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Article

The righteous outrage of post-truth anti-feminism: An analysis of TubeCrush and feminist research in and of public space

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Abstract
Contemporary gender relations occur in a polarised environment characterised by popular feminism and networked misogyny. This context structures feminist researchers' public engagement and exposes them to online hostility. Addressing a paucity of work on the affective dimensions of digital hostility, this article analyses 2400 comments made in *The Daily Mail Online* in response to feminist research on TubeCrush, a website featuring unsolicited images of men on the London underground. Our analysis shows feminists constructed as powerful but hypocritical; as discredited post-truth experts and, along with gay men and women in general, as being less knowledgeable or valid than white men. These discourses were united by an affective texture of an outrage that positions itself as righteous, undoing feminist knowledge and recuperating (white) male power. Identifying this as 'righteous outrage' offers important insights into the workings of contemporary anti-feminist sentiment where visibility is permitted so long as credibility is undone.

Keywords
Networked misogyny, popular feminism, post-truth anti-feminism, righteous outrage

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Introduction

Contemporary culture is notable for a heightened visibility of both popular feminism and misogyny. The latter is evident in a vitriolic smearing of women in public that includes on- and offline rape and death threats, hostility from Men's Rights groups and online trolling of well-known and less well-known feminists. As UK Cambridge University classicist professor and history television show presenter Mary Beard argued after receiving threats in response to her appearance on BBC political commentary show *Question Time*, it 'would be quite enough to put many women off appearing in public, contributing to political debate'.

Beard's position is echoed by a range of feminist researchers who highlight a hostile digital environment emerging in response to their work, public engagement and identities that is characterised by affective intensities of disgust, anger and hate (e.g. Diaz-Fernandez and Evans, 2019; Jane, 2014; Ringrose, 2018; Savigny, 2019). Affective responses have significant implications for feminists working in a context where publicising their work is often an institutional obligation. But, to date, a 'popular everyday misogyny remains under-theorised – almost as if its very familiarity and ordinariness has exempted it from serious critique' (Garcia-Favaro and Gill, 2015: 392). Addressing this paucity, we offer a significant contribution in showing that a particular kind of outrage that positions itself as righteous – a *righteous outrage* – is central to the functioning of the affective atmosphere of networked misogyny that feminist researchers have to navigate.

Our analysis of righteous outrage comes from our research on TubeCrush, a website that features unsolicited images of men on the London Underground who are praised for their physical attractiveness and perceived sexual prowess (Evans and Riley, 2018a). This research became the subject of a piece in UK newspaper *The Daily Mail* (daily circulation: 1,270,418 print; 11,700,000 PC unique browsers), which in turn produced 2400 comments and 22,000 shares. The number of comments and shares represent significant public engagement with our work, demonstrating the 'economy of visibility' that feminist research operates within. These responses also offer an important opportunity to explore public responses to feminist research, particularly as they emerge online.

In analysing the responses to our research, we show three ways in which feminist work is undermined: first, through accounts of 'reverse sexism' that construct feminists as powerful but hypocritical; second, 'real science' arguments that position feminists as experts in a post-truth context where experts are discredited and, third, through a form of 'male heteronormative superiority' where women and gay men are positioned as less knowledgeable others. These accounts shared, and were shored up by, an affective tone of moral righteous outrage.

Below, we contextualise our analysis in a literature that sees important relationships between both the heightened visibility of popular feminism and of publicly expressed misogyny in English-speaking networked publics. We use this literature to consider the gendering of transport, before offering an analysis of the 2400 responses to *The Daily Mail*'s reporting of our TubeCrush study, which shows the importance of moral outrage in seeking to discredit feminist research. Throughout, we consider implications for feminist scholars, concluding that identifying the working of righteous outrage exposes how

contemporary misogyny operates in undoing feminist work operating in an economy of visibility.

Popular feminism and networked misogyny

The visibility of feminism in contemporary culture is well documented, circulating in public discourse both online and offline (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Examples are diverse, but include: the 2017 Women's March on Washington, the largest public demonstration in US history; the prioritising of gender equality by a number of global institutions, including the United Nations; and the documenting of abuse and harassment in industries from entertainment to academia (e.g. #timesup, #metoo).

There have been other periods of heightened activism. Such peaks of visibility are often understood through 'waves' metaphors, with some identifying the current Internet-enabled movement as the 'fourth wave' (e.g. Cochrane, 2013). But others problematise the wave narrative for both suggesting inaccurate levels of coherence and oversimplified linearity (Hemmings, 2005) and for being intrinsically Anglophone, since feminist activism developed differently across sociohistorical contexts (Dean and Aune, 2015). We share these concerns, but also note that these waves do map onto points in history where feminism is openly discussed within a wider public sphere, including the media. We might therefore consider the heightened visibility of feminist activism in contemporary times as such a 'wave', while also recognising that it is complex and non-linear.

Within this wave, among various, multiple contemporary feminisms, is 'popular feminism' a term used to describe a dominant, media-friendly concept of feminism. Banet-Weiser (2018) argues that popular feminism circulates in an 'economy of visibility', where the politics of visibility becomes an end in and of itself, so that simply being visible is enough. This work draws on McRobbie's (2009) discussion of a postfeminist luminosity, in which femininity is lit up in ways that also obscure and make other femininities invisible. In popular feminism, such luminosity similarly works on a dynamic relationship between the visible and the invisible, with Banet-Weiser (2018) arguing that the ownership of the means of visibility (currently dominated by consumerism, social media and technology corporations) shapes how feminism is visible in the present moment.

Thus, popular feminism makes feminism visible in particular ways while obscuring others. In popular feminism, one way that feminism is made visible is through celebrity culture, for example, in feminist 'icons' such as Emma Watson and Beyoncé (Hamad and Taylor, 2015; Keller and Ringrose, 2015). Such celebrity feminists are, in turn, made visible in particular ways, underscored by racialised logics. For example, racial elements of celebrity feminism are evident when white female celebrity figures (e.g. Emma Watson, Jennifer Lawrence, Charlize Theron, Taylor Swift) are seen to legitimately claim a feminist identity, when black celebrity feminist identities like Beyoncé are questioned. Meanwhile, such claims to feminist identity are complex, since 'simply showcasing beautiful black bodies does not create a just culture of optimal well-being where black females can become fully self-actualized and be truly respected' (bell hooks, 2016: n.p.).

Consumer culture also structures the visibilities of popular feminism. For example, the purchase of 'This is What a Feminist Looks Like' t-shirts is emblematic of how appearance literally makes visibility the point of politics, making feminism about a 'look'

(Banet-Weiser, 2018). Popular feminism in consumer culture also has an individualistic, self-love and self-care rhetoric critiqued by scholars of postfeminism for employing a feminist language of empowerment to permit pernicious forms of self-surveillance (Gill and Orgad, 2016; Riley et al., 2019). Social media also enables the visibility of particular forms of feminism as they trend through being re-tweeted and remixed in feminist fashion blogs, feminist memes and gifs and feminist-themed hashtags (e.g. #wokeaf, #nomakeup-selfie) (Kanai, 2018; Ringrose and Lawrence, 2018).

Despite being critiqued for lacking in radical potential (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2016), popular feminism engenders a 'backlash', as with previous moments of heightened feminist visibility. What distinguishes this current backlash is the evolution of digital culture and its visual and 'participatory' interactions, enabling a 'networked misogyny'. Networked misogyny occurs at the intersections of seismic shifts in digital culture and gender relations, and polarised personal and public political sentiments (Gill, 2017);[1] it represents 'a new era of the gender wars, an era that is marked by alarming amounts of vitriol and violence directed toward women in online spaces' (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016: 171). This new era is witnessed in a number of widely publicised instances, for example, #gamergate (Jane, 2016), revenge porn (Burns, 2015), viral rape videos (Dodge, 2016) and celebrity nude image hacking (Massanari, 2017), with each demonstrating different elements of networked misogyny's affective hostility.

Given the examples above, it is important 'to think together feminism with anti-feminism, postfeminism, and revitalized misogyny' (Gill, 2016: 625). It is also important to consider continuity and disjuncture between current and previous anti-feminist backlashes. Continuities include notions of men's biological superiority and/or essential differences between men and women, whereby feminism creates an unnatural social order. We also perceive important differences. As discussed above, there are new digital flows in networked misogyny, but the affective fabrics are also different to previous backlashes. For example, Faludi (1991) described a 'benevolent sexism' response to second wave feminism, which expressed concerns regarding the impact of feminism on women, for example, that working women's biological clocks might run out before they could enjoy motherhood. By contrast, today's networked misogyny is openly more hostile (Diaz-Fernandez and Evans, 2019). In her research on the Incel (involuntary celibate) movement, Ging (2019), for example, argues that 'masculinity politics have reached a deeply affective and toxic juncture, representing a significant threat to the capacity of digital feminisms and women generally to operate online' (p. 16).

It is in this context of popular feminism and networked misogyny that feminist researchers also operate. With the visibility of popular feminism, feminist research can be visible too, and this can be to the advantage of feminist researchers, for example, we might get more 'air time' because our work is understood to be of public interest. However, in a context of sound bites and rolling news, the complexity and nuance of feminist scholarship is often absented. And as we have argued earlier, the visibility of popular feminism makes invisible other forms of feminism, in particular, forms of feminism with solutions less aligned with postfeminism, consumerism and visibility as the end goal. These forms of feminism lose legitimacy in a postfeminist media culture that positions feminism as having achieved many of its aims, including being visible in an 'economy of visibility' (Banet-Weiser, 2018; McRobbie, 2009). The result is a further

marginalisation of feminist research, especially research outside the realms of the commodifiable, or which challenges the status quo, presents nuanced arguments or highlights oppressions in relation to the intersections of race, class, disability and gender diversity. Popular feminism thus structures how feminist scholarship is made visible.

Networked misogyny also structures feminist scholars' experiences of making their work visible. Ringrose (2018), for example, describes receiving aggressive dismissal and open hostility on Twitter in response to her feminist analysis of the US 2016 election. Furthermore, it may not always be obvious that negative comments are motivated by misogyny (even as women get more of them than their male counterparts), making it harder to identify strategies or elicit support to deal with it. And, where networked misogyny is explicit, it is often disregarded by statements that compel us to 'ignore the trolls' (Banet-Weiser, 2015). A similar observation is made by Jane (2014), who, drawing on her experience as a journalist, calls on feminist researchers to make public the 'e-bile' they receive so it can be made visible.

Ringrose (2018) theorised the 'aggressive, demeaning and sometimes sexually abusive' responses she received as a form of 'post-truth anti-feminism', an open hostility to feminist researchers supported by presenting racist, sexist and misogynistic beliefs of an 'alt-right' as common sense (p. 652). Building on Ringrose, we understand post-truth anti-feminism as a complex ideological standpoint that undermines feminist researchers through positioning them as experts, while simultaneously undermining the value of that expertise. This undermining is enabled in two ways: first, by a post-truth sentiment where experts in general are no longer considered to offer legitimate knowledge in favour of seemingly 'common sense' or alternative knowledges (Ylä-Anttila, 2018), such as in the popularity of academics like anti-gender[2] psychologist Jordan Peterson; second, through a specific undermining of feminist expertise, where feminist ideas become the object of ridicule, identified variously as postmodern, fluffy, obscure, ideological, foolish or simply wrong. See, for example, the so-called 'grievance studies affair' in 2018, where in an attempt to demonstrate and deride a perceived ideological bias in the field, hoax articles were submitted, reviewed and, on a few occasions, published in gender studies journals.[3]

Feminists doing research have to operate in this context. We are often driven through our institutions' marketing strategies or by our desire for public pedagogy (or both) to make our work public. And in making our work public, it is subject to the luminosities enabled by popular feminism and networked misogyny. To further explore the implications of these luminosities for feminist research, below we locate our TubeCrush project in the context of gendered considerations of public transport.

The context of TubeCrush, feminism and misogyny

Like public space more generally, public transport is significant for exploring the visibilities of both popular feminism and networked misogyny. For example, digital feminist activism that documents sexual harassment, such as Hollaback! and The Everyday Sexism Project, features many stories that take place on public transport, while the hashtag #manspreading, often circulated through unsolicited photographs, calls attention to men physically dominating space, particularly seats in public transport (Jane, 2017).

Policy makers too are recognising public space as gendered. For example, in the United Kingdom, London Mayor Sadiq Khan initiated *The Women We See*, a campaign responding to the lack of diversity in advertising in London (Ringrose and Regehr, 2018), partly provoked through Khan's banning of Protein World's body-shaming advertisement that asked London Underground travellers, 'are you beach body ready?'. There has also been growing awareness of non-consensual images of women taken in public. For example, in 2018, the UK parliament debated a bill proposing to make upskirting illegal following a campaign by journalist Gina Martin. Martin's own experience of upskirting provoked the campaign, since, when she complained, police told her it was not deemed illegal.[4]

TubeCrush – a site sharing unsolicited images of desirable men on the London Underground – offers a relatively novel digital space exposing heterosexual women and gay men's gaze on men's bodies. This drew us to the site, with its potential to examine a range of issues around contemporary gender relations. TubeCrush launched in 2011, with the aim of paying 'Homage to the Hommes'. To feature on TubeCrush, images must fit the criteria of appearing unsolicited (i.e. not posed) and being visibly on the London Underground. Once an image is accepted, it is posted onto the TubeCrush website (tube-crush.net), alongside a caption provided by the owner of TubeCrush. This caption is often tongue-in-cheek, where these men are celebrated for their appearance, desirability and sexual prowess (see Evans and Riley, 2018a, 2018b, on TubeCrush's usability).

TubeCrush emerges alongside further spaces that produce and share images of desirable male bodies. This includes comparable social media, such as Hot Dudes Reading, an Instagram account that features unsolicited images of men reading in public in New York. Alongside unsolicited photographs, others note men's self-produced digital images, such as gym and dick pics and images of men receiving fellatio (Ringrose and Harvey, 2015; Winch and Hakim, 2017). In these images, on TubeCrush and elsewhere, men's bodies are usually seen as desirable, made visible to be celebrated, in ways that reconfirm male power (Evans and Riley, 2018a). This is in contrast to women's images, which are often used to shame, humiliate or abuse, such as in the examples cited above of upskirting, revenge porn and viral rape videos. We explore this below with the example of Women Who Eat on Tubes (WWEOT).

Facebook group WWEOT features unsolicited images of women eating on the London Underground, posted by members of the group. Its founder, Tony Burke, claimed the group was an observational photography project, stating, 'Everywhere I go I see women eating on Tubes. . . Slowly, secretly, guiltily raising each bite-sized morsel to their salty lips in the hope that no one's watching. Well, I'm watching. And I'm photographing. . .' (cited in Smith, 2014). In contrast to TubeCrush's celebration of photographed men, WWEOT is intended to humiliate, since it is often captioned and commented with shaming and misogynistic content. For example, journalist Sophie Wilkinson reported finding herself featured on the site, with captions such as 'Entering or exiting her gaping orifice??' (Wilkinson, 2014). Following Wilkinson's article, WWEOT received significant press attention, leading to the feminist activist protest 'Women Who Eat Wherever the Fuck they Want', which included a picnic on the London Underground.

WWEOT is regularly compared to TubeCrush. Supporters of WWEOT understand it as tit-for-tat objectification, addressing the inequality of men objectified on sites like TubeCrush and demonstrating 'exactly how hypocritical – and humourless – feminism can

be' (Lloyd, 2014: n.p.). Thus, WWEOT intersects with a larger discussion about reverse sexism circulating around TubeCrush, one that, we argue, ignores the history and gender asymmetry in how images are used and owned, while reproducing heteronormative assumptions by attributing the flows of desire in TubeCrush to heterosexual women, thus absenting gay men (Evans and Riley, 2018a). In this article, we take our analysis further by considering public responses to our analysis, which reasserted the reverse sexism argument, among other discursive strategies, through a particular tone of righteous outrage.

So far, we have suggested that a popular feminist economy of visibility and networked misogyny create a complex environment for women to occupy public space, including a hostile affective digital environment. But little work has explored how affect in networked, post-truth anti-feminism discourse works, other than to highlight the aggressive and/or angry tone. In this article, we significantly develop scholarship on this important issue with an analysis of comments on *The Daily Mail* website in response to a report about our research with TubeCrush. In so doing, we address the following questions: What reoccurring discourses are employed? What subject positions are made available, and how do they shape what can be said, thought and felt? How does affect facilitate these subject positions? And what can this tell us about the recuperation of male power in a context of a heightened visibility of feminism? In addressing these questions, we demonstrate the important role of righteous outrage in undoing feminism within its otherwise seemingly populist moment.

Methods

The methodology in this article is shaped by our larger TubeCrush project (British Academy Small Grant, SG162199) that treats TubeCrush as an assemblage, whereby analysis requires attention to the multiple elements of the assemblage (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012). Our approach means recognising that any study would need to account for the multiple facets of TubeCrush, including the issues raise above, but also elements of desire and attraction, the city of London, commuter spaces, urban masculinity, social media's relationship with privacy and consent, the geography of the Tube carriage and so on. These elements have emerged through an iterative and intuitive process of thinking with TubeCrush since 2014.

In 2017, one element of this assemblage – how TubeCrush acts as an intimate public – was published online. Our analysis followed Berlant's (2008) definition of an intimate public as one that 'operates when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests' (p. 5). Our argument was that understanding TubeCrush as an intimate public, where shared sentiment quells complaint and returns us to normalcy, helps understand how desire orients towards a visibly wealthy financial masculinity and a physically strong gym-based masculinity. Thus, we suggested,

> masculinity is celebrated, if with tongue-in-cheek, in a way that marks the middle class, wealthy, mobile and sexually powerful male body as not a political one (as feminists intend it to be), but as one that should be actively desired. (Evans and Riley, 2018a: 1008)

As is common in the current climate of research accountability and impact (Savigny, 2019), our institutional marketing teams were keen for a press release. With their support, we wrote one, carefully written to present TubeCrush as a website that brings together images taken by straight women *and* gay men. The press release generated significant coverage, which, for the most part, was heteronormative in the reporting, conveyed as providing insight into 'what women want' in a man. Of this media coverage, *The Daily Mail* most clearly captured this sentiment, with the title 'Women really DO fancy men with "muscles and money" according to the website full of pictures of "hot commuters" taken secretly by females on the London Underground'.[5]

The Daily Mail article was published in print and online. The online copy included 24 images reproduced from TubeCrush (necessitating a considerable scroll-time through the article). It produced sizable public engagement, with 2400 comments and 22,000 shares on its Mail Online platform, creating a significant naturally occurring data set of responses to feminist research. This occurred in the month it was published, after which comments were closed.

All 2400 comments were collated into one document and coded for reoccurring themes, that is, patterns in the data that constructed our research in similar ways.[6] Our analysis employed our own version of Foucauldian discourse analysis, examining how the comments constructed our research, the affective dimensions of the texts or subject positions produced and how these repertoires, affects, and subject positions combined to position our research in particular ways (e.g. as il/legitimate) (Evans and Riley, 2014). Acknowledging different definitions of affect, we note our use of the term understands it as not just bodily intensity, but as occurring between discourse and affect, that is, where the psychic and the social, the subjective and the cultural, and the discursive and the non-discursive are dynamically interacting (Diaz-Fernandez and Evans, 2019).

Below, we begin by discussing comments that expressed outrage about the 'reverse sexism' that was left unproblematised by feminist researchers such as ourselves, who might otherwise have got their 'knickers in a twist' had TubeCrush been about women. We then explore a second pattern, which constructed our work as unscientific, and therefore 'fake news'. These two patterns functioned to discredit feminist research. Our third pattern was somewhat different, focusing on the men featured on TubeCrush (and reproduced in *The Daily Mail*) that focused on discrediting these men and the imagined women who took or look at their photograph, which absented gay male desire. We argue these comments functioned to produce the subject position of an 'everyman Brit', who is white, straight, unaffected by appearance concerns, and more knowledgeable than the attractive men on TubeCrush, the women who find them attractive, and the feminist researchers asking why.

Analysis

Plain knickers in a twist

As with public commentary on TubeCrush, a key discourse across the data set was that TubeCrush constitutes a 'reverse sexism', whereby women objectify men the way that

sexist men might do to women. Within these logics, our research further constituted reverse sexism in our not condemning the practice in the way expected had it been men illicitly photographing women. This sense making often deployed feminist and civil rights language (see Young, 2019, for an analysis of this in relation to Trumpian racial politics), while also functioning to discredit feminists (McRobbie, 2009). For example, one comment read, 'Now reverse the role and post photos of sexy woman and see the reaction from the loony left feminazi'. Here, 'reverse sexism' is used to construct a subject position of 'loony left feminazi' and, since this is clearly dispreferred, the outcome is that posting photographs of sexy women is legitimised (since only 'loony[s]' would complain), even as the comment criticises the practice. A similar argument is made below:

Extract 1

Still waiting for the government funded feminist organisations to complain on males behalf. If this was pictures of females the feminist lobby would get their plain knickers in a twist. It proves the inequality we have in the west.

The notion that images of women would get feminists' 'knickers in a twist' suggests a particular affective response, one that is inherently gendered, associating feminists with an emotional outburst that is irrational, trivial and without meaningful cause. The position of the feminist researcher is also a desexualised subject, in their wearing of 'plain' knickers. Again, we have a dispreferred feminist subject position. Through the construction of a powerful (i.e. government funded), if pettily annoyed, 'feminist lobby', such comments were able to position men as disenfranchised, with no one to 'complain' on their behalf.

Of particular note in Extract 1 was the way the 'it' (although unclear on whether the commenter means our research, or the existence of TubeCrush itself) came to unequivocally prove 'the inequality we have in the west'. Such 'inequality' hails another time, a nostalgic move imagined as a pre-feminist society where men's power was still intact, and was thus more 'equal'. This sense of exasperation with the current state of gender relations was echoed in a number of comments, for example, 'god I hate the way this world is becoming', 'What has the world come to?!', 'I hope you realise you women your the reason the world and society is so screwed' and 'This and trans BS proves the worlds gone mad!'. The ways these comments echoed each other reflects how 'e-bile' is so similar that it could be interchangeable (Jane, 2014). And there is a clear affective tone in these comments, whereby outrage is expressed, and blame apportioned, to women and gender-diverse people, since the world is 'screwed' and 'gone mad' because of 'you women' and 'trans BS'.

Responses to this new world order were also described as affective, as in the post below that references feeling sick:

Extract 2

When women are coming out of the woodwork right left and centre at the moment complaining of this, that and the other, you get this. This country makes me sick. . .

Here, TubeCrush is contrasted to the way women are 'complaining' about sexism. Like the idiomatic language of feminists having their 'knickers in a twist', in this extract, women are 'coming out of the woodwork', implying an insect-like behaviour that is unwelcome and overwhelming, while also dismissing these complaints as being about a variety of meaningless, indiscernible issues ('this, that and the other'). Popular feminist visibility is abject, while the commenter simultaneously devalues such complaint. This reproduces a postfeminist logic of simultaneously recognising and refuting feminism (McRobbie, 2009), here modified through outrage over hypocrisy so that feminism is hailed (women are visible in their complaint), only to show how it no longer counts (here, performed through the accusation of hypocrisy).

Such comments articulated a sense of horror and powerlessness over things not being 'right' in the country/west/world, producing a righteous outrage distinct from anger or disgust, although potentially fuelling both. Alongside the affective fabric of the injustice and injury towards men from a perceived feminism, the article also provoked a sizable amount of explicitly stated outrage. For example,

Extract 3

these men have a case of hara$$ment – blatant exploitation of men . . . outraged I am . . . OUTRAGED!!

In these examples, we revealed a sentiment we believe is different to other instances of networked misogyny, one that is not violently misogynistic, but connected to a general worldview of (white) male disenfranchisement (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Carroll, 2011; Garcia-Favaro and Gill, 2015). We argue that this is different from (although connected to) the hostile misogyny discussed by Jane (2014) and Ringrose (2018). Rather than hate, anger or disgust being the primary affective focus, articulation of a righteous outrage appeals to a sense of hostility directed at men (whether through harassment, exploitation, inequality, etc.) and is therefore presented as morally justifiable. This affective texture was so pervasive within the comments, to the point of receiving its own parody, for example, 'Having scrolled through all the pictures and not finding myself in any of them, I have concluded this is outrageous and must be banned!'.

Academic discussions often focus on outrage as an emotion of revolution, protest and social change (e.g. Castells, 2015). By contrast, we read the 'outraged' comments on *The Daily Mail*, such as 'hara$$ment' and 'exploitation', as forms of outrage in which feminist language is used to make anti-feminist statements to further a post-truth misogyny (e.g. that men's sexual exploitation is worse than women's).

Is science having a day off?

Above we have suggested there is an attempt to undo feminist research through a righteous outrage. The extract below also expresses this outrage, but more explicitly addresses the research/ers, constructing our work as problematic, propagandist and even dangerous to women. These accounts tied in to another key discourse, that of science, evoked here and elsewhere in the data:

Extract 4

> This story is just a load of loser feminists trying to get their own back on men, it is false, inaccurate, has no scientific evidence whatsoever, all this feminist p r o p a g a n d a os going to achieve is to stir up hatred against women.

The affective texture of this comment reflects a Trump-era style of insult ('loser feminists'), a blast of outrage that, befitting the post-truth rhetoric of accusations of falsehood, inaccuracy and science, provides little detail as to what elements of the project are being critiqued – other than our designation as feminists and a link to reverse sexism, or perhaps orienting to cultural constructions of feminists as man hating and thus 'get[ting] their own back on men'. We are, however, constructed as failing in our endeavour, since the outcome is increasing 'hatred against women'.

Extract 4 assesses the research by stating that it 'has no scientific evidence whatsoever'. The issue of 'the science' of our work was commented on regularly, perhaps made more salient because *The Daily Mail* piece on our research stated that 'Scientists studied images on comments on the website "Tube Crush"', and featured in the 'science' section of *The Daily Mail Online*. Although this did feel slightly incongruous to us, being more closely aligned to the social sciences and humanities, the reaction to this designation within the comments further cemented the outrage directed to the article. While one comment simply stated, 'Scientists? – really?!', others further delegitimised the work as not scientific:

Extract 5

> STOP sexualising us, I feel uncomfortable! And why the hell is Colin Fernandez Science Correspondent writing this? Is science having a day off? I think not Colin, back to work.

Again, we see the work of outrage in the claim that the sexualisation of men (or 'us') should stop. Given the humorous tone of this post, it is likely that this claim is a parodying feminist critiques of female objectification. And having held up objectification arguments for ridicule, the writer then critiques the journalist for writing about our research, again through humour related to the seeming absurdity of our research: 'Is science having a day off?'. The ridicule and demand that the journalist should 'get back to work' deepens a trivialisation of the research, implying that our inclusion in the science section of *The Daily Mail* is illegitimate and not the real work of a science correspondent.

These comments sat alongside those that complained of 'government funded feminist organisations' (Extract 1) and propaganda (Extract 4). Others suggested our research was correct, where straight women (not gay men) have a biological preference for men with money and muscles to rear children; thus, our research was stating the obvious: '"Women really DO fancy men with 'muscles and money'. . ." Is anyone surprised by this statement? No, didn't think so. It's basic biology' (see the work collected in O'Neill (2016) for discussion of evolutionary biology and biological essentialism to disarm feminist research). Others, still, implied that our Universities themselves were somehow illegitimate producers of good scientific research (e.g. 'Research by academics at

Coventry and Aberystwyth universities . . . need one say more?'), and thus questioned us as the authentic producers of knowledge. There was also a repetition in these statements, a sarcastic rhetorical question used to undermine feminist research: 'Scientists? – really?!', 'Is science having a day off?' and 'need one say more?'. The seemingly obvious responses to such questions deepen the sense of an affective tone of outrage, in which our research is positioned as obviously lacking.

Taken together, we assume the science being hailed within the comments on *The Daily Mail* is one of a masculinist, 'hard' science (Lather, 1991). Claims that our work is unscientific repeat a post-truth era discourse being used more broadly, for example, in right-wing moves to ban gender studies courses in Universities across Europe (Matthews, 2017), justified by the argument that ideology takes precedence over 'proper' science in these courses (and assuming science does not have its own ideology). In the comments in *The Daily Mail*, this political perspective was also taken up, linking Brexit, University degrees and science to our project on TubeCrush:

Extract 6

This is from the scientists that are worried that their funding will dry up when we leave the EU. They're the ones with mickey mouse degrees that are too clueless to research real subjects that mean something.

As with Extract 1, the comment makes a truth claim that we have power (in the form of funding) but power that is threatened (in this case, when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union (EU) and presumably scientists like ourselves will not have access to EU funding). This extract also reproduces a common trope that our research is not 'proper' science, here a three-part list – we have 'mickey mouse degrees', are 'clueless' and do not research 'real subjects that mean something'. Added to many other comments that claimed our work was fake (including five comments that specifically used the term 'fake news'), our work and our position as legitimate producers of knowledge were discredited. We tie this to our earlier discussion of post-truth anti-feminism, since such comments represent a dismissal and open hostility to our work enabled by simultaneous recognition and refutation of feminist expertise created through an affective tone of ridicule and outrage.

'. . . [G]ym bunny types are so vain!'

The Mail Online article clearly intended to invite the readership to look at and evaluate the images of the men on TubeCrush, given the number of TubeCrush images in the piece. This evoked a number of comments that centred on the appearance of the men on TubeCrush. Thus, alongside the expressed concern over them as sexualised, objectified, exploited or harassed through TubeCrush, comments sometimes expressed outrage that these men were considered attractive, and criticised them for their apparent appearance concerns.

Many of the comments criticised men on TubeCrush as shallow and self-interested (e.g. 'They're all gawping at their phones, and looking at the state of them I'd guess they're all Googling themselves!'). Other critical comments focused on body parts being exposed (e.g. 'The one with the shirt off is just a show off . . . put some clothes on'). Associations

between appearance concerns, homosexuality and self-interest were also articulated, so that, where *The Daily Mail* article described the men on TubeCrush as representing women's desire (absenting gay desire), and the men on TubeCrush were also constructed as only able to disappoint (assumed heterosexual) women ('Actually I think the majority of these men are probably more interested in themselves. Sorry ladies'). Understanding the men in TubeCrush as gay also meant positioning gay men as uninteresting or irrelevant to the viewer ('Mainly guys interested in guys!!'). Such comments reiterated a heteronormativity, wherein gay men were positioned as having little or no value.

The examples above are critical of men on TubeCrush, but were also speaking back to the perception that we, the researchers, were saying that *all* women were attracted to men with money and muscles, or pointing out what we had apparently missed, given *The Daily Mail*'s heteronormative take on our work. Also interesting were moments where key arguments in our article were subtly reproduced and undone. For example,

Extract 7

Don't like big hairy naked legs man-spread all over the place! And why are they all pale?

To which another responds,

C'mon, we live in the UK. When was the last time you saw the sun here? Every Brit is naturally pale.

Like other extracts, the comments above are humorous responses that, we argue, do important interactive work. 'Don't like big hairy naked legs man-spread all over the place!' draws on feminist language, but in making it humorous both problematises manspreading and simultaneously neutralises it, since the problem is identified as being the lack of tan – 'why are they all pale'. The implication is that these men simply are not attractive enough. The subsequent commenter then – also with humour – equates Britishness with paleness. But the comment 'Every Brit is naturally pale' absents all British people who are not 'naturally pale', thus coupling whiteness with Britishness. It is interesting to note that this validation of whiteness is also reproduced in TubeCrush, since the vast majority of the photographs of attractive men are white (Evans and Riley, 2018a). Thus, both on TubeCrush and in responses to our research on TubeCrush, we see a reproduction of whiteness as a normative, taken-for-granted signifier (Dyer, 1997), but in a context where, as Carroll (2011) argues, white masculinity recuperates challenges to its privilege by claiming itself as marginal. There is a repetition of TubeCrush's own invisibility, an assertion that Britishness equates to whiteness set against the racially and ethnically diverse space of the London Underground and in a context where nationhood and 'Britishness' are very much part of public discourse (see Extract 6 and the salience of Brexit/the United Kingdom leaving the EU).

Conclusions

Above, we presented an account of feminist research as operating in an economy of visibility, in which particular elements of feminism are illuminated, while others are

not. We located this economy of visibility in relation to popular feminism, networked misogyny and post-truth anti-feminism (e.g. Banet-Weiser, 2018; Ringrose, 2018). We developed these accounts by suggesting that in online responses to visible feminist research, righteous outrage can be added to the affective tonalities of anger, hate and disgust. We conclude that righteous outrage is a distinct way of articulating misogyny, and analysing it is fruitful for untangling elements of networked misogyny and post-truth anti-feminism.

In contrast to research showing outrage as an enabler of online social justice movements (Castells, 2015), we have shown its role in undermining visible feminist research. In this article, this outrage was righteous since it was enabled by and produces a sense of moral superiority and/or condemnation. This moral standpoint was often shaped by a claim to white, male injury, or in appeals to basic 'truths', related to common sense or biology, as being undone by the prevailing cultural dominance of feminism. Outrage in this sense works alongside hate, derision, ridicule and smug knowingness, situating the (white, male) subject of righteous outrage as superior in their understanding of the world.

The righteous outrage we identify has significant implications for feminist researchers working between institutional requirements to engage in the production of public knowledge and desires to challenge misogyny and/or avoid hostility. Mapping the workings of righteous outrage is essential in a context where, for example, gender studies degrees are under threat, and when feminist researchers are regularly positioned as 'un/under-qualified' (see Contois, 2018; Riddle, 2018; Wigginton, 2018, for challenges). We suggest righteous outrage helps us make sense of how the current climate positions feminism as illegitimate, devalued and discredited, serving to invalidate feminist positions and recuperate male power, even while at the same time we are often called upon to be more public.

Given attempts to silence women, our analysis allows us to 'own the comments' (Jane, 2014). But, we recognise that 'owning the comments' in itself may not be enough. Post-truth complicates how we can respond, resist or challenge misogyny, given that even while *The Daily Mail* disseminated our work to a previously unprecedented number of people and framed us in valued terms as 'scientists', in its heteronormative tone and in the misogynistic responses of its readership, it was done in a way that recuperated power, closing down the possibility for more nuanced discussion of the complexities of contemporary gender that our project was designed to elicit.

And while we were only met with derision (although painful enough for academics who 'are' their ideas), 'owning the comments' is not enough when feminist researchers know that networked misogyny makes real the possibility that their work will be met with threats of violence. The potential for real threat, as well as the expectation that 'good' scientists engage with debate (see, for example, expectations in the online academic dissemination platform *The Conversation* to respond to comments), means that advice to not 'read the comments' is problematic. Critique of responses considered misogynistic also opens up further vulnerabilities for feminist researchers, including accusations of 'oversensitivity' that are often levelled at feminist and/or progressive identity politics (often derided as the 'snowflake' in digital parlance). Such oversensitivity is typically seen as a reason towards developing 'resilience', in which feminist identity itself becomes at fault, eliding the cultural contexts requiring women to need resilience (Gill and Orgad, 2018). But, showing how righteous outrage is a discursive

strategy that discredits feminist research might provide feminist researchers with tools that legitimate their requests for calling on institutional support.

We suggest that our analysis of righteous outrage points to several future directions. These include further exploration of the textures of righteous outrage; analysing its micro-discursive construction, its relationships with other affective tonalities (e.g. hate, disgust, anger) and how it is enabled by humour and more macro-oriented analyses that consider shared patterns between the affective texture of responses to feminist research and wider public alt-right, post-truth anti-feminist rhetoric that incorporates and reiterates the language of Breitbart, Trump and others – including *The Daily Mail* itself.

It is therefore important to continue to identify and share feminist experiences of networked misogyny, where a new sexist and racist ideology threatens to undermine feminist research, and where visibility is permitted so long as credibility is undone. Developing a language through which to make sense of networked misogyny is one step towards creating strategies of resistance. We argue that the identification of righteous outrage is necessary in understanding this language and the way these affective intensities deny our voice in public space.

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Notes

1. Highlighted in the Anglo-American West with Donald Trump's election in the United States and the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom.
2. The term 'anti-gender' positions itself against broadly social constructionist accounts, and especially feminist and LGBTQ+ approaches, to gender.
3. As responses to the hoax noted, in an attempt to mock gender studies research (buttressed by figures like Peterson and Steven Pinker), the hoaxers only revealed their own ideologies, hence undermining their argument (see Phipps, 2018, for one such critical response).
4. This bill became more newsworthy when it failed to become law following an objection by Christopher Chope, MP, who developed a reputation for blocking laws designed to protect women. See https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/feb/08/tory-mp-who-blocked-upskirting-bill-halts-fgm-protection-law-christopher-chope (accessed 30 September 2019).
5. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5081485/Women-want-men-muscles-money-finds-TubeCrush.html
6. For ethical reasons, we have not provided names for the comments, although these are partially anonymised through *The Daily Mail*'s online comment function.

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