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### Feminist Peer Production

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**DOI**

[10.1002/9781119537151.ch23](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119537151.ch23)

**Publication date**

2021

**Document Version**

Submitted manuscript

**Published in**

The Handbook of Peer Production

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Toupin, S. (2021). Feminist Peer Production. In M. O'Neil, C. Pentzold, & S. Toupin (Eds.), *The Handbook of Peer Production* (pp. 311-321). (Handbooks in Communication and Media). Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119537151.ch23>

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Citation: Toupin, S. (2021). Feminist peer production. In: M. O'Neil, C. Pentzold & S. Toupin (Eds.), *The Handbook of Peer Production* (pp.311-321). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

ISBN 9781119537106 Available at: <https://www.wiley.com/en-au/The+Handbook+of+Peer+Production-p-9781119537090>

## **The Handbook of Peer Production**

### **Chapter 23 – Feminist Peer Production**

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## 1. Introduction

Over the years, feminists have developed specific digital forms of collective practices that effectively illustrate what feminist peer production is. In this chapter, I examine some of the practices which have rendered visible the analytical category of gender – and at times other categories such as race, class, and caste, which are often absent from the analysis of mainstream peer production scholarship and practice. The move to use feminist perspectives allows for a broadening of understandings of peer production and in turn enables the following questions: What is feminist peer production? Why has it emerged and how is it done? These apparently simple questions contain complexity, the exploration of which will be the work of this chapter.

To begin, I define two concepts: peer production and feminism. I follow Benkler's (2006) notion of peer production where he suggests that the “networked environment makes possible a new modality of organizing production: radically decentralized, collaborative, and nonproprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other without relying on either market signals or managerial commands” (p. 60). When I use the framework of feminism to qualify peer production, I am influenced by bell hooks' definition. She understands feminism as “the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression” (2000, p. 33). She goes further in adding that feminism cannot be separated from racism and from colonial histories, including slavery, as integral to the development of capitalism and the enrichment of the global North (Ahmed, 2017; hooks, 2000). Rooting feminist peer production in bell hooks' understanding makes visible the intersectional and decolonial aspects of feminism which are crucial for many feminists

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today. From those definitions, it is possible to get a sense of what is feminist peer production and highlight the gendered aspect of the social relations which form peer production.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. First, to understand feminist peer production, it is imperative to focus on feminist objectivity. Feminist objectivity is one of the main features of feminist science and technology studies and is integral to understanding feminist peer production. I draw from the debates on objectivity that were prevalent in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. These debates will offer the reader a much better understanding of how feminist objectivity has influenced the emergence of and shaped feminist peer production practices. Second, I focus on feminist critiques of peer production to show the main reasons why this practice has emerged and how it has grown over the years. The invisibility of feminist peer production is part of a long history of erasing the contributions and specificities of women in technology. Third, I examine the ways in which feminist peer productions are produced through a process of struggle. To do so, I draw from a number of case studies of feminist peer production, which reflect on the plurality of these practices. I conclude with some thoughts on the future of feminist peer production.

This research uses mixed methods. First, it is grounded in ethnographic fieldwork with a variety of feminist technologists involved in peer production projects. I have myself been taking part in a number of feminist projects, which has led me to discuss, observe, and come to the conclusion that feminist peer production is grounded in distinct practices. While commonalities exist between traditional forms of peer production projects and feminist ones, the practice of feminist peer production remains distinct, especially as it is

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attentive to gender. I have followed a number of these feminist peer production projects as a participant observer either online or in face-to-face gatherings. Second, this research is rooted in a classical literature review of some of the work produced in the field of science and technology studies.

Finally, I want to stress that the picture of feminist peer production that I am about to draw will be incomplete. This chapter is meant as an introduction to what feminist peer production looks like and how it differs from mainstream peer production. It, however, does not account for all the types of feminist peer production projects and practices that exist. I have in particular been attentive to some of the practices in which I am rooted in or have witnessed in addition to those that focus on the global South since such practices make visible what would otherwise likely be hidden from view. Haraway's (1997) metaphor of the game of cat's cradle, a game that kids play involving creating various string figures with the hands, illustrates what I am about to do. The metaphor of the cat's cradle gestures towards the different types of articulations, formations, and entanglements that emerge while the game is being played, which involves humans and non-humans. Despite the emergent formations created through the game of strings, gaps and holes remain within every formation.

### **2. Feminist Peer Production as Situated Knowledge**

One of the main principles behind feminist peer production is the fact that it uses situated knowledge to understand and act in the world. As is outlined below, the groundbreaking work of feminist science and technology scholars such as Donna Haraway (1988, 1997, 2004) and others (Harding, 1986, 1993, 2011; Wajcman, 1991) have been essential

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to re-imagine the ways in which we see and understand the world that surrounds us and our relationship to science and technology. Such research has been crucial to the emergence of the practice of feminist peer production.

In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s a debate about objectivity became of great importance for feminist scholars of science and technology studies. The question that was under scrutiny pertained to how scientific knowledge was made: Was an insider's perspective, within scientific knowledge, a valid one? A well-known trope of feminist analysis of scientific and technological knowledge (but clearly not the only one) can be located in the white American women's health movement of the 1970s (Murphy, 2012). The white women's liberation movement had identified the body as a way to gain knowledge and control over women's sexuality and fertility – an early example of non-digital feminist peer production. Women would gather in a living room to show one another how to examine their bodies and in turn produce what Michelle Murphy (2010) calls a feminist protocol. As I will show below, their practice would influence the emergence of feminist biohacklabs. As part of heterosexual family planning techniques, they practiced menstrual extraction and as such gained expert knowledge through peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. This knowledge had generally been in the hands of gynecologists who were white men. It is in a context of the re-appropriation of their bodies that women could develop new knowledge and skills collectively and with their bodies that had a direct impact on their lives (Wajcman, 1991). They recognized science, and scientific knowledge and practices, as patriarchal, as it was based on a masculine project grounded in so-called objectivity, reason, and truth. To disrupt what they saw as a biased understanding

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of science and technology (or the portmanteau term technoscience), they needed to develop their own knowledge based on their specific experiences and praxis.

During the 1980s, a scholarly body of literature started to criticize Western science as patriarchal. Sandra Harding's influential 1986 book entitled *The Science Question in Feminism* aimed at shifting the script by asking the science question in feminism rather than the woman question in science. At the core of the feminist questioning of science and reproductive technologies were the questions of what counts as knowledge and what produces better knowledge.

The endeavor of these feminist scholars was about the needs of women (often with white women in mind) to create and access knowledge for women, because in science and technology the default human was a (white) man. This approach allowed scholars to have a more complete understanding of dominant institutions and structures. By mapping the dominant groups and their practices, feminist scholars were able to show the patterns of domination in the relationship between gender, science, and technology. Sandra Harding's position was that knowledge production based on experiences was not just situated opinions: "Men's dominating position in social life results in partial and perverse understanding, whereas women's subjugated position provides the possibility of more complete and less perverse understandings" (as cited in Wajcman, 1991, p. 10).

While Judy Wajcman (1991) recognized that Harding's standpoint theory was based on the universal features of women's experience, she was nonetheless critical of this project: The fractured identities of women along lines of class, race, and culture limited the standpoint framework. Was there a need, she asked, for other kinds of feminist science and

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technology studies rooted in experiences of, for example, Black women, Asian women, lesbian women, Indigenous women?

In 1988, in her article “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” Haraway proposed another way of framing the objectivity question, thereby rethinking the standpoint. She suggested that all knowledge production – not only subjugated knowledge – was in fact situated. Even so-called objective and rational science was situated because “all science is already embedded in matrices of capital, subjectivity and history” (Haraway as cited in Murphy, 2012, p. 99). To talk about feminist objectivity, Haraway preferred to adopt the metaphor of the vision: “The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). However, she warned feminists about the dangers of romanticizing or appropriating a vision from below. Seeing from below or from the margin is not an innocent position, she argued. While it remains preferred because it seems to provide a better account of the world, it requires enormous skill to be mobilized well. It requires passionate detachment and the recognition that vision is always a question of power (Haraway, 1988, p. 585).

Situated knowledge is about challenging “the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581) and in turn makes visible other ways of seeing from other positionalities. Situated knowledge is important for thinking about and with science and technology as it is at the basis of many feminist peer production practices. Feminist peer production practices do challenge the default positions of who participates in peer production projects and how, and the reasons why some peer production projects or understandings are more visible than others.



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Moreover, taking an expansive view on technology is fundamental to capturing feminist peer production practices. The way technology is often thought of is as things or artefacts as opposed to processes or practices (Slack & Wise, 2015). An expansive view considers technology not only as an artefact with particular values thereby revealing the situatedness embedded in such position, but also its social and cultural implications. Wajcman (1991) clearly illustrates this situated expression in relation to the history of technology when she says that “women’s exclusion from, and rejection of, technology is made more explicable by an analysis of technology as culture that expresses and consolidates relations amongst men. Technologies bear the imprint of the people and social context in which they developed” (p. 22). Wajcman’s reference ought to be taken in the context of an era in which the rejection of science and technology by many white feminists in the global North came about during the Cold War and the Vietnam War. Nuclear power, weapon systems, and the earlier Manhattan project were the types of scientific and technological systems that were front and center for feminists’ rejection of military technologies.

So, what does peer production bring to situated knowledge? I suggest that it is not only about ways of seeing, but also about feminist ways of doing (Rentschler, 2019; Toupin & Spideralex, 2018). One feminist scholar who brings this relationship of seeing and doing together in the realm of science and technology studies is Michelle Murphy (2012) in her book *Seizing the Means of Reproduction: Entanglements of Feminism, Health, and Technoscience*. For Murphy, *doing* feminist technoscience is about an understanding of knowledge that is produced in the process of struggle. Her book shows that the proliferation of diverse forms of participatory science and the politicization of

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collective feminist health projects in the late 20th century were a reaction to a dissatisfaction with patriarchal and commercialized forms of gynecology and of biopolitics (such as the control of population through forced sterilization of Indigenous women and women in the global South) it supported and constrained. Feminists wanted to create their own feminist biopolitics and allow women to seize their means of reproduction. For Murphy, the feminist strategy of developing non-commoditized health techniques through exchange practices of sharing information and doing together resonates with contemporary practices around free and open source software (F/OSS) development.

Participatory feminist science is still alive today in the Gynepunk Lab, a feminist biohacking space (See chapter on Biohacking by Morgan Meyer) in Spain, which aims at bringing back knowledge of reproductive justice in a context where it is threatened. In this feminist biohacking lab, the Gynepunks aim at regaining control of their fertility through menstrual extraction techniques and processes, and have developed DIY emergency gynecological kits with 3D printers that any woman can use safely if needs be.

Using Murphy's understanding and applying it to feminist peer production highlights the fact that feminist peer production practices are rooted in feminist everyday struggles. Such an understanding adds to Benkler's (2002) conceptualization of the commons-based peer production model by making visible the gender and race aspects of peer production. For feminists, peer production is about the importance of considering race and gender as integral to peer production.

### *What Are the Feminist Critiques?*

I now highlight some of the critiques of peer production from feminist perspectives. These critiques will help to distinguish practices that make up feminist peer production, to

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show that there are different forms of feminist peer production practices and that tensions exist within and between these projects. The four feminist criticisms I examine are a) the lack of feminist content and/or women's participation in some of the most well-known peer production projects (Wikipedia and F/OSS), b) the trend towards eclipsing women in technology, c) the ongoing debate about who can take part in feminist peer production projects, and d) the invisibility of the oppressive cycle of technological production in terms of labor and the origins of the material that constitutes our technologies. Focusing on these critiques helps answer the question of how, as a result of feminist critiques, feminists have performed feminist peer production.

### *The “Culture” Within Peer Production Projects*

Since Wikipedia has long been dominated by the participation of white men (Sichler & Prommer, 2014) often from the global North and in English, feminists have organized themselves to create feminist Wikipedia edit-a-thons (Wikimedia Foundation, 2018). The goal is to add feminist content within the online encyclopedia. Such activities have been organized by feminist academics, librarians, artists, activists, and technologists in many parts of the world. The feminist Wikipedia edit-a-thons are designed to mitigate the lack of feminist content and the low participation of women as Wikipedia contributors (Bear & Collier, 2016), and also as a means to teach other women how to edit within Wikipedia. The hope was that women who participated in the one-time Wikipedia edit-a-thon would become regular contributors (Evans, Mabey, & Mandiberg, 2015). This do-it-together methodology has been recognized as a feminist approach to learning, particularly when it relates to technology, in order to shy away from technological fears (Toupin, 2017). Despite initiatives to widen feminist content in languages other than English and in

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geographical location such as the global South, it remains that the core activities have been dominated by white women from the global North.

Within free and open source software projects, the percentage of women is very low (Geek Feminism Wiki, n.d.). In 2001, Ghosh, Glott, Krieger, and Robles' (2002) research showed that only 1.1% of women were active in the development of free and open source software (see chapter on F/OSS by Stéphane Couture, in this volume). To start changing this trend, women coders have tried recruiting other women with coding skills. Moreover, some have started organizing training gatherings where they show other women how they can contribute to F/OSS projects, dispelling the myth that one absolutely needs to know how to code to participate in such projects (Haralanova, 2010). In fact, these gatherings aim at highlighting that, for those who want to get involved and learn, many tasks do not require coding knowledge but rather demand translation skills and being able to identify errors or bugs within the code (sometimes spelling mistakes), among other skills. The intention behind these projects being that more women with coding skills and women with skills other than coding can get involved.

Why is it important to focus on “culture” to shed light on the lack of women within mainstream peer production projects? In her work *Feminism Confronts Technology*, Wajcman (1991) stresses the relationship between technology and culture by articulating the mutual shaping of technology and gender relations. She argues that the fact that technology was recognized as masculine culture was the result of the historical and cultural construction of gender (Wajcman, 1991, p. 135). It was an ideological position, the ideology of masculinity, which created a bond between men and machines. In her discussion about technology and masculinity she writes, “treating technology as a culture

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has enabled us to see the way in which technology is expressive of masculinity and how, in turn, men characteristically view themselves in relation to machines” (Wajcman, 1991, p. 149). Further, Wajcman and other feminist scholars (Balsamo, 1995; Faulkner, 2001; Hicks, 2017) insist that there are a lot of cultural factors – including associated symbols, images, and representations of technology – that play a role in lowering the interest of girls and women in technology.

Wajcman’s (1991) research brings important aspects to understanding the lack of visibility on feminist peer production practices. More recent scholarship has shown that the contributions of women to the histories of technology have been invisibilized particularly when it comes to the development of computing (Ensmenger, 2010; Hicks, 2017). Thanks in part to new declassified archival material and the decentering of the inventor or the machine as objects of study, it has been demonstrated that women were the first computer programmers in both the United Kingdom and the United States. In the UK, thousands of women were hired at Bletchley Park during the Second World War to do cryptanalytic work, and helped with programming the first computer, Colossus (Hicks, 2017). There were also women in the USA, mostly after the war, who programmed the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC), a computer based on the Turing machine. Those two government-led computing projects followed a division of labor where men were responsible for plans and analysis, while women operated the machines. This division of labor resulted in rendering women’s contribution to the history of computing invisible for nearly 50 years, as they were not seen as programmers but rather involved in the low clerical task of “simply” pressing buttons (Hicks, 2017).

In both cases, research has documented the ways in which women were excluded from the field of computing as it began to take prominence whether through governmental or corporate policies as well as in terms of representation in advertising. But more so, Mary Hicks (2017) argues that computerization has been designed as a project built on a type of labor organization that reproduces a sexualized division of labor. She concludes her book wondering whether the increased number of women and girls with programming skills will simply succeed in flooding the market and creating a feminized sphere of computer labor rather than changing social and economic inequalities (Hicks, 2017). Her conclusion shares similarities with Christina Dunbar-Hester's (2014) reflection on social movements and their technologies where she asks whether it is necessary to have the attainment of technical expertise as a universal goal? She observed that participation in technology is no guarantee towards empowered social conditions, even among a group of activists (Dunbar-Hester, 2014). Such critiques are of great value when trying to understand, map, and make sense of feminist peer production practices and their limits.

#### *Who Takes Part in Feminist Peer Production Practices?*

The group composition of who can ascribe to feminist peer production practices varies and depends on the communities that are associated with these projects. Certain projects feel that the identity of the members of the group must be limited to women (most include queer and trans people), while others rather recognize that anyone independent of biological body at birth can be a feminist. Feminist peer production practices are thus attuned to how the community itself understands feminism. This relationship implies that there might be disagreements among the different groups that carry out feminist peer production practices. However, those disagreements do not necessarily preclude

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participation in broader feminist peer production projects or ideas. Feminist peer production practices and groups are, however, not static. Depending on the composition of the group and their political orientation, they can go from one understanding (e.g. women only groups) to another (e.g. recognizing that anyone can be a feminist).

### *Invisibility of Feminist Peer Production Practices*

There are a lot of feminist peer production projects out there, but many are not well known or might not be thought of as peer production. Most of these projects do not articulate what they do as feminist peer production. They might instead be using terms such as do-it-together, collective work, or co-production.

There are many reasons why feminist peer production projects are relatively invisible. First, because many of these projects address issues that affect mostly women, trans and queer people they are considered projects that tackle “minority” issues. The understanding that gender issues concern women, trans people, and queer people only erases the responsibility of other actors in gender and intersectional dynamics. As a case in point, since street and online harassment is common for most people who are not white, heterosexual, and male, many of the peer production platforms that are feminist in nature concern gender-based violence. Some examples which will be further explained below include HarassMap and Hollaback!, platforms which allow feminist activists to crowd-source information on street harassment and have it available for others to see.

Second, in the past few years, feminist makers and hackers involved in peer production practices have foregrounded the importance of the politics of visibility. SSL Nagbot (2016) articulates this type of political orientation as follows: “Th[e] combination of visualization with emancipatory alterity demonstrates the ways that feminism in hacking

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is largely based on a politics of visibility; that is, hacking and making serve the broader objectives of bringing to light the invisible infra/structures of power that render technological achievement possible” (p. 1). Making visible the type of work necessary for feminist peer production practices to exist illuminates why some feminists simply cannot take part in them or, if they do so, why their time is limited. Women are still predominantly responsible for taking care of children and elders as well as reproductive tasks (cleaning, cooking, etc.), giving them less time for leisure. Finally, some feminist peer production projects are invisible because they want to remain as such. Certain projects that aim at building feminist servers or other types of feminist technologies benefit from staying under the radar to protect themselves and their projects from online or offline violence and harassment.

### *Cycle of Technology Production*

Part of the analysis of feminist peer production is about understanding the production cycle of technologies that allows peer production to happen. This is usually a forgotten dimension in most peer production projects with the exception of such projects such as the Fairphone (Haucke, 2018), Precious Plastic, and a handful of others. Recognizing that the cycle of production is rife with inequality – from the production of technology to its access, uptake, development, and governance, until its end cycle – feminists make visible aspects which are often invisible. This feminist approach to peer production sheds light on forms of violence intrinsic to resource extraction, the factory, and assembly line, a type of work that is highly gendered and raced (Toupin & Haché, 2015).



### 3. Three Case Studies

Having examined some of the main criticisms of peer production projects from the standpoint of feminist perspectives, I now turn to three case studies of feminist peer production. This discussion is in an attempt to make visible feminist peer production practices and better understand how they are put in practice. The three case studies are the following: a) the building and maintaining of feminist spaces, collectives, and servers; b) projects that address gender-based violence through peer production; and c) the ways in which speculative thinking is being mobilized by feminists to rethink technologies and their imaginaries.

#### *Feminist Peer Production and Space*

In the past couple of years, feminist tech collectives from Brazil, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Spain, among others, have come together to set up feminist hackerspaces/hacklabs (Toupin, 2014, 2017) (see chapter on Makerspaces by Kat Braybrooke and Adrian Smith, in this volume), discussion lists, and bots and maintain what they call feminist servers. These feminist projects are a way to host feminist content, combat violence, say no to the commercialization of the internet's infrastructure, learn better in a do-it-together environment, and make visible the development of feminist projects. These projects follow feminist principles and employ peer production to build, maintain, and repair them.

Their do-it-together methodology is a form of peer production that is feminist in its pedagogy and allows other feminists to learn to set up or maintain a given technology (how to build a bot, a server, etc.). What they do is meet online or have face-to-face gatherings where they learn together and produce collectively. The documentation of their meetings

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and gatherings is then archived on a feminist server and circulated on feminist discussion lists. The ways in which these projects have seen the light are twofold: feminist techies have either impressed upon feminist groups the importance of hosting their content on feminist technological infrastructures, or feminist groups have come to feminist techies to have them build the needed physical or virtual space.

Through such a case study, we come to understand that feminist peer production is an intentional feminist political act. This practice aims at (re)gaining control and consent over one's technological infrastructure, be it software, hardware, or data produced. Moreover, it is about creating new practices and new expectations regarding technologies and its associated services, in this case being provided by feminist tech collectives.

Feminist peer production is the product of collective reflections, interactions, dialogue, and co-production of knowledge and practices on what it means to be building, maintaining, and repairing feminist technological infrastructures and being a feminist. Recognizing this history of co-production (or peer production) is all about taking a feminist approach that credits feminists.

### *Feminist Peer Production and the Fight against Sexual Harassment*

Feminist peer production has been used to map instances of sexual harassment in the streets and to make (unofficial) lists of sexual harassers public. When it comes to gender-based violence, feminist peer production projects have brought to the fore the intrinsic relationship between its online and offline dimensions. In making visible the systematic culture of violence women, queer, and trans people experience daily in the public sphere and virtually, feminist peer production has shown that this is a worldwide and structural phenomenon.

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Hollaback! (Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018) was established in New York City in 2005 and later became a platform where feminists could geolocate and map details of the street harassment they experienced or witnessed. The aim of this feminist-powered platform is no less than to end street harassment. The platform is available in 21 cities and 16 countries in both the global North and South.

Following instances of harassment in Egypt during the Arab Spring in 2010, a group set up HarassMap to map and spatially locate instances of violence against women in Egypt (Abdelmonem & Galan, 2017). The platform is designed in such a way that with a cell phone a woman can easily anonymously report the street harassment she has been subjected to. She can send a report through social media, SMS, email, or by clicking on one of the two main buttons appearing on site: Report an incident. The other button available is to report an intervention, which means that you can describe the kind of assistance or response that was offered to the harassed woman. HarassMap verifies the report and geolocates it on a Google map of Egypt.

Another feminist peer production project called HeartMob was set up in the USA by Hollaback! to provide yet another essential service: care from the community to reduce trauma to those who suffer harassment. Their premise is to fight fire with water. The app HeartMob, designed by a feminist workers collective, can be installed on a cell phone and send secure and private messages of care to those who have experienced harassment (Blackwell, Diamond, Schoenebeck, & Lampe, 2017).

These three projects are in the tradition of feminist peer production as they are volunteer-based with a feminist vision of ending sexual harassment in society and tackling their consequences. But more so, these examples show that feminist peer production is

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more than participating voluntarily in a peer production project. It stresses the need for the bystander to act and say no to a violent practice both online and offline (Rentschler, 2017).

The peer is not just a volunteer who participates for free in a project that she believes in, but a feminist political actor who helps transform the society in which we live.

Furthermore, the socio-technical imaginary behind this project is the pre-figuration of a world where gender-based violence, patriarchy, and racism come to an end.

More recently, a new type of feminist peer production has surfaced online to make (unofficial) lists of harassers in and around university campuses. In a digital context, two examples are worth mentioning, in South Africa and India. In 2016, an anonymous Facebook post appeared on the Rhodes University (RU) Queer Confessions and Crushes Facebook page. Rhodes University (or the University Currently Known as Rhodes, as it bears the name of a white supremacist, Cecil Rhodes, who pillaged the resources of the southern African continent) is located in the southern part of South Africa. The post made a public peer produced “reference list” (which was to trend on Twitter in South Africa the next day under the hashtag #RUReferenceList) consisting of eleven names of people from Rhodes University who were believed to be sexual offenders (Seddon, 2016). The list called on the university administration to take immediate action and investigate the alleged offenders. The list circulated widely and forced yet another debate about sexual violence and rape culture in South Africa generally and more specifically in university settings. This action by South African queer, trans, and feminist students succeeded in putting the topic of rape culture back in public discourse. South Africa has terrible statistics regarding the rape and murder of Black women, queer, and trans people, making it one of the worst place in the world to be a woman (Gqola, 2015). A similar example of the constitution of a list of

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sexual harassers came to the fore on Facebook in an Indian and diaspora context. The online list, called Raya Sarkar's list or later LoSHA (List of Sexual Harassers in Academia), was released by an Indian female law student at the University of California (Davis). Raya Sarkar, a 24-year-old Indian citizen studying law in the USA, decided in 2017 to publish the name of dozens of men who had allegedly been accused of sexual harassment by women (Chowdury & Deep, 2017). Her list was then expanded to 75 names after other women contacted her on Facebook and WhatsApp to add the names of more harassers. It was possible to consult the list on a non-editable Google document and identify the names of Indian male academics who had allegedly been harassers in India, the United States and elsewhere. The list, which was peer produced, was extremely controversial and polarized Indian feminist movements. The controversy surrounded the ways in which the list was produced and circulated, as well as its accuracy (Menon, 2017). Independent of this controversy, the list has been named as a catalyst for an organized #MeToo movement<sup>1</sup> in India and within the Indian diaspora (Kumar, 2018). Sarkar understands this form of feminist peer production as a form of dissent in a world where sexual harassment is rife and where female identified students in particular have a right to know if their professors have a history of harassment (Prashad, 2018).

The peer production of lists by feminist, queer, and trans people who face violence and harassment seems to be a tactic that has emerged of late. While the ways in which feminist peer production is activated varies, "lists" seem to represent a feminist means of leaking peer produced information relatively anonymously using corporate platforms and

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<sup>1</sup> #MeToo is a concept first used by black community organizer Tarana Burke.

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as one of the multiple ways to fight against gender-based violence and harassment. The paradox with the latter practice is that on the one hand it can be said to depoliticize peer production by using corporate and proprietary tools, but politicizes peer production through its feminist strategy regarding its content and the importance of reaching out to a large audience. All and all, the two types of feminist peer production practices highlighted above show differences: one type aims at building F/OSS feminist platforms and crowd-sources its content (as with Holloback!, HarassMap, and HeartMob) in line with Benkler's definition while the other has the goal to constitute crowd-sourced lists using corporate platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

### *Feminist Peer Production and Imaginaries*

“it matters what ideas we use to think other ideas (with). It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories”. (Haraway, 2016, p. 29)

Donna Haraway's (2016) citation signals the importance of stories, and how we tell them. This point seems particularly fitting when engaging with feminist peer production and imaginaries. Research on peer production is generally not a field that acknowledges that it tells stories and that in part these stories help shape future technologies and their infrastructures. The imaginary around peer production is mainly a post-capitalist one (Bauwens, Kostakis, & Pazaitis, 2019; Mason, 2015; Srnicek & Williams, 2016) where the

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struggle against patriarchy and racism is not specifically acknowledged. The fact that feminists are mobilizing imaginaries to (re)activate their peer production practices gestures towards rendering visible particular sensibilities, cultures, and entanglements.

Regarding socio-technical imaginaries, science and technology scholar Sheila Jasanoff (2015) states that they are “collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology” (p. 4). Although in this definition an emphasis is placed on the institutional aspect, socio-technical imaginaries have also gained support outside of institutions and within Black feminist movements in particular as a way to engage with current problems whether they are sexual harassment, the climate crisis, or the racism that can blatantly surface with technologies (Benjamin, 2019; Eubanks, 2018; Noble, 2018). The relationship between technologies and imaginaries has a long and contested history. Some believed it has had and still has a direct influence on technologists (the term *cyberspace* being coined by William Gibson’s 1984 novel *Neuromancer*) while others say that there is no direct link. To reimagine technologies and their peer production practices, feminists have designed a way to collectively write stories on and about feminist technologies and the infrastructures that sustain them (data centers, the submarine cables and the boats that repair them, the electricity necessary to power our devices, the minerals that power them, etc.). These stories are a way to reclaim, through peer produced narratives, feminist technologies and practices. As a case in point, workshops have used a feminist peer production methodology to produce new narratives or what SpiderAlex calls feminist futurotopias (Radio Cargo & SpiderAlex, 2018). These workshops are a way to

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prefigure the future that feminists want, in addition to going back in time to better understand the present. These workshops take, though not explicitly, a feminist approach *à la bell hooks*, recognizing the patriarchal, colonial, and imperial past is shaping our present and future. The workshops are about collectively conceiving imaginaries that are alternatives to existing oppressive or dystopian technological models.

### *The Future of Feminist Peer Production*

As a practice feminist peer production seems to be here to stay. The examples that were briefly showcased in this chapter exemplify this assertion. While the term never had much traction, the principles behind the practice remain widespread. Feminists involved in such practices have preferred terms such as do-it-together (DiT), co-production, or collective work. What underlines these terms are what feminist peer production is about: the social transformation of society, especially the collective fight against gender-based violence, the fact that the personal is political, making visible projects and practices that mobilize feminist peer production practices, the belief and acknowledgement that all postures and practices are rooted in situated knowledge, and shedding light on the cycle of production of technologies and their impact on the environment. Moreover, feminist peer production adds to our understanding of the commons-based peer production model through the gendered and racial aspects too often invisibilized.

These feminist peer production practices are not homogenous and often differ widely. But feminist peer producers are often able to work together despite varying feminist ideological positions. Friction remains front and center, but it does not prevent or close the possibility of collaboration. Feminists involved in peer production practices have criticized certain ways of doing things, either of other feminists or peer producers, not for



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the sake of critique, but rather to make visible the invisible and the irreconcilable contradictions that open up new possibilities. The imagination that has been deployed by feminist peer producers up to now offers hope for the future. A feminist position that is antiracist and which attends to the colonial and the imperial in its practice is a welcome approach in the landscape of feminist peer production. Feminists from the global South and women of color living in the global North have much to do with this turn. Their work and advocacy to highlight the blind spots of white feminism have been essential for this shift.

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