

Abstract for
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Online harassment and online solidarity – a technofeminist perspective

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In my presentation I plan to discuss the role of digital technology in gender-related discriminatory and harassing activities. I will present various forms of online misogyny and shed a light on especially Twitter as an arena for online solidarity and support. Coming from science and technology studies, I will argue with a technofeminist perspective that neither can technology offer an easy fix to discrimination, nor is it the source of it, as both, gender and technology are fluid and shape each other mutually.

The anonymity and interactivity of social media allow immediate participation without identification. This very fact encourages public sharing of discriminatory experiences which would otherwise be kept private, but it also allows derogatory comments. However, with the pervasiveness of smart technologies, online harassment has become ubiquitous, too. Even if victims are not online the harassment can go on, additional parties can be involved, and the victim cannot escape from the situation.

Other technologies like spyware and online maps bring stalking to a digital, pervasive level, too. Digital stalking is often harder to identify as stalkers are not physically standing in front of the victim's house.

However, the publicness of social media can also have a positive effect: Social media bundle single voices and help to spread stories to those who have not been aware of them as well as to those personally affected. For instance, Twitter hashtags like #shoutingback give an impression of how immense the problem of misogyny and harassment in real life is and show that it is not a minority that is affected. This allows women to make their voices be heard, to show solidarity and opens the opportunity to "shout back".

Thus, technology can unveil mechanisms of harassment by multiplying single voices and pointing to a societal problem: a culture of misogyny.