot rely on the interventions from one or a few corporate social media platforms alone, as critiquing only individual social media platforms is just one small piece of the puzzle involved in TFV. After all, the Internet did not invent sexism, racism, transphobia, and other forms of oppressions. Rather, they are “enabled by technology and the cultural norms of Internet communication in which this behavior is supported, defended, and even
valued” (Shaw, 2014, p. 275). From this perspective, finding a technological solution, for instance, would not be sufficient to stop and prevent TFV. As Kalliope further reflected on how TFV is part of a larger continuum of violence:

you can’t stop technology-facilitated violence if you’re not solving the issues in our physical spaces. […] Consent education, sexual violence clinics are being defunded, so you know that’s going to be a bigger problem. That’s just going to manifest into the environment.

A final recommendation by participants was to have more collaboration and involvement of anti-violence organizations in discussions around digital technologies. Calla and Kalliope both expressed to me that there was little knowledge by many anti-violence resources about what TFV was and how best to support those women experiencing such violence. Kalliope argued that “the violence against women space has to be really aware of the technology that’s being built and engage in those conversations around technology.” Similarly, Calla insisted that there is a need for “training for violence against women organizations to understand the technology. Technology-related violence against women is so big and some [of them] are like ‘don’t use it.’” She further shared that, within her work in anti-violence organizations, she has “had to push [her] human resources team to take training on what social media is and what harassment looks like, because they don’t get it.”

TFV emphasizes the role of technology in facilitating, rather than causing, the violence that women experience. This often leads to responses such as “don’t use it,” as mentioned by Calla in the earlier comment, thus minimizing the experience of TFV and resulting in victim-blaming. Leaving online spaces is not the best response, as social
media platforms and accessing any Internet-enabled devices are increasingly becoming a large part of everyday activities. In this particular example, Calla noticed that the rhetoric imitated a “victim-blaming” approach, which views the anti-violence online activism work as a problem, even though Twitter and social media engagement is part of her professional work as well. As social media participation is expected for more and more professions (Veletsianos et al., 2018), and especially an increasingly viable option for anti-violence professionals and activists (Fairbairn, 2020), workplaces need to be better equipped with understanding how to support employees who may experience a range of violence, including TFV. More broadly, participants want to be able to create and circulate their anti-violence content without threats of further violence. This was clearly articulated by Petunia who shared that “the future for me would be that the Internet would be a safe space to do that advocacy.”

6.3. Conclusion

An intersectional approach, as the one invoked here, reveals hidden experiences of TFV. Not only were participants facing oppressions facilitated by technology that were anonymous, they experienced TFV that originated from identifiable perpetrators, including those within the anti-violence sector and others even closer within personal networks. Participants also expressed violence that was unintentionally facilitated by social media reach and connectivity. These findings provide further evidence that we must avoid a technological deterministic understanding resulting in simplistic solutions like leaving these spaces or removing anonymity. On Twitter and Facebook, all connections become friends, even connections who may otherwise be total strangers (Marwick & boyd, 2014). This confusion of networked connections may create
dangerous exposure for many users (Chun & Friedland, 2015). Chun and Friedland (2014) assert that much online violence occurs between those who are connected as friends in online networks and that social media, especially Facebook’s assumptions about safety and TFV, are based on stranger-danger myths, where the anonymous troll is assumed to be the only danger to users. These findings build on and further support this argument.

Finally, Twitter’s response to addressing TFV primarily emphasizes certain experiences of TFV that do not take into consideration the depth and range of violence that is actually experienced online. Thus, current responses from social media companies are ill-equipped to help those who experience this range of TFV on their platforms. Ultimately, these tensions and experiences impact which voices and perspectives remain present and in the spotlight of online discussions about anti-violence in social media spaces. This research highlights the persistent efforts to prevent racialized women from expressing their anti-violence views. As indicated by the participants in this study, racialized women involved in online activism around violence against women are often met with racist, sexist, ableist, transphobic, and homophobic online vitriol that is often not addressed by social media platforms and may not meet the threshold to be considered criminal offences. As this leaves few options to those experiencing such violence, these findings suggest a need to expand definitions of TFV the same way we do with offline violence to move beyond a single-axis, gender only approach. Otherwise, we are missing out on more insight into experiences of TFV and further silencing the marginalized individuals who experience it.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

To add to existing research on online activism challenging violence against women that tends to homogenize the experiences of women, this dissertation posed the following questions: why and how do racialized women participate in anti-violence online activism within Canada, specifically as it involves violence against women? My approach to the methodology and analysis was informed by intersectionality. Guided by semi-structured interviews with nine racialized women involved in online activism to challenge and end violence against women, I argue that these women are creating a variety of digital media technologies to draw attention to the intersectional nature of violence, but they are struggling to increase their visibility and widen their networks for support and mobilization. This study contributes a deeper and more nuanced account to the limited research on racialized women in Canada’s experiences of involving online activism to end violence against women, identifying distinctive experiences.

In this final chapter, I begin with a brief overview of the dissertation’s four major findings. Next, I present the key theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of this study. Finally, I present the limitations of this research and provide potential directions for future research interested in examining online activism around anti-violence in Canada from the margins.

7.1. Key Findings

This project offers four key findings that add to the growing conversation about the opportunities and challenges of digital media technologies for social transformation by emphasizing the perspectives and experiences of racialized women and their anti-violence online activism in Canada. First, this study revealed that participants are
involved in online activism to challenge violence against women in ways that are both similar to, and different than, the experiences reported on in literature focusing primarily on white women’s experiences, which rarely includes marginalized individuals in a Canadian context. The participants in this study challenge dominant public narratives they perceive as excluding and reinforcing violence faced by many women, explicitly doing so from an intersectional feminist perspective. The dominant narratives about violence against women that participants were challenging primarily stemmed from Canadian mainstream news media misrepresentations; the non-profit sector involved in preventing and ending violence against women; and settler colonial policies, frameworks, and regulations of racialized women experiencing violence (see Chapter 4).

Significantly, participants’ collective descriptions of violence against women involved instances of violence that included more than gender-based or sexual violence, which are typically the primary focus in research and media attention (see Chapter 1). Participants, instead, discussed violence against women that involved intersections of racism, settler colonialism, homophobia, ableism, and transphobia (see Chapter 3). With intersectionality, it is challenging to separate parts of different identities and parts of oppressive power systems because they happen together and are not easily separable, even as white feminism isolates gender as the only axis for analysis of power (Crenshaw, 1989; 1990; Hill Collins, 1990). Further, unlike the typical discourse of TFV against women, which primarily focuses on white women and their experiences of violence (see Chapter 1), the findings of this study indicate that there are various and complex ways in which TFV involves attacks on more than just gender. Further challenging typical discourses of TFV against women, which focus primarily on anonymous trolling,
interviews revealed aspects of TFV originating from those who were known to participants, including white women working in the anti-violence sector, family members, and friends. In addition, participants provided several examples of unexpected instances of violence, which included even participants themselves unintentionally perpetrating TFV through their online activism (see Chapter 6).

Secondly, this analysis uncovered various, less visible ways in which participants were involved in anti-violence online activism outside of the high-profile trending hashtags that have been the focus of much research and media attention (see Chapter 1). Rather, these less visible online spaces of anti-violence activism took place on: personal resource-based websites; social media profiles, pages, and in direct messages; and podcasts to host participants’ counternarratives around violence and anti-violence. These spaces were preferred as they are user-generated, low-budget, and operate outside of traditional media systems, thus allowing participants to harness the power of the media to tell their stories about, perspectives on, and experiences of violence both in their own words and on their own terms. This finding suggests that the scope of online activism needs to be widened beyond just the integration of singular social media platforms and features. Participants also discussed using Facebook and Twitter in unique ways for their own needs. Many participants discussed how the private spaces and closed networks on Facebook and Twitter were important and necessary aspects of their online activism and connections to social supports. For these participants, although Facebook and Twitter are still pivotal to their activism, they are not the only online tools being used (see Chapter 5).
Thirdly, this research revealed ways in which Facebook and Twitter shape much of the participants’ activism, as all participants relied on using both platforms to broadcast their counternarratives and engage in online activist efforts. Although many participants described using a number of social media strategies to expand their online networks of support and gain the attention of key actors, such as journalists and politicians, not all participants in this study described being as easily able to circulate their content to wider online networks. This distinction was evident along three areas that created very different experiences for the participants, including having: already established networks of support; the skills and time required to engage with others via social media platforms; and the assumed abilities of all users (see Chapter 5).

Having established networks and the skills and time required to engage with others are parts of the cultural norm of using Facebook pages and public Twitter profiles, with both being embedded in the design of these spaces as they were anticipated to be used by the platform and by potential followers and audiences. The assumed abilities of all users is another bias based on the cultural norms and design of both Facebook and Twitter in terms of their anticipated user, specifically an able-bodied and sighted user. This research further complicates the idea that mere access to social media platforms for online activism leads to transformative social change.

Moreover, for people such as Levana, who have physical and visual disabilities, being online is sometimes the only way to connect with others and to be involved in anti-violence activism. This challenges the notion that activists who work only online, and activism that takes place only online, are somehow inferior to those engaged partially or solely in offline activist work. Rather, those with disabilities may rely on digital media
technologies as their only source for their activism and, as indicated by several participants in this study, online activism can have a substantial impact on both online and offline communities (see Chapter 5).

Finally, findings from their interviews demonstrated that participants had to weigh the benefits and the challenges of having an online persona. To be impactful, online activists need to make their posts publicly available. Indeed, it benefits their cause to use the features of social media platforms to expand their networks and their public visibility, but that public visibility is a double-edged sword: in the hands of perpetrators, these activists’ online presence had the potential to expose them to TFV.

Together, these findings suggest that further research needs to be actively inclusive instead of universalizing or essentializing the perspectives and experiences of online anti-violence activism. This is best expressed by Kalliope, who stated that “our experiences are different, our concerns are different, our risks are different” in response to the question of why racialized women need to be involved in anti-violence online activism.

7.2. Contributions

This dissertation makes methodological, theoretical, and practical contributions situating anti-violence online activism in Canada in a historical and theoretical context, as well as interrogating its potentials towards transformative social justice. Methodologically, this dissertation centers the experiences and perspectives of nine racialized women in Canada, some of whom also identify as queer and/or disabled. Relying on semi-structured interviews, I was able to explore those factors that were most prevalent and apparent to the participants in this study as a way to acknowledge their
diversity and challenge the highly visible factors that often do not emphasize intersectional perspectives within a Canadian context.

Moreover, such an approach provides space for participants in the study to shape the data analysis in a way that findings make sense to them and their experiences. This means that I drew from my participants’ expertise as those involved in online activism to end violence against women and looked to their interview transcripts for direction when conducting data analysis and forming the theoretical approach. With this approach, participants described perspectives and experiences that provide nuance to existing content analysis-based research focused on feminist activism around violence against women.

Interviews with racialized women anti-violence activists revealed their perspectives of the benefits and challenges of online anti-violence activism, further complicating the notion that social media access leads to social change. Although social media can be sites of resistance for many marginalized groups, these media are also sites where violence targeting marginalized groups occurs. This results in some individuals, such as some of the participants in this study, simultaneously experiencing both privilege and oppression.

Further, the findings of this study reveal that interviews are necessary to uncover online activist content, approaches, and experiences that may not be apparent to researchers and media relying solely on information processed by algorithms that determine and filter hashtag content on social media platforms. This project has demonstrated that interview-focused research supplements research focusing solely on content while adding in the element of human agency, as well as the relationships and
entanglements of the technology and the women involved in anti-violence online activism.

Theoretically, this dissertation is guided by an intersectional approach to interrogate the complexity of power structures and relations that situate the experiences and perspectives of nine racialized women involved in online activism in Canada to end violence against women. This dissertation brings together intersectionality, with theories of technology and society, to the context of anti-violence online activism (Brock, 2011; Costanza-Chock, 2018; Gray, 2012; Noble, 2016; Noble & Tynes, 2016). What is unique in this approach on online activism around violence against women is, first, understanding that technologies and society are mutually constructed. This understanding helps to avoid technological deterministic arguments, as well as to focus on the technology, the larger socio-political context surrounding the creation, distribution, and use of technologies, and the human participants involved. Moreover, incorporating an intersectional framework provided me with analytical tools to critically examine and interrogate the positions of those who are marginalized from multiple and overlapping systems of oppression in a specifically Canadian context.

I was further guided by intersectional theorists in my definition of violence against women, moving from an exclusively gender-based definition to one that involves more instances of intersectional forms of interpersonal violence (e.g., violence based on racism, homophobia, and ableism in addition to sexism), as well as representational and structural forms of violence. My incorporation of intersectionality is also based on the interviews and how participants described their social locations in relation to their experiences and relationships of their anti-violence online activism. Thus, the theoretical
approach and literature review was reflexive and informed by the interviews. Such an approach contributes to an understanding of how cultural values and biases created in social media platforms affect the participation of these nine women and their needs for anti-violence online activism. Further, this approach reveals more benefits and challenges that may be helpful for researchers to understand the socio-technical power dynamics at play for marginalized users. This theoretical approach provides context for the technologies that participants discuss as pivotal to their activism and also context around their anti-violence activism in Canada. This context has been important in demonstrating that anti-violence activism from racialized women is not new and that their incorporation of digital media technologies for their activism is based on their convenience, low-cost, and ease in ability to share intersectional perspectives of violence.

Practically, this research provides some insights and recommendations towards social transformation based on the needs and experiences of nine racialized women anti-violence activists in Canada. Throughout this dissertation, I shared participants’ recommendations and suggestions that would improve the state of their online activism to challenge and end violence against women. Some of these recommendations and suggestions are short-term, aiming for: improvement in how journalists report on violence against women, including doing more research into the intersectional experiences of violence against women; critically examining the reliance on law enforcement for details about cases of women’s violence; and treating racialized women activists as experts in this area of violence against women (see Chapter 4.1.2.).

More specifically, as Chapter 6 has shown, there are consequences for marginalized individuals when not fully understanding the contours of the violence they
face because we are limited in our definition or characterization of violence. Importantly, participants drew connections between violence against women, including violence perpetrated by other women, and both broader societal violence and a lack of support and funding. In order to examine and explore the relationship between media and social transformation related to violence against women, we need to start with a more complex understanding of violence. Otherwise, we continue to be limited in our scope while privileging some individuals over others in our attempts to help them with their experiences of violence and prevent future ones.

In addition to the more short-term solutions offered by participants, some recommendations included more long-term solutions and sought to shift the status quo. For instance, one participant wanted to see a new governing structure based on compassion, while another participant stressed the importance of Indigenous sovereignty when it came to new approaches to governance (see Chapter 4). Finally, some participants discussed the need for more ongoing collaboration between anti-violence organizers, especially marginalized individuals, and those building and maintaining such digital media technologies (see Chapter 6). Although participants discussed some recommendations for improvement, this should not be taken as an exhaustive list, nor should these women be expected to provide the practical solutions to move forward in this area. As many of these participants are out on the front line and severely underpaid when compared with social media platform creators, designers, and engineers, the ongoing labour of addressing the issues identified in this study, and seeking out the knowledges required to do so, remains the responsibility of those working behind the scenes.
7.3. Limitations and Future Research

This research project demonstrates that racialized women have different experiences of incorporating online activism in their commitments to challenge and end violence against women. Therefore, the results of this project invite further examination into the ways that those situated at multiple and intersecting systems of power interact with diverse online tools and spaces for such online activism. Within the settler colonial borders of Canada, I have emphasized the perspectives and experiences of a small group of those involved in anti-violence work. As a result, there are other marginalized groups whose perspectives and experiences still need to be explored, such as: more racialized and/or disabled women; gender diverse and transgender individuals; and those working beyond the settler colonial borders of Canada who are actively involved in anti-violence activism. Additionally, although this research project is contextualized within the settler colonial Canadian state, it is missing the experiences and perspectives of racialized Francophone women and gender diverse individuals who have a contextually unique history within the state that is also worthy of further attention (Austin, 2013; Conradi, 2019).

However, my research has also further demonstrated that there are challenges involved in gaining access to and interviewing marginalized groups, which is perhaps a major reason why so much research relies on the convenience of a content analysis method instead of interviews. Likewise, more research on marginalized populations should be undertaken with caution to avoid the over-researching and further exploitation of these peoples, who typically receive very little benefit from their participation. For instance, future research may want to use critical participatory action research methods to
more closely involve those participating into the full research process. Critical participatory action research pays close attention to power dynamics and the structures of oppression that marginalized people face and is a good fit for mobilizing towards social transformation within and beyond the research field (Torre et al., 2017).

Moreover, critical participatory action research interrogates dominantly held positions in research and aims to shift power from researchers to participants involved in working together as co-researchers (Fine & Torre, 2019; Torre et al., 2017). Such an approach aligns with intersectional feminist research goals because it breaks down hierarchies between researcher and participants and, on the basis of this study, aligns with participants’ recommendations for co-design of technological tools and desire to be more involved in the processes and decision making behind digital media technologies (see Chapter 6). However, as indicated in some of the challenges I faced in recruiting and interviewing participants for this study, the ideal participants for such research may be too busy with their own work to participate in an intensive critical participatory action research project that does not necessarily have direct and immediate impacts for themselves, their activism, or the communities they serve. This will continue to be a challenge for researchers who struggle to build trust relationships with these communities and demonstrate an understanding of shared social transformative goals and knowledge.

To reiterate, I am not arguing that more research on this population is needed, as there still remains many challenges of the continued over-researching of marginalized groups (Smith, 2012). This is especially clear when there is an emphasis on the violence that women endure and the damage-centered narratives to which these experiences are typically, but should not be, reduced (Tuck, 2009). Although it is important to
acknowledge the ongoing oppressions that are enacted in racialized women’s experiences of violence, it is just as important to simultaneously hold space for thriving and everyday acts of living that are also joyful and meaningful (Tuck, 2009). This research project highlighted some of these joyful and meaningful moments in the ways in which online activism was beneficial for participants (see Chapter 5) and emphasized their more hopeful recommendations and suggestions to improve the environment of those involved in online activism to challenge and end violence against women.

Another major limitation of this dissertation project is in the replicability of conducting intersectional research and how the data are interpreted and communicated in conventional academic terms and logics (May, 2014). For one, as stated earlier with regard to the construction of my research design, intersectional approaches benefit from pushing back on conventional social science research approaches, but are often left to interpretation and translation from the researcher. Throughout my methodology and theoretical chapters, I have therefore aimed for as much transparency in my research process as possible. However, many details were also lost in how the translation of data does not always neatly fit into a linear narrative form that a dissertation document requires. For instance, I found it challenging to discuss the methodological and theoretical approaches as distinct and separate, including which aspect of the project needed to be shared with readers first, as both came about simultaneously. Further, there are no clear boundaries between the multiple worldviews informing this intersectional research. Despite this, each theory informing this dissertation needed to be introduced and explored separately before integrating these theories in the analysis.
Further research into these subject areas, and further research adopting an intersectional approach, should keep this in mind as it is an expected challenge, but should not be a barrier to engaging with complicated research that best reflects the lived experiences of the populations of interest. Rather, future researchers should be prepared to engage in multiple critical frameworks and to be guided by participants and their discussions about intersectionality. Moreover, part of the responsibility of preparing researchers rests with academic institutions and disciplines, who often favour more simplistic approaches. Rather than relegate issues of anti-racism, anti-colonialism, feminisms, and many other critical disciplines to the margins of study, as has certainly been the case for Canadian communication studies (Alhassan, 2007; Hirji et al., 2020), such issues need to be addressed by academic institutions and disciplines by adequately equipping future researchers with the tools required to approach more complex areas of study. Through academia and academics helping to foster an environment in which such research can thrive, I hope to see not only individual projects moving towards areas of study similar to those discussed in this dissertation, but also larger academic disciplines doing so as well.
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Appendix 1: Recruitment Poster

Participate in a study on ending violence against women in Canada

To participate in this study, you must be:

✓ Directly involved in the creation, development, and/or continuing to fight for survival of an online campaign or technology to end violence against women

✓ Self-identify as a woman of color

✓ At least 18 years old

✓ Comfortable speaking in English

This is a 1-2 hour study. You will be asked about your experiences using online and digital tools in your work ending violence against women.

Outside of Ottawa? Interviews can be conducted via Skype or Google Hangouts.

The ethics protocol for this project has been reviewed and cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Bernadette Campbell, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at ethics@carleton.ca).

Please contact the researcher, Nasreen Rajani for more details on this study at nasreen.rajani@carleton.ca
Appendix 2: Consent Form

Name and Contact Information of Researchers:
Nasreen Rajani, Carleton University, Communications and Media Studies, School of Journalism and Communication
Email: nasreen.rajani@carleton.ca
Supervisor and Contact Information: Dr. Merlyna Lim, Carleton University, Communications and Media Studies, School of Journalism and Communication
Tel.: 613-520-2600, ext. 1641
Email: merlyna.lim@carleton.ca

Project Title
Examining online activism to end violence against women in Canada

Carleton University Project Clearance
Clearance #: 109292 Date of Clearance: October 3, 2018

Invitation
You are invited to take part in a research project because of your work to end violence against women from an underrepresented perspective is important for research on ending violence against women and digital policies in Canada. The information in this form is intended to help you understand what we are asking of you so that you can decide whether you agree to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and a decision not to participate will not be used against you in any way. As you read this form, and decide whether to participate, please ask all the questions you might have, take whatever time you need, and consult with others as you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of this study is to highlight the experiences of online and digital tools used to end violence against women in Canada from those who self-identify from underrepresented communities.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in a 1-2 hour interview on your experiences in using online and digital tools in ending violence against women. The interview may be conducted via Skype or Google Hangout, whichever you prefer, if you are located outside of the Ottawa area. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate transcribing and note-taking. As soon as the transcription is complete and de-identified with your information, the audio-recording will be deleted.

Risks and Inconveniences
The topics covered in the interview are not considered to be more challenging than the participant’s everyday experience in their everyday lives working to end violence against women. You are free to skip any questions at any time during the interview and you are free to stop the interview completely at any time with no consequence.
Possible Benefits
You may not receive any direct benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation may allow researchers to better understand the online and digital work of ending violence against women in Canada from a perspective of those who are often underrepresented in such research. This research will benefit the academic and local community of those ending violence against women by exploring this area of research and will be helpful for future technology and digital policies around ending violence against women.

Compensation/Incentives
There will be no compensation however, if we are conducting a face-to-face interview, refreshments (cookies, tea, juice, cookies, fruit) will be provided by the researcher.

No waiver of your rights
By signing this form, you are not waiving any rights or releasing the researchers from any liability.

Withdrawing from the study
If you withdraw your consent during the course of the study, all information collected from you before your withdrawal will be discarded immediately.

After the study, you may request that your data be removed from the study and deleted by notice given to the researcher before April 30, 2019.

Confidentiality
I will remove all identifying information from the study data as soon as possible, which will be after transcription of the audio-recorded interview takes place.
I will treat your personal information as confidential, although absolute privacy cannot be guaranteed. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent. However, research records identifying you may be accessed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board to monitor the research. All data will be kept confidential, unless release is required by law (e.g. child abuse, harm to self or others). Additionally, all data collected over Skype of Google Hangouts are based on US servers and are therefore subject to the Patriot Act that permits US law enforcement officials to seek a court order that allows access to the personal records of any person without that person’s knowledge.

Your data will be assigned a pseudonym so that your identity will not be directly associated with the data you have provided. All data, including coded information, will be kept in a password-protected file on a secure computer that only the researcher has access to. I will password protect any research data that we store or transfer. The transcript will be emailed back to you and you have two weeks from that date to notify the researcher if any further information needs to be de-identified to enhance the protection of your privacy.
The results of this study may be published or presented at academic conferences or meetings, but the data will be presented so that it will not be possible to identify any participants unless you give your consent.

Data Retention
After the study is completed, your de-identified data will be retained for future research use.

New information during the study
In the event that any changes could affect your decision to continue participating in this study, you will be promptly informed.

Ethics review
This project was reviewed and cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Bernadette Campbell, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board (by phone at 613-520-2600 [ext. 2517] or by email at ethics@carleton.ca).

Statement of consent – print and sign name
I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. ___Yes ___No
I agree to be audio-recorded. ___Yes ___No

__________________________
Signature of participant

Date

Researcher who interacted with the subject
I have explained the study to the participant and answered any and all of their questions. The participant appeared to understand and agree. I provided a copy of the consent form to the participant for their reference.

__________________________
Signature of researcher

Date
Appendix 3: Interview Guide

(optional) How old are you?
_______________________________________________________________

(optional) How do you identify your gender?
_______________________________________________________________

(optional) How do you identify your ethnicity?
_______________________________________________________________

(optional) How do you identify your sexual orientation?
_______________________________________________________________

Can you tell me about your involvement in ending violence against women?
When did you first start thinking that violence against women was an issue?
What does your involvement in ending VAW look like today?

What has been your experience of the role of online tools (social media platforms; podcasting tools; others) in ending the problem of VAW?
Can you tell about some of your earliest experiences such using online tools in your work to end VAW? Most recent?
What were the benefits and successes?
What were the challenges you faced?
How have you negotiated these challenges with the benefits when thinking about online tools your use?

How did you decide on which online tools to use for effectively communicating your messages?
Have you ever contributed to twitter hashtag campaigns to end VAW? (Prompt: #endvaw; #cdnfem; #MMIW; #beenrapedneverreported; #metoo)
If Yes, which one(s)? What prompted you to use the hashtag?
If No, why not?
What has been your experience of these Twitter hashtags specifically around ending VAW?
Other than Facebook and Twitter, what are other ways you have experienced the use of online tools to aid in helping end VAW locally?
Do you think social media or other online tools that are available now are sufficient in ending VAW? Why or why not?

What kind of interactions with others in the community have you had because of your online work to end VAW? Has it been positive, negative, neutral?
Tell me about a positive experience you’ve had
Tell me about a negative experience you’ve had
Have these experience changed how you interact with online tools in your work to end VAW?
What has been your experience with mainstream media in your work to end VAW?

How do you see online activism around ending VAW improving in the future?
Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to this research project that we haven’t covered yet?
Who else do you think I should be talking to about this?