FINAL REPORT

Anti-rights discourse in Brazilian social media
Digital networks, violence and sex politics

Prepared by Horacio Sívori and Bruno Zilli
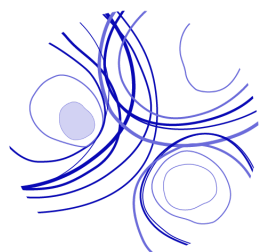
Research team:

Tatiana Laai, social media

Silvia Aguião, interviewer

Fabio Gouveia, digital methods

Eliane De Paula, statistics

Rio de Janeiro, 22 August 2021

feminist
internet
research
network

clam

IMS INSTITUTO DE MEDICINA SOCIAL

UERJ UNIVERSIDADE DO ESTADO DO RIO DE JANEIRO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About this research

Anti-feminist discourse and sex panics are fundamental pieces of the current conservative turn in Brazilian politics, whose apex was the election of Jair Bolsonaro as President of the Republic in november 2018. We addressed the role of social media in public controversies over gender, sexuality and feminism in the period between the 2018 presidential election and the municipal elections in 2020, during the covid-19 pandemic. Relentless attacks, whose semantics activate the intersection of gender, sexuality and race, often in the form of hate speech, operate as a form of political violence. Using mixed-methods, we analyzed digital engagement with anti-rights discourse in the Brazilian social media sphere and assessed the impact of this hostile climate on feminists, LGBTIs and their allies, as well as their individual and collective responses.

About the organization and the research team

The Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights (CLAM) is a regional resource center based at the Institute of Social Medicine (IMS), University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Created in 2002 as a transformation of the Program on Gender, Sexuality and Health, created in 1993 within the same academic unit, CLAM gathers UERJ faculty, graduate students, undergraduate trainees and associate researchers, and networks with feminist and gender and sexuality researchers, activists and professionals throughout Brazil and Latin America, mainly by means of its two online media sources: its website/newsletter www.clam.org.br and its open-access academic journal www.sexualidadsaludysociedad.org. As

gender and sexuality scholars, our teaching, research, dissemination work and partnerships favor a human rights perspective and intersectional approaches to different forms of social inequality.

This research was undertaken by Horacio Sívori, PhD, IMS professor, and Bruno Zilli, PhD, associate researcher, both social anthropologists in the field of sexuality studies. At different stages, Elaine Rabello, PhD, digital media researcher and formerly IMS professor, collaborated with digital research design; Tatiana de Laai, Phd, was workshop rapporteur and social media ethnographer; and Fabio Gouveia, PhD, Fiocruz researcher and faculty, curated our digital datasets. Jandira Queiroz, Brazilian civil society coordinator for Amnesty International Brazil, coordinated our workshop with prospective academic and activist partners. Maria Leão, PhD candidate at IMS, helped with the literature review. Roxana Bassi, with the APC tech team, developed our LimeSurvey instrument and stored its dataset; and Eliane De Paula, PhD, performed the statistical analysis of survey results. Silvia Aguião, PhD, CLAM and AFRO/CEBRAP researcher, acted as online interviewer.

While our earlier research had addressed digital network engagement with sexuality politics, our approach to feminist internet research began in 2008 when, in partnership with the Sexuality Policy Watch, we conducted a Brazilian case study as part of the APC WRP EROTICS project. Both those partnerships and the FIRN framework have been key in shaping our intellectual and institutional investments, reflection and engagement with gender, sexual politics, violence and the internet.

Our story

The broader thematic field of our research is that of gender, sexual politics. We discuss the struggles and the co-constitution, in the complex interplay of State and by civil society, of political identities and of subjects of rights. Over the past 12 years we have also invested in a socio-anthropological approach to the rapid changes in that field brought by the internet. The evolution of human-machine interaction does not only affect human beings and society, changing the way people behave, communicate and interact, but particularly the way science and politics are made. Witness to this are the current datafication of electoral processes and political advertising on social media

and the research on the question of algorithmic racism, for example. The FIRN call made it possible to bring together our most recent investments in the study of the current conservative reaction to feminism and sexual rights in Brazil, on the one hand and, on the other hand, issues of feminism and sexual rights in relation to the grave regulatory challenges brought by the rapid transformations of the internet, particularly with regard to online violence. IIt was an opportunity to also face the methodological challenge of integrating digital research methods in our project design.

Both politically and theoretically, our project finds inspiration in intersectional approaches to issues of violence, vulnerability and feminist care, particularly by Black Feminism and by feminist Brazilian alternative media. Related to those issues, another source of inspiration are the digital feminists who develop tech-age grassroots frameworks and instruments for feminist internet security. The burgeoning field of Brazilian digital anthropology, with its focus on "thick data" is another permanent source of inspiration. Finally, we closely follow the works of Internet Lab, of Coding Rights, and of the Sexuality Policy Watch, main references in engaged research for the various intersections upon which our research pivots.

Some of those sources of inspiration came together at a live online panel we hosted in 2020, bringing together Brazilian feminist activists and academics to discuss the covid-19 pandemic at the light of research on online violence and the current conservative turn in Brazilian politics. Natália Neris, who cooordinated two iterations of the research project Other Voices, with Internet Lab, spoke about the notable surge in online gender based violence against female politicians and feminist activists in the context of the 2018 election. At the time, social movements and feminists in particular became the targets of dehumanizing violence on- and offline. That was aggravated during the covid-19 pandemic, affecting women's safety and their very possibility of convening online. Anthropologist Isabela Kalil, faculty at the São Paulo School of Sociology and Politics Foundation, who researches the anti-gender movement in Brazil, spoke about the co-constitution of the anti-gender agenda and neo-fascism in current national and global politics. She was precise at showing that present ultra-conservative forms of authoritarianism are not necessarily "anti-rights'' or against democracy, but conceive of those values in a restrictive fashion that is threatened by the specter of communism and gender. Luísa Tapajós, member of the Brejeiras

transfeminist dyke editorial collective, recalled the political assassination in March 2018 of Rio de Janeiro Councilwoman Marielle Franco, a black bisexual feminist from the urban periphery, as a turning point in Brazilian feminist mobilization. "That image of extermination inhabits us all," she said. Later on the same year during the electoral campaign, the "Bolsonaro 17" electoral slogan was deliberately deployed and operated as a threat to lesbians visible in public spaces. Brejeiras' response to that everyday fear was to create sources of communal joy and strategies of protection such as avoiding activists and community members' identification in publications. Our colleague at Rio de Janeiro State University, sociologist José León Szwako, faculty at the Institute of Social and Political Studies, argued that negationism is not foreign to, but formulated within the realm of science, as a collective investment by concrete networks who dispute the boundaries and scope of scientific discourse, seeking concrete gains, whether material or moral. In those disputes, gender becomes a highly contested issue, for its relevance as a site of regulation, with grave effects on public policy. Therefore we should look for negationism not only in the media and politics, but pay attention to its intellectual and scientific roots. The audience included researchers, faculty, students from all levels and alumni, as well as activists, interested in gender, sexuality, health, fake news and disinformation, online GBV, the current anti-democratic turn. The debate in our session challenged commonsense understandings of online violence and highlighted its complexity, particularly in the context of the covid-19 pandemic and its associated "infodemia," as its communicational context was aptly called. The audience came out with relevant information, got their assumptions challenged, and acquired new conceptual tools to address pressing issues. All invited speakers knew about each other's work and, although it took place by virtual means, the debate was an opportunity to get to know each other "in person." As we all enthusiastically recognized, the talks expanded our own perspectives on political violence, online GBV, the role of gender and sexuality in Brazilian ultra-conservative discourse, and on scientific negationism. Plans were made to find more ways of keeping this discussion alive, in the form of future events and publishing opportunities. More live transmissions around similar intersections are planned for the 2021 CLAM debates series, and also at other online forums both during the covid pandemic and beyond, hopefully in person physically.

Research question, rationale and objectives

The increasing public legitimation of anti-feminist, anti-LGBTI+ and anti-human rights discourse over at least the past decade in Brazil, by means of moral panics and disinformation campaings, produced hostility and acts of violence against women and sexual minorities, and towards feminists and LGBTI+ activists in particular, that were capitalized for the election of Jair Bolsonaro as President in 2018. That hostility and that violence are intersectional, in the sense that negative representations of women and of non-normative sexualities and gender expressions are always and primarily conceived within age, class and racialized hierarchies. Social media have been instrumental to anti-rights engagement and the covid-19 pandemic potentiated their role by increasing dependence on online communication, not only as main or primary, but often as the only available means of socialization and of access to information. This research aimed at generating a complex understanding of the particular role of social media use and architecture in the production and dissemination of anti-rights discourse, often under the form of hate speech, of its reception and of how the communities that are the targets of that hostility may articulate responses to those forms of violence.

To access the political and technological contexts and the cultural meanings mobilized in current struggles around feminism and LGBTI+ rights in Brazilian social media, we selected cases of 'issue networks' in which anti-rights discourse got disseminated, amplified and responded to, triggered by communicational events in the period between the political campaign for the 2018 presidential election and the Municipal elections in late 2020. We described cases in terms of their actors, their language, the semiotics and the social grammar of their messages, and some measure of how social media platform affordabilities shape different forms of engagement with those networks. To assess the impact of this hostile climate, we conducted an online survey that provided some clues about the variety and magnitude of the challenges faced in this context by persons positively engaged with feminism, gender and sexuality issues, their forms of political engagement, their experiences with and individual responses to online violence, and their understandings about its regulation. Finally, to

provide a further understanding of the engagement with issues of feminism and online violence, we collected narratives by means of semi-structured open-ended video interviews with a selection of survey respondents.

Feminist methods of data collection and analysis

To construct relevant cases of 'issue networks' involving controversies spearheaded by anti-rights discourse on social media, we conducted initial user-end and backend explorations on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp during 2019 and finally, during the second half of 2020, already into the Covid-19 pandemic, focused on Twitter for its prominent role as forum for political debate. We were already familiar with pro-rights networks and sources, including responses to anti-rights discourse and episodes of homophobic, misoginistic and racist violence from our own previous research and personal and professional and networks. In order to access anti-rights networks, we set out to "lurk" on *bolsonarista* (supporter of President Bolsonaro) Twitter profiles, tweets and retweets, by constructing an online 'research persona,' male, white, vaguely neutral in terms of their politics, who would abstain from engaging in platform interactions other than 'following' an initial set of bolsonarista actors, identified based on information from press sources and on front-end user searches. After that, we kept adding accounts suggested by the Twitter algorithm, fed by the research profile's own behavior, and by further exploring their connections.

While the methodological challenge in our daily engagement with *bolsonarista* networks was to 'learn their language' (their lexicon and social grammar) and etiquette, and to become familiar with their values, norms and cultural references. Our approach to online pro-rights and anti-rights issue spaces actors also meant a methodological distancing from our own preconceptions about both, particularly the latter, so that the partial knowledge (Haraway, 1988) to be generated from our situated position could generate more complex interrogations than those coming from our own commonsense or as spontaneous responses to the aggressive provocations all too frequent in Bolsonariosta networks. Making their behavior and the political challenge it represents the objects of an interrogation, rather than expecting to formulate a direct response to the former, is a methodological step in that direction. Furthermore, in our fieldwork, that engagement could

not be actively direct, in the sense of eliciting a response to our inquiries, but paradoxically passive, lurking in their network as anonymous observers.

The materiality of violence *in* research raises a delicate issue. When researchers immerse themselves in public spaces where violence is exercised acting as "lurkers," while they may to a certain extent avoid exposure in the sense of not being identifiable, they are still irremediably exposed in the sense that they are vulnerable to the emotional stress that aggressive behavior primarily produces. Something similar happens when we invite interlocutors, selected precisely because of their vulnerable position, to narrate violences that they dealt with in their past or the ones that they currently face. The framework developed for this project by the Feminist Internet Research Network puts enphasis on care as a meaningful attribute of feminist research. In this research, practices of self, mutual and community care emerged as relevant responses to hate speech, online gender-based violence and hostility on social media. They can be considered forms of political engagement themselves. That finding indicates a path both as a way to deal with the ethical issue of subjects' and researchers' vulnerabilities in fieldwork settings, as well as a relevant focus of analytic investment.

The responses to contemporary online challenges related to feminist engagement were the object of two other metodological procedures, to add to our composite picture of anti-rights discurse and hate speech in the Brazilian mediasphere: an online survey to illustrate the present variety of forms of online violence, as related to respondents' political engagement with feminist issues and issues of internet regulation; and a series of open-ended in-depth interviews to discuss similar experiences in their social and biographical context.

An evident limitation to the outcome of the self-administered online survey was the significant homogeneity of its demographics, remarkably white, educated, cis-hetero female, and highly concentrated in the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area. While it is expectable that the declaration of some sort of feminist engagement or attention to sexuality politics, as inclusion criteria, would invite for a largely female sample, and while self-identified gays and bisexuals were not necessarily underrepresented, we were not able to attract responses by persons self-identified as trans, as cis-male hetero or as

non-white in proportions sufficient, or an overall sample large enough to make results statistically comparable. We attribute this shortcoming to our institutional identity as an academic unit, to a somewhat surprising locally-driven outreach, and to the almost exclusively white composition of our unit staff and its relatively short history of investment in racial and intersectional issues. Besides raising structural challenges only recently faced by Brazilian academic institutions in terms of affirmative action, this outcome marks the necessity to create formal partnerships with civil society organizations and activist collectives across the country, and particularly with black feminist and trans collectives and organizations, in order to reach a more diverse and inclusive public. An indispensable condition for that is a pact of equitable protagonism in research. Strengthening those ties became to a large extent impracticable during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, to meet that challenge within this research project, we made an effort to compensate for those limitations and the potential biases they entail, by aiming at a variety of demographics in the selection of interlocutors for our in-depth video interviews.

Ethical framework

The "human" in the human-machine interactions that generate the digital objects we access either by means of front-end immersive observation or back-end metadata collection should not be taken as self-evident, but as the subject of complex mediation, always involving a significant level of indeterminacy. As regards to the confidentiality of that data, the digital objects that we accessed and scrutinized were not only *defined* as public as a matter of legal regulamentation (either by platform default or by user's deliberate choice), but their creators also *intended to* make them public to the greatest extent possible. Our digital databases gathered, in fact, the traces of online behavior by human actors who sought their own exposure and the amplification of their messages and of their mediated presence in the public sphere. That also allowed for the ethically ambivalent methodological choice of creating a research profile constructed as an imaginary persona, to conduct "lurking" immersive observation at *bolsonarista* networks. In that way we expected to somehow "cheat" the algorithm into feeding us selections and suggestions not based on our own personal behavior, leading us to networks where we might be classified as

outsiders, but with which we intended to get acquainted. Another reason for that choice had to do with our research team's safety. The anonymity of our research profile (traceable only to a mobile line registered outside Brazil and accessed on an anonymized web browser) was a limited yet deliberate means of safeguarding our team members from any exposure in those networks during our fieldwork.

We took measures to preserve the anonymity of survey respondents and interviewees, listed in an Informed Consent Form, approved by our academic unit's Ethical Review Board. Following institutional guidelines, that consent form also raised the issue of discomfort produced by some questions, particularly the ones that evoked and instated to share traumatic experiences. That text, whose reading was mandatory before the start of the survey or the interview, reminded the respondent or interviewee that the session could be paused or interrupted at any moment at their will, and interviewers were professionally trained to respond with empathy and care towards interviewees. Following another institutional guideline, a statement in the consent form also speculated about potential benefits brought by participating, raising the possibility that the online questionnaire and the interview might represent opportunities to reflect on the issues addressed by the research. In the construction of the survey instrument and as a guideline for the interviews, particular care was exercised to contemplate and respect all forms of self-identification in terms of gender and sexual orientation, including trans and non-binary ones. All multiple-choice questions offered the possibility of formulating a response "other" than the predefined ones.

Discussion of research findings

When we set out to look at the online dissemination of anti-feminist discourse and the incitement to sex panics in the context of right-wing conservative political campaigning in contemporary Brazil, we asked about the role misoginistic, homophobic and racist hate speech in relation to anti-rights discourse. As the research progressed, we realized the need to gauge their specificity as a form of political violence, i.e. intended to interfere with its target's political rights and aspirations, in a context, marked by

gender, sexuality and racial hierarchies. Furthermore, the climate of public hostility against feminists, LGBTI+ and other human rights movements was key to the rise of public support for the election of Jair Bolsonaro in October 2018 and for his and his allies' implementation of an anti-rights government agenda thereafter.

Over that period, social media became a laboratory for unregulated forms of violence and conservative pedagogies. The hostility against feminists and LGBT+s by Bolsonaro and his followers cannot be dissociated from the primary role of the anti-gender and anti-sexual rights agenda of his government. Gender and sexuality are not just in the content of those controversies and the discourse they delineate, but sexual morality and the gendering of self and others operates as a primordial political grammar. Anti-rights discourse and hate-speech configure the preferred political language of *Bolsonarista* attacks against political adversaries that they construct as enemies of Nation and Family. At materializing the status of sexual minorities as morally inferior, hate speech and prejudice produce forms of material and symbolic violence that reveal social inequalities and the workings of oppression. Their activation as political language in social media aims at the disassemblage and reassemblage of political identities performed by digital populism.

In response, right-wing anti-gender hostility on Brazilian social media has provoked a collective feeling of outrage about offenses made possible by the usurpation of online spaces and rights in strict correspondence with what happens in the state's institutional sphere under the present government. That is understood as an expression and effect of systemic injustices, of rights being violated. In that context, the increased vulnerability of women and minorities is seen as the result of the formation of a hostile, violent environment, facilitated by platforms that only seek their own profit.

Investigating political issue engagement with digital media means addressing the role of opaque network architectures and the complex mediations of community and personhood implicated in competing discourses and narrative disputes. We paid attention to the engagement by different actors, human and digital and interrogated the materiality of social media technological mediation. In constructing cases of struggles around anti-rights discourse and hate speech in social media we sought to interrogate not only

an overwhelmingly hostile environment, but also queer and feminist vernacular uses of Twitter and Instagram as ways inhabiting social media spaces, resisting that hostility and claiming those technologies, languages and spaces as their own.

The revealing of violence as such by denunciation, contestation or irony indicates the subsistence of struggles around the meaning of gender and sexual difference, activated by other audiences. Social media also became the main medium where the social movements and subjects who had gained social recognition and citizenship rights over the long process of democratization that took place since the 1980's could exercise public forms of resistance. Narratives of suffering and understandings of trauma as signs of structural vulnerability also indicate a collective engagement with a struggle. The search for online well-being is both an intimate and public pursuit, negotiated in close-knit networks that are seldom anonymous. Collective responses to violent acts whose meanings are materially and symbolically shared in and by digital networks represent both challenges and opportunities for feminist networks of resistance and care.

Research suggestions and input for advocacy

The itineraries followed by this research project deserves some reflection on a variety of issues, regarding in two aspects: one the operative and the other involving theoretical, methodological and ethical issues. Additionally, we address a few advocacy issues.

Research - operational aspects

Institutional partnerships: both the successes and the failures, the felicity of some encounters and the hindrances met for the sustainability of others highlight the importance of:

1. the cultivation of strategic, sustainable multi-sector (activist professional and grassroots; fellow academic and nonacademic research; educational; expert professional, as in data science and design; government; legal; parliamentary; etc.) partnerships;
2. the capacity to revise the terms of existing partnerships and explore new ones, based on experience;

3. accountability among partners both in terms of tangible (deliverables, labor) and not-so-tangible (trust, engagement, solidarity, encouragement, meaningful criticism) reciprocal commitments;
4. feedback, peer advice and supervision.

Research - theoretical, methodological and ethical aspects

1. Unlinke gender-based violence, where the testimony and political voice of victims is privileged by activists and researchers alike, regulation debates and hegemonic research approaches to online hate speech have privileged its framing in legal terms. The conclusions reached by this research indicate the relevance of socio-cultural and linguistic approaches. Further explorations addressing hate speech in the context of different disputes and in different media should include anthropological perspectives on social suffering, care, the legibility of state practices, biopolitics and necropolitics.
2. The pedagogical role of homophobia, misogyny and class violence in Bolsonarista political language can be addressed using the analytical tools of critical masculinity studies.
3. Further empirically-grounded theoretical discussions may explore the materiality of subaltern agency in the context of platformized social media and activist responses to algorithmic discrimination and surveillance, from a collective user-centered perspective, as rehearsed in the interpretive sections of this report.
4. Further research and theorization may address shared perspectives and points of friction regarding definitions of feminist research.
5. The overall ethnographic approach to mixed methods proved adequate to the feminist perspective adopted in this research, as well as framing neophite experiments with digital research methods rudiments and survey methodology. However, a more symmetric approach to those methods must be profitable in the sense of allowing a more thorough, thus reflexive, articulation of their perspectives
6. Our experience as queer feminist-identified qualitative researchers in two "data sprints" held by academic digital research methods graduate programs raised issues about, first, the mutual translatability of qualitative research questions and hypotheses, as well as the communicability between issue-oriented and method-oriented

research. Second, it raised issues about the intersection between gender and sexuality and digitality, and of gender and sexuality in the study of digitality. On a related note, third, it called for a thorough, systematic, mapping of existing and potential devolpments in feminist digital methods.

7. The ethical issues of safety, suffering, care and embodiment in research on online violence and hate are always a delicate subject and fertile ground for engaged reflection and problematization.

Policy and advocacy

1. This research provides valuable evidence of urgent issues regarding the critical role of social media development, their political economy and forms of regulation in the facilitation of an increasingly violent mediaphere, hostile toward women and minorities. It takes issue with user and enterprise accountability and with the lack of transparency of social media design and architecture, by providing a situated interpretation of the negation of a feminist internet that the unregulated expansion of an extractivist business model in social media design represents.

2. When uttered by political leaders and their followers, hate speech represents a singular challenge for regulation debates; in the case of Brazil, on the applicability of existing legislation (See Azmina and InternetLab, 2020). The structural dimensions and legal challenges involved in those issues are beyond the scope of this project; but this research highlights the role of violence in general and of hate speech and online violence in particular as the expression of social struggles around the meaning of social difference.

3. Policymakers must be open to dialogue with feminist, LGBT+, Black and Human Rights movements for the design of not only legal regulations, but also pedagogical interventions. Most of all, State regulating organs and processes, third sector organizations responsible for internet control and fiscalization, and corporate digital providers must include community and academic representation in their governance, policy and oversee bodies.

4. Internet users positively engaged with gender and sexuality issues online denounce a climate of hostility toward their convictions and their very existence and highlight the key role of tech experts, legal

operators and care professionals to aid internet users subject to different forms of online violence and fatigue. However, that professional involvement must be collaborative, with communities actively involved in the diagnosis of problems. The importance of nurturing networks of feminist resistance and care is always enphasized.

THE RESEARCH

SUMMARY

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

Anti-gender discourse and sex panics are fundamental pieces of the current conservative turn in Brazilian politics, whose apex was the election of Jair Bolsonaro as President of the Republic in November 2018. In his right-wing populist narrative, womens' rights, LGBT+ rights and sex education bring "the destruction of the family" and tradition.[1] Relentless attacks by Bolsonaro's supporters targeting feminists, LGBT+s and their allies activate the intersection of gender, sexuality, class and race in the form of hate speech, anti-rights discourse and disinformation.[2] In this research we consider that hostile assemblage as a form of political violence, that is, intended to interfere with its target's political rights and aspirations.[3] This hostile climate is now ever present on the online networks where interest in feminism, gender and sex politics permeates the everyday use of social media. After March 2020, social distancing measures in response to the covid-19 pandemic increased dependence on online communication, not only as main or primary, but sometimes as the only available means of socialization and of access to information and political participation.

---

[1] For a robust up-to-date overview of anti-gender politics with focus on Latin America, see Correa et al., 2021.

[2] Anti-rights hostility and acts of violence are intersectional in two senses: on the one hand, negative representations of women and of non-normative sexualities and gender expressions are always and primarily conceived within racialized class hierarchies. Secondly, they are also linked to a longstanding reaction to the advancement of legal protections and correctives to systemic discrimination based on racism, sexism, classism and homophobia. The most recent national landmark in that advancement was the 1988 constitutional reform, during the democratic transition after two decades of military dictatorship (1964-1985). See Machado, 2020.

[3] For a timely report on online violence against women, LGBT and black candidates at the 2020 municipal elections in Brazil, see Revista Azmina and InternetLab, 2021. In this research, we propose an expanded understanding of the impact of this violence, which includes individuals who become the focus of public controversies over minority rights, as well as feminists and minorities broadly defined, whose physical and moral integrity is challenged by this hostile climate. For an earlier report on gender and sexuality-based online violence, also see Néris et al., 2019.

Benefitting by the recent increase in low-cost mobile access to the internet and penetration of social media, during the 2018 election, fake news, smear campaigns and hate speech were extensively used to delegitimize and promote rejection against political adversaries. That was accomplished by "generating suspicion about information broadcast by large media outlets, and giving credit to information coming from closed networks anchored on relationships of trust and proximity" (Almeida, 2019b:190). The literature on electoral uses of social media points at the polarizing effect of those tactics, exploring the disruptive potential of moral controversies in times of political uncertainty and heightened emotional sensitivity (Silva 2020; Cesarino 2020). In social network platform design, maximized engagement is sought by polarizing connections (Chun, 2016), therefore constantly 'dividing' publics (Lyon, 2003). That was arguably the role played by controversies over gender and sexuality issues in social media, manipulated by campaign publicists, engaged by a radicalized core of Bolsonaro's supporters and largely disseminated on WhatsApp groups by automated accounts (Davies 2020; Machado, 2018).

Online engagement with anti-rights discourse is also connected to the formation of digital hate cultures (Ganesh, 2018). Social media platforms are a vector of prime importance for hate speech and other public forms of gender-, sexuality- and race-based violence (Blakemore, 2016; Awan & Zempi, 2017). If we understand the power of artificial intelligence to enhance the ability of social media platforms to promote connectivity by predicting user behavior and sentiment as a surveillance mechanism, the traction of online misogynistic, homo/lesbo/transphobic, and racist hate speech and anti-gender discourse on social media stresses Shepard's point that "the data and metadata at stake in surveillance are never neutral [...] in relation to gender, sexuality, and race" (2016:3). Online violence makes explicit, loud and visible the digital rejection implicit in algorithmic racism (Nakamura, 2006; Bailey, 2011; Leurs, 2017).

This research looked at the role of the internet in public controversies over gender, sexuality and feminism during the period between the 2018 presidential election and the 2020 municipal elections, during the covid-19 pandemic. Using mixed-methods, we explored online engagement with, and responses to, anti-rights discourse and episodes of sexist and homophobic hate speech in Brazilian social media. That meant addressing the role of

opaque network architectures and the complex mediations of community and personhood implicated in competing discourses and narrative disputes. We paid attention to the engagement by different actors, human and digital and interrogated the materiality of Web 2.0 media as a *space* where interactions take place, and as technological *mediation*.

We looked for evidence of the formation of online publics who assemble and mobilize by engaging with issues in and by digital media. Our empirical focus was at a micro level. At particular events on social media we selected cases of 'issue networks' (Rogers, 2019) in which anti-rights discourse got disseminated, amplified and responded to, triggered by communicational events over the period between the 2018 presidential election and the municipal elections in late 2020. We described cases in terms of their actors, their language, the semiotics and social grammar of their messages, and some measure of how social media platform affordabilities (Taina & Helmond, 2017) and vernaculars (Keller, 2019) shaped different forms of engagement with those networks.

This report provides a detailed description of the different combination of linguistic, performatic and technological resources utilized by anti-rights actors banding against feminists, LGBT+s and Human Rights defenders, on the one hand; and of the latter's perplexed response to that violence. The humiliation, the outrage, or else, the apathy that the forms of violence documented here contribute to generate work as confirmation of the power of words intended to harm, of the trauma and damage it leaves. But, as with all forms of power, its effects are ambivalent; among those three—often combined and sometimes indiscernible—emotional responses, outrage stood out as a site of subjective investment. Whereas humiliation and apathy can be characterized as 'silent' emotional responses, the social grammar of outrage requires public legibility. Outrage is an emotion that requires naming to become public. It is by that naming that the meanings of violence are disputed. Giving violence a proper name is part of the feminist struggle. The research commitment to the documentation of the struggle for meaning around online violence is also an effort to interrogate the possibilities of feminist investment in digital media in times of adversity, by localizing the collective agency of women, minorities and their political allies in face of dehumanizing acts and discourse.

METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Issue engagement in social media overlaps and articulates the digital and the political (Omena et al., 2017). The metrics of engagement (dominant voice, concern, commitment, positioning and alignment) may, for example, provide insights about a political cause or issue over time (Rogers, 2016; 2017). This means looking at engagement (its logic, structure, vocabulary of actions) as embedded in, and embedding social relations (Omena et al., 2017). The notion of engagement in social media, involves the articulation of different grammars of action (Agre, 1994), with specific textures, according to the system (in this case the social media platform) that mediates engagement with particular issues.

Digital research methods explore, experimentally, the concrete possibilities of drawing insights about that engagement from *measuring* the online behavior of human and digital objects. They do so by classifying and counting those objects, collected with the aid of algorithms supplied by the platforms themselves under the form of APIs (Application Programming Interface) for research purposes, or else developing the researchers' own and by simulating end-user scenarios. Such measurements must be guided by qualitative interpretation at each step in translating complex calculations to cultural meanings and vice-versa, to account for the textured perception of digital media and for measurements to *make sense* as culture. This research stands on the qualitative side of that translation process.

Hoping to provide insights on the grammars and vocabulary of gender and sexuality issue engagement in social media, the analytical strategies and the methodological tools we developed focus on actors' and content's qualitative attributes. Those methodological strategies, tools and units of analysis were constructed using an ethnographic approach, from a feminist perspective. Briefly, ethnography involves the immersion of the researcher in the flow of everyday life at multiple sites, to engage the perspectives of social actors and exercising reflexivity at each step, including design, data collection, analysis and writeup. A feminist approach to the theoretical and methodological challenges posed by gender and sexuality issue engagement in social media may be summed up in three interlocked interrogations: how to account for the embeddedness, embodiment and everydayness (Hine, 2015) of *that*

internet from a feminist perspective; what would, in this case, our situated, partial (Haraway, 1988) point of view be; and how to locate the agency of subaltern subjects within the structures of domination (Mahmood, 2001) of social media architecture.

We developed empirical and analytical tools to produce a 'thick' description (Geertz, 1973) of digital mediascapes (Appadurai, 1990), favoring immersive experiences in various online and offline environments connected by the internet. We also 'mixed' methods to enhance our understanding of what happens at the 'back-end' of human-machine interaction: some digital tools and procedures developed to automate the construction and basic quantitative analysis of datasets at potentially larger and more technically complex scales than the bare eye can meet as far as information and communication processes go. Digital Methods for social analysis are defined by Rogers (2019) as a set of techniques for the study of societal change and cultural conditions with online data, using available digital objects (hyperlinks, tags, likes, shares, retweets, etc.), built into experimental sets of tools that perform "search as research" (Rogers, 2018; 2019). We designed and tested our online research protocols at two 'data sprints', a collaborative model where a number of staff data scientists help translate research questions to digital methods protocols, guide the procedures and lead technical tasks, while staff designers generate visual outputs.[4]

To construct relevant cases of 'issue networks' involving controversies spearheaded by anti-rights discourse on social media, we started front-end and back-end explorations on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp in 2019. Later on, during the second half of 2020, already into the Covid-19 pandemic, we focused on issue networks on Twitter, a platform prefered for political expression and debate, by actors who want their public voices to be heard, and where political figures gather a large following. Twitter highlights narrative disputes and provides a vantage point to observe the posting habits of right-wing populists like Trump, who purposely eschew traditional media outlets, fomenting distrust of sources other than their social media channels (Cesarino, 2021; Silva 2021). Deliberately decontextualized

---

[4] As pedagogic devices, data sprints may be interesting sites to interrogate the social and technoscientific orders in which digital methods are themselves embedded and the constestations and negotiations around them, for example, in the gendered distribution of specialized knowledge and shared understandings of the internet, and the gender scripts in institutional arrangements and those performed by participants.

fragments of text and images, memes, short audio recordings and video footage are a prevalent feature in content shared in both anti- and pro-rights networks.

In our daily engagement with *Bolsonarista* networks, we pursued the task of 'learning their language', that is, along with getting acquainted with grammars of action of different social media, we became familiar with a far-right alpha-male and anti-feminist lexicon, iconography, local codes, norms and cultural references. Our approach to online pro-rights and anti-rights issue spaces actors also meant a methodological distancing from our own preconceptions about both, particularly the latter, so that the partial knowledge (Haraway, 1988) to be generated from our situated position could generate more complex interrogations than those coming from our own commonsense or as spontaneous responses to the aggressive provocations all too frequent in Bolsonariosta networks. Making their behavior and the political challenge it represents the objects of an interrogation, rather than expecting to formulate a direct response to the former, is a methodological step in that direction. Furthermore, in our fieldwork, that engagement could not be actively direct, in the sense of eliciting a response to our inquiries, but paradoxically passive, lurking in their network as anonymous observers.

Initially, our familiarity with anti-gender and *bolsonarista* discourse and with reports of episodes of sexuality- and gender-based and racist violence came from secondary sources and first-hand from our own left-wing erudite queer feminist and scholarly networks on various platforms. Anti-rights discourse and hate speech are inextricably entangled with each other, as are the voices that produce them. As outsiders, in order to gain insight on anti-gender and Bolsonarista networks, we constructed an online 'research persona' (Dieter et al., 2019), conventionally male, white, devoid of political affinities, who would abstain from engaging in platform interactions other than 'following' an initial set of *bolsonarista* actors, identified based on press reports on front-end user searches. After that, we kept adding accounts suggested by the Twitter algorithm, fed by the research profile's own behavior, and by further exploring their connections. Engagement with the controversies over gender and sexuality provoked by "anti-rights" provocations are not restricted to Bolsonarista actors. Our universe of analysis also included their reverberation in "pro-rights" networks, i.e. intersectional feminist and LGBT+ discourse networks that effectively engage those controversies.

The scope of our data gathering in social media, both in terms of user-end queries and immersive observation, and metadata collection, either facilitated by platform APIs or utilizing computer programming scripts for 'scraping' metadata, was primarily defined in terms of digital objects (human or automated profiles, text, image files and URLs either posted or used in profile descriptions, reactions, linked profiles, etc.), in the sense that the "human" in the human-machine interactions that generate those objects should not be taken as self-evident, but as the subject of complex mediation, always involving a significant level of indeterminacy (Latour, 2005).

As regards to the confidentiality of that data, the digital objects that we accessed and scrutinized were not only *defined* as public as a matter of legal regulamentation (either by platform default or by user's deliberate choice), but their creators also *intended to* make them public to the greatest extent possible. Our digital databases gather, in fact, the traces of online behavior by human actors who sought their own exposure and the amplification of their messages and of their mediated presence in the public sphere. That also allowed for the ethically ambivalent methodological choice of creating a research profile constructed as an imaginary persona, to conduct "lurking" immersive observation at *bolsonarista* networks. In that way we expected to somehow "cheat" the algorithm into feeding us selections and suggestions not based on our own personal behavior, leading us to networks where we might be classified as outsiders, but with which we intended to get acquainted. Another reason for that choice had to do with our research team's safety. The anonymity of our research profile (traceable only to a mobile line registered outside Brazil and accessed on an anonymized web browser) was a limited yet deliberate means of safeguarding our team members from any exposure in those networks during our fieldwork.

Responses to contemporary online challenges related to feminist engagement were the object of two other metodological procedures to add to our composite picture of anti-rights discurse and hate speech in the Brazilian mediaphere: an online survey to provide a larger contextualization of different forms of online violence, as related to respondents' political engagement with feminist issues and issues of internet regulation; and a series of open-ended in-depth interviews to ellicit narratives about similar experiences in their own social and biographical context. We took measures to preserve the anonymity of survey respondents and interviewees, as listed

in an Informed Consent Form, approved by our unit's Ethical Review Board. Following institutional guidelines, that consent form also raised the issue of discomfort produced by some questions, particularly the ones that evoked and instated to share traumatic experiences and reminded the respondent or interviewee that they could paused or interrupted their engagement at any moment at their will. Interviewers were professionally trained available to respond with empathy and care towards interviewees. In the construction of the survey instrument and as a guideline for the interviews, particular care was exercised to contemplate and respect all forms of self-identification in terms of gender and sexual orientation, including the ones that contest binary conventions. All multiple-choice questions offered the possibility of formulating a response "other" than the predefined ones.

The violences and challenges surveyed configure a complex variety of interpersonal and group dynamics, representations, meanings and offline extensions; they involve different expectations, dimensions and forms of regulation. Without diminishing the role of connectivity and hardware design, our theoretical and methodological approach to the role of digital communications in those dynamics and representations privileges technological mediation and regulation in terms of *access* (its unequal socio-cultural conditions); of *user-interface design and affordabilities*; of *platform architecture*; and of *algorithmic surveillance and design*. To account for that complexity one may theoretically look at each of those aspects and see what happens at those different levels, which requires different methodologies and analytical strategies. The survey methodology provides a descriptive, in this case illustrative (opportunistic, statistically not representative) account of representations related to challenges from the point of view of participants. The questionnaire classified those representations as different entities for analytical purposes, but categories of perception often overlap with one another and also produce areas of ambiguity and contradiction.

Finally, the materiality of violence *in* research raises a delicate issue. When researchers immerse themselves in public spaces where violence is exercised acting as "lurkers," while they may to a certain extent avoid exposure in the sense of not being identifiable, they are still irremediably exposed in the sense that they are vulnerable to the emotional stress that aggressive behavior primarily produces. Something similar happens when

we invite interlocutors, selected precisely because of their vulnerable position, to narrate violences that they dealt with in their past or the ones that they currently face. The framework developed for this project by the Feminist Internet Research Network puts enphasis on care as a meaningful attribute of feminist research. In this research, practices of self, mutual and community care emerged as relevant responses to hate speech, online gender-based violence and hostility on social media. They can be considered forms of political engagement themselves. That finding indicates a path both as a way to deal with the ethical issue of subjects' and researchers' vulnerabilities in fieldwork settings, as well as a relevant focus of analytic investment.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

According to Brazilian linguist Daniel N. Silva (2020), Bolsonaro's kind of populism configures what he calls a "pragmatics of chaos," inciting the communicability of hate and fear through incendiary framing and dispersive effects. The illusion of non-mediation afforded by social media and the creation of micro-publics by algorithmic segmentation have a central role in that form of political communication, allowing "the impression of politics being decoupled from its conventional (formal) register, old bureaucratic channels, and possibly its corrupt mechanisms, and being reassembled in intimate, 'unmediated,' transparent channels" (Silva 2020, p. 531).

Humor, for example, is present in both anti- and pro-rights networks, as scorn of the adversary using irony and parody are a classic feature of political debate. However, in anti-rights content, the repurposing of digital objects, by either gross or sophisticated interventions on image layout and the decontextualization of pieces of narrative, often explores polysemy and ambiguity in a different direction. Rather than producing a shift of register seeking a strategic distancing from facts in order to expose the paradoxical nature of reality, the way humor operates; on the contrary, anti-feminist and anti-LGBT+ posts supply iconic evidence of an alternative reality, a twisted narrative that their authors claim to be truer than their adversaries', to be trusted precisely because it doesn't come from the mainstream press, but

from the receiver's closest, dearest and most familiar contacts: their leaders, family and peers.

This form of political communication creates, according to Brazilian anthropologist Leticia Cesarino, "a liminal environment where language becomes highly mimetic and performative," the ambiguity, ready-made replicability and divorce from content sources of messages conveyed by digital media supports a memetic pedagogy whereby digital populists teach their followers to speak and act like them (Cesarino 2020, p. 421). Toxic masculinity, gender-based online violence and homophobic hate speech seem to configure an adequate vehicle for that pedagogy. Digital populists mobilize hateful language to appeal to their online bases and as a provocation to political adversaries and critics, whom they construct as their enemies. Homophobic and misoginisc language alike mobilizes the semantics of male domination as inflammatory language to execrate political adversaries, including former allies and dissidents, but having followers as its main audience. To the latter, the leader's direct appeals perform an emotional bond and predicate a moral pedagogy of gendered roles, social classifications and political action.

"Not Him" | On digital feminisms and violence against women

For the earlier part of the 2010s decade, a number of mobilizations and debates took place online and on the street, including the *Marcha das Vadias* (Slut Walks) held in cities across the country (Ferreira, 2013; Gomes & Sorj, 2014) and several others (Piscitelli, 2017; Souza, 2017; Almeida, 2019a). Expressing a variety feminist views, conventions, connections and intersectionalities regarding gender-based violence, those mobilizations took place by ways of engagement that, like the Slut Walks, as Brazilian social scientist Carolina Branco Ferreira stressed, "originated within the linkages between digital networks and the occupation of public spaces" (2015:222). But by the mid-2020s, online and offline feminist and sexual rights mobilizations were forced to take a new defensive tonality. By that time, anti-feminist backlash increased as a common moral ground for the alliance of the most conservative, anti-democratic elements of the military and police

forces, agro-business and the Christian Right that consolidated in Congress, precipitating the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 (Szwako & Sívori, 2021).

The hegemony of that alliance gave political centrality to a heterogeneous but nonetheless strong, unified 'anti-rights' reaction against the already ambivalent advances that social movements had struggled for under the umbrella of Human Rights since the democratic transition in the 1980s. As Moutinho, Buarque & Simões interpreted, by 2016, "gender, sexuality and race [became] central aspects of a discourse that arose not about difference or respect, but about inequality and exclusion" (2020:3). This shift was produced not without a significant, and rising, amount of violence against women and minorities, as the authors go on to argue, as a form of control and domination.

While leaders agitate fears, there also has been a surge of misogynistic, homo/lesbo/transphobic, and racist violence both on- and off-line. The assassination of Rio de Janeiro Socialist Councilwoman Marielle Franco, a black bisexual woman and Human Rights defender, and of her driver Anderson Gomes on 14 March 2018, whose case still unresolved, marked a turning point and revealed the role of gender, sexuality, race and class in the targeting of a victim of political violence.[5] In the aftermath of her assassination, while massive streets protests, in mourning, demanded a thorough investigation of her death, offensive memes and factoids circulated on social media disputing police and press reports and attacking her reputation.

The memory of Marielle, whose assassination was allegedly attributed to militias with publicly known connections to the Bolsonaro family, was tangible in online and street mobilizations prior and during the presidential elections in October of the same year across the country and in cities in the Americas, Europe and Africa against the ultra-right-wing candidate.[6] The slogan *Ele Não* ("Not Him") condensed in the singular male "He" Bolsonaro's deadly misogyny, authoritarianism and disrespect for institutions.[7] On Twitter, the #EleNão and #EleNunca ("Not Him, Not Ever), promoted by the

---

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marielle_Franco#Final_days_and_assassination
[6] First-round general elections were held 7 October 2018 and the second round for candidates to executive office on 28 October 2018.
[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ele_N%C3%A3o_movement

Women United Against Bolsonaro movement (Neris et al., 2019) gained traction. In response, an #EleSim (HimYes) was initiated, contributing to the composition of a polarized issue space (**Figure 1**). While the #EleNão hashtag and associations highlighted the alliance of feminism and the defence of democracy on one pole, its reverse "Yes" produced a female pro-Bolsonaro voice. Twitter posts as the one in **Figure 2** and metrics of the #EleNão hashtag reveal how, in this polarized context, a whole range of feminist and otherwise pro-rights issues are embedded in symbols of resistance against Bolsonaro and the fascist turn he represents.

Figure 1. **Twitter EleNão/EleSim. User-hashtag network.** SMART Data Sprint 2020. Twitter API and Gephi. Nodes are hashtags and edges are users. Node and font size indicate hashtag frequency. The distance between nodes represents the density of hashtag content connection, revealing a marked overall polarization between an #EleNão-related cluster, blue, on the left, and an #EleSim one, purple, on the right.

Figure 2. **#Elenao iconography**. Twitter, Android app.

"Rape without intent" | Resisting the effacement of sexual violence

Trigger alert: this section discusses rape

Racist remarks, sexist provocations, male bravato, homophobia and the disclaimer of violence against women are part of Bolsonaro's and his core supporters' political language repertoire. The latter is arguably in response to Brazil's previous exemplary track record of feminist debate, legal reform and public policy on the subject.[8] Further on that same track, over the past decade, feminist mobilization gave visibility to a larger variety of forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, date rape and femicide (Almeida, 2019a). Disputes on Twitter over the correct use of the term *estupro*, rape in Portuguese, feminist, on one side, and anti-rights, on the other antagonic views about the issue of violence against women. Aside from typical victim-blaming at the case level, Bolsonaro's far-right supporters

---

[8] Milestone public policies addressing violence against women are the creation of Womens' Police Stations (Delegacias da Mulher) in the 1980s (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_police_station) and the Maria da Penha Act in 2006 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lei_Maria_da_Penha), both focused on the issue of domestic violence.

typically adopt openly anti-feminist stands. In line with his government's emphasis on the family in womens' issues, they mobilize narratives about the crisis of parental control over young women due to sexual liberalization and sex education, and an alleged crisis of family values. To them, accusations are exaggerated and the concept of gender-based violence is but a feminist baseless invention. The President himself, since his time as a Federal House Representative, made a habit of making sexist remarks when verbally attacking female opponents, to the point of going on record telling fellow House Member Maria do Rosário (former State Secretary of Womens' Affairs), in 2003, "I would never rape you because you don't deserve it" (Kaiser, 2018), implying ironically that rape is but a male prerogative and a gift women should be thankful for, that is, naturalizing violence against women as a legitimate component of the patriarchal order he defends.

In 2019, Mariana "Mari" Ferrer, a model and digital influencer who worked as hostess at a luxury beach club in a state capital in southern Brazil, denounced on Twitter and Instagram that in 2018 she had been raped at the venue. She has made her ordeal public on those platforms ever since, asking for justice. But the largest repercussion of the case started with a November 2020 report in the Brazilian edition of The Intercept, the internationally renowned investigative journalism website, covering the trial of her attacker and the rise of the hashtag #justiçapormariferrer ("Justice for Mari Ferrer") on Twitter's Trending Topics (Alves, 2020). The piece reported public outrage over the attack, on the one hand, and contempt and discredit toward the victim by the Police and the Judiciary, on the other. The article coined the expression *estrupro culposo* ("rape without intent") to account for the peculiar way the events were construed by the perpetrator's defense. Regardless of testimonies that the victim was unconscious, presumably drugged by her attackers, the main defense argument intended to extinguish responsibility on behalf of the perpetrator by claiming that he had no intention of having intercourse with the victim.

The dispute about the tipification of rape as a criminal category brought home a larger ongoing moral struggle for the definition of gender-based violence. Despite its absence of in the case file or at the hearing, "rape *without intent*" captured with precision the fallacy in a sexist common sense argument typically mobilized in order to dismiss womens' claims of sexual violence. The expression went viral and led to new, greater repercussion of

the case, which already had a presence in feminist and allied networks. The case received coverage by the news media and the hashtag #justiçapormariferrer began to show on social media.

There were nuances, however, in the ways the term was used. Some tweets expressed outrage about the case; but others, by claiming that the expression was "illegal" or that it didn't exist in law or in jurisprudence, in a subtle way questioned the topic's relevance, elliding—in disregard of the crime itself and the voice of its victim—the critique of how the case was being handled by the Brazilian criminal system. Note also the effacement of the alleged perpetrator: her attacker's name is seldom cited as the controversy focuses either on Mari raising suspicion about her part as victim, or on the abstract definition of the crime.

Most accounts that posted in solidarity and support for Mari Ferrer belong to young women who regularly post about their daily lives, movies, TV series and the reality shows they watch, the books they read, and the music they listen to. Occasionally they engage with identifiable feminist, gender and sexuality issues. Their engagement with the issue, in this case, was to denounce, in outrage, both the sexual violence Mari suffered and the way her case was handled by the Court, as a way to contest rape culture commonsense. This included direct confrontation by means of original posts, replies, commented reposts or just comments on Twitter profiles that cast doubt on Mari's claims. Prominent among the latter was the one owned by recalcitrant right-wing moral conservative commentator Rodrigo Constantino. Along with various tweets on the same tone, he posted a video from his YouTube Channel stoking controversial claims about women's questionable conduct as a justification for sexual assault.[9]

Young women also reelaborated their moral outrage in the form of irony: their posts connected to the case mimicked the derisive, often mocking tone with which their male counterparts dissmiss the issue of sexual violence against women; the "harmless jokes" and pitiful apologies typical of rape culture. Sarcastic comments in girls' tweets, invoked commonplace remarks

---

[9] An illustration of the kind of rhetoric mobilized by Constantino is the syllogistic fallacy and subtle shift of focus that he reiterated across different media, that "if somebody CHOOSES to drink and, drunk, CHOOSES to get in a car and drive, and kills somebody, it's a crime WITH INTENTION, right? So why the excuse that a woman who is drunk is not responsible? (emphasis in the original)
https://twitter.com/Rconstantino/status/1323971927707471872?s=20

like: "What was she wearing?" "How many drinks did she have?" Or "why was she alone?" As attacks against those engaged in support of Mari generalized, young women mobilized showing support both for Mari and for each other on Twitter. Conversely, among the profiles engaged against Mari Ferrer's claims, including verbal attacks against her supporters, the three most co-retweeted profiles apparently belong to women, featuring typical *Bolsonarista* conservative slogans, Brazilian flags, and power iconography. This also highlights female protagonism in anti-feminist, as well as in *Bolsonarista* mobilization (Souza, 2017).

"A country of sissies" | Toxic masculinity and the covid-19 pandemic

At a public intervention during an official function in November 10, 2020, held to mark the "reopening of tourism in Brazil" (sic), Bolsonaro reiterated a public appeal that he had been making on an everyday basis since the announcement of the covid 19 pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March of that year. As a provocation to the press and the opposition and contrary to the scientific consensus on the urgent need of social distancing measures, he once again called Brazilians not to stay home and go to work, despite the overload of hospital facilities and the risk of death for the most vulnerable:

> Now everything is about the pandemic! This has to stop! I'm sorry for the dead. I'm sorry. But we're all gonna die someday. Here everybody is gonna die. [...] It is no use running away from this, running away from reality. [You] have to stop being *um país de maricas* [a country of sissies]. [...] We have to face this with open arms, face the fight.[10]

---

[10] See full transcript at:
https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/acompanhe-o-planalto/discursos/2020/discurso-do-presidente-da-republica-jair-bolsonaro-na-cerimonia-de-lancamento-da-retomada-do-turismo-palacio-do-planalto

In his speech, implicitly assuming an all-male audience, Bolsonaro urges Brazilians to be men, not 'sissies' [*maricas*];[11] meaning that they must be brave and face death 'with open arms' a fate that he promises to be inevitable. Manifest in Bolsonaro's recourse to the term *maricas* in his appeal is the cultural association between male homosexuality and moral weakness. In that social grammar, the symbolism of male homosexuality as a betrayal of a 'natural' condition of superiority attributed to 'real' men operates as a reminder of male domination. Adopting their leader's lexicon, Bolsonaro supporters propagated over their networks the term *maricas*, otherwise infrequent, as a celebratory icon of Bolsonaro's discourse, promoting a trend in right-wing Twitter jargon. For a few days, *maricas* was featured in tweets in support of Bolsonaro not only in reference to the pandemic, but also, for example, to his negationist stand on environmental issues. The graph on **Figure 3** shows some measure of how the term *maricas* echoed on Twitter during the period.
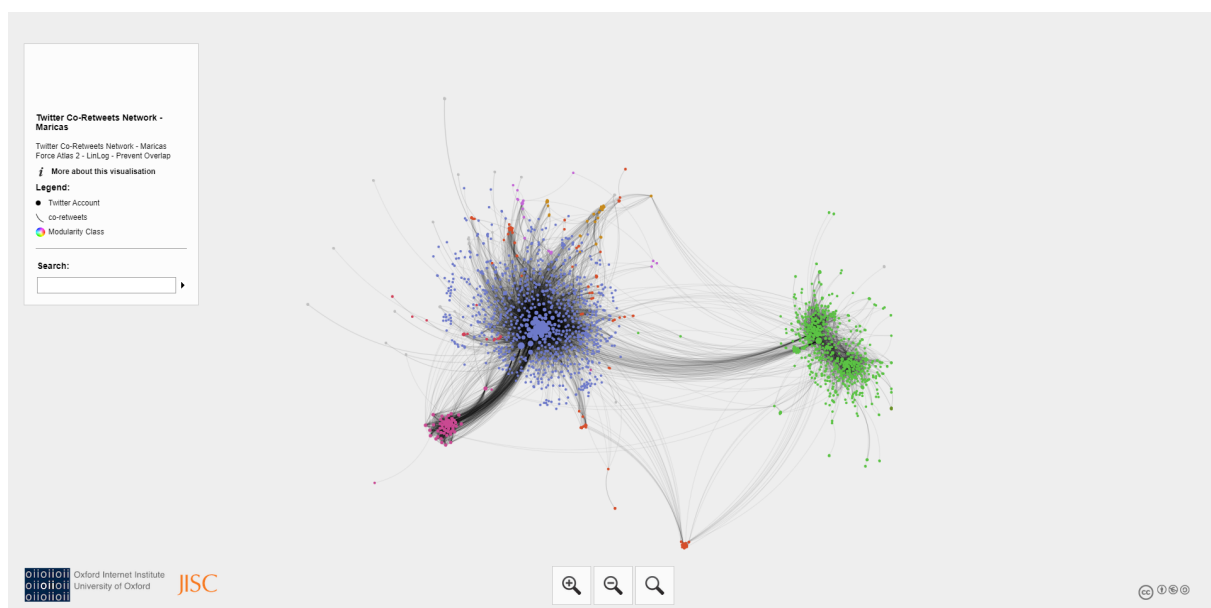

Figure 3. *Maricas.* **Co-retweet network**. (CLAM/APC 2021) Tools: Netlytics & Gephi. Colored nodes indicate co-retweeted accounts, indicating the high density of the 'listening networks' around a small number of clusters. The greater ones are prominent Bolsonarista profiles.

---

[11] Unlike in Spanish, where the noun's (whose meaning is identical to its Portugues counterpart) 's' ending indicates its plural declination, in Brazilian Portuguese, as with a few other cases, in this particular noun the s-ended form is used as both plural and singular noun and adjective.

Maricas entered the political vocabulary of the Brazilian twittersphere; its usage exclusively associated with the meaning suggested by Bolsonaro in his speech. In a slightly different vein, the term *maricas* was also adopted to make broader statements about morality and politics. It was used by self-acclaimed true *Bolsonaristas* to attack their leader's political enemies, old and new, for example, in the context of accusations of disloyalty against former allies, referring to them as cowards. Thus, in that trend, *maricas* worked always as a derogatory name to perform an injurious offence, regardless of political alignment. Those pragmatics are as relevant as the tweet's thematic content, bringing to the fore *who* posted it, *who* the post talked about and *to whom* it was addressed, enacting an always renewed classification of friends and enemies.

Conversely but to a far lesser extent, *maricas* was also used in posts contesting either Bolsonaro's negationism regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, in response to Bolsonaro's own use in his speech, or to contest his posture, often mockingly, about other issues. In those cases, the pragmatics were the same as in Bolsonaro's and his supporters' (unified) voice, mobilizing the semantics of male honor and shame in effemination. Still, some tweets questioned Bolsonaro's use of the term, embedded in broader critiques of his government's absurdities, in particular with regard to the pandemic. Nevertheless, as far as we can tell, a great majority of occurrences of *maricas*, including the latter, indicate the assimilation of the same gendered metaphor. The choice of the term did not, *per se,* generate controversy. Few, if any, questioned its homophobic and sexist connotations. That sort of contestation had to be found elsewhere, perhaps looking a little back in time.

Preceding the *país de maricas* episode, another hashtag had distinctly contested the way Bolsonaro's articulated his negationism of the covid-19 pandemic with homophobia as political language. On 7 July 2020, the day when, after showing mild symptoms, President Bolsonaro announced that he had tested positive for the new coronavirus, Folha de São Paulo, a traditional mainstream newspaper, run a brief comment piece about the president's public insistence on disregarding the sanitary protocols recommended by scientists and health officials around the world in the context of the pandemic (Bergamo, 2020). The most ostensible expression of that attitude was his refusal to wear a face mask when he met with crowds.

"That's a fag thing" (*é coisa de viado*),[12] he was quoted allegedly saying to visitors and to his own aids, apprehensive about his attitude.

The news generated a movement in response, parodying the remark attributed to the President. All kinds of people adopted the #coisadeviado ('afagthing') hashtag in posts of selfies wearing masks in defence of public health, many of them with the rainbow colours, mobilizing the symbol of gay pride as a protest against homophobia. Face masks thus became 'a fag thing' that everyone was proud to do, say or wear as a symbol of resistance. A front-end search for the *#coisadeviado* on Instagram on 14 July 2020 shed more than 500 valid results (**Figures 4 & 5**).
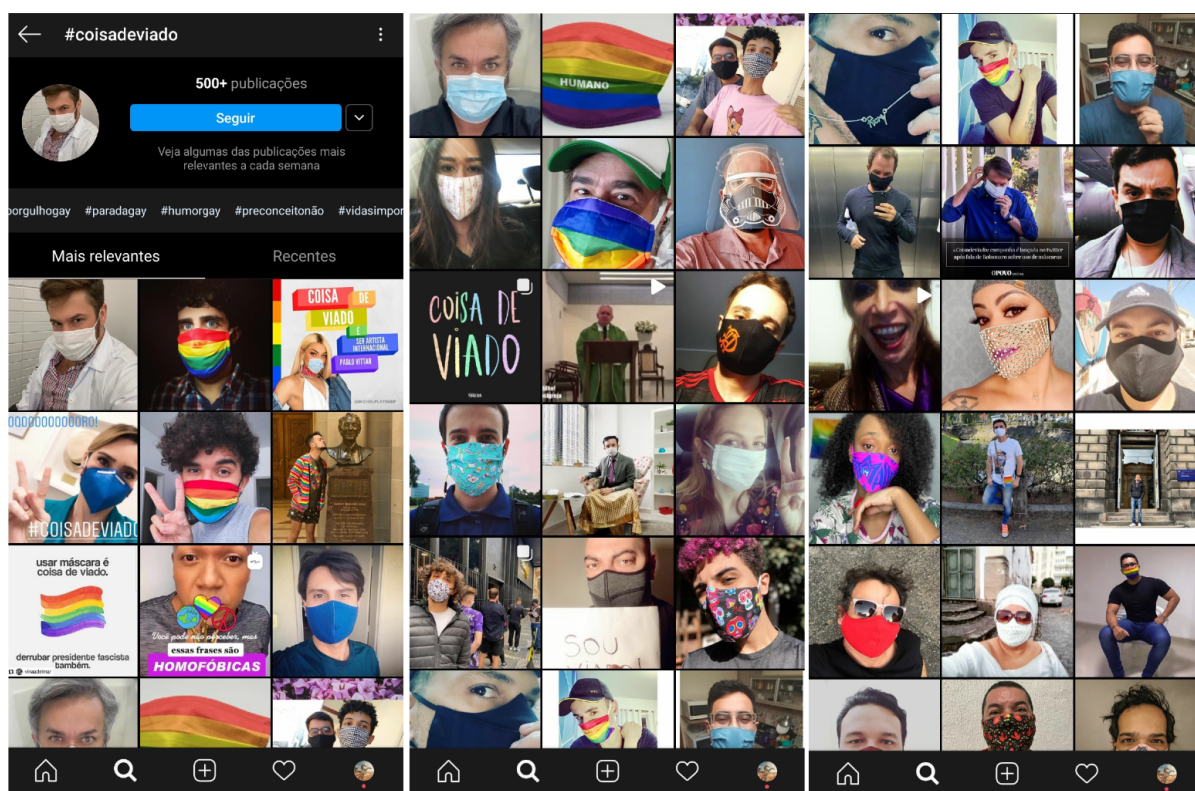

Figure 4. ***Coisa de viado****. Instagram screenshots (Android application).

---

[12] In Brazilian slang, *viado* is a derogative term for male homosexual. Its homophone *veado* refers to 'male deer,' although its spelling is also admitted for the slang term. Furthermore, in homophobic jokes and innuendo, *veado* the animal and the number 24, its equivalent in the *jogo do bicho* ('animal creature game,' an informal lottery popular across the country) are coded references. There isn't a consensus about the etymology of the term; associations are made with transviado (masc. sing. noun), misfit, aimless, and with the cartoon character Bambi, a meek, delicate deer, created in 1942 by Walt Disney.

Figure 5. ***Coisa de viado***. Instagram screenshots (Android application).

Regardless of whether he had actually uttered those exact words at one occasion or another, its truth was materialized by a network response. Although derogatory in essence, but always provocative for its iconic value, *viado* is too common a term in the Brazilian vernacular, used as vocative among peers; which makes it only situationally offensive.[13] From the standpoint of queers, feminists and their allies, health workers and citizens concerned with the lives of fellow human beings, in Bolsonaro's mouth, its utterance too evidently meant an insult. It synthesized the role of homophobia in his populist rhetoric and his active boycott of public health responses to the pandemic, in both cases as an appeal to his bases and a provocation to his political adversaries and critics. In response, the hashtag

---

[13] Another example of a non-derogatory use of terms such as *viado* is its inverted meaning as a prevalent stylistic feature of Gayspeak in many languages (and other subaltern sociolects, such as Black English), whereby the stigma is contested by means of its reappropriation as a symbol of intimacy and solidarity among those who share it. In the context of joking relations, peers may call each other 'fag' not as an insult, but signalling intense social proximity and affect. The semantic ambiguity brought by those raises the issue of local context and conventions in social media content moderation: how can the actual meaning be assessed of terms whose power to harm depends so highly on context?

echoed the newspaper column's denunciation of Bolsonaro's active denial of the covid-19 pandemic and of his homophobic remarks, by appropriating the latter with reverse meaning. The iconic expression quickly became part of the repertoire of ironies about Bolsonaro. As a reversal of the homophobic connotations in his voice, the trending topic and its associated visuality signified care, responsibility, solidarity, dare to love, and the celebration of alternative masculinities.

The *maricas* Co-Retweet network above showed the successful amplification of Bolsonaro's message among a densely connected network of followers, or else competent users of the homophobic code, without much interference by outsiders, neatly isolated from his camp. Conversely, perhaps due in part to the higher currency of the key term *viado* in Brazilian slang, Twitter and to a greater extent Instagram afforded an also successful movement of contestation, shaping and shaped by a trending topic. Instagram's privilege of visual content was particularly suited to the imagetic symbology mobilized with the #coisadeviado hashtag. This affordance allowed users to repurpose the two elements in dispute, the breathing protection mask and *viado*, as catchy visual icons with prosthetic potential, that is, as body extensions that enable the performance of identities less subject to language classifications and dissident from what is prescribed as 'natural.'

At materializing the status of sexual minorities as morally inferior, hate speech and prejudice produce forms of material and symbolic violence that reveal social inequalities and the workings of oppression. Their activation as political language in social media aims at the disassemblage and reassemblage of political identities performed by digital populism (Cesarino, 2020). But the revealing of violence as such by denunciation, contestation or irony indicates the subsistence of struggles around the meaning of gender and sexual difference, activated by other audiences.

In the field of design, the term affordance designates the scope of relational properties that make a material instrument useful for human action. Social media affordances are often attributed a determining role in relation to the content and effects of the interactions that they mediate, by means of physical devices, user interfaces and digital networks. In her feminist 'critical' approach to digital socialities, Jessalynn Keller seeks to encompass "not only the multiple qualities of social relationships facilitated through digital media

but also the uneven power relationships that often shape these encounters [and] the structural inequalities exploited by the design of the Internet." The varied grammars of action and forms of engagement with gender and sexuality issue networks by Bolsonarista anti-rights publics, on the one hand, and by feminists, LGBT+s and their allies on the other might be well interpreted by the concept of 'platform vernacular' that Keller adopts after Gibbs et al. as a corrective to deterministic understandings of platform affordabilities, the attention to platform vernaculars highlights that online "communication genres develop not only from the affordances of particular social media platforms but also from the mediated practices and communicative habits of users' (Keller 2019, p. 4).

In the Twitter episodes above, anti-rights discourse by Bolsonaro and his supporters, in the form of outright hate-speech, configures their preferred political language against political adversaries that they construct as enemies of Nation and Family. The detailed description of aggressions in the context of emerging controversies show how gender and sexuality are not just in the content of those controversies and the discourse they delineate, but sexual morality and the gendering of self and others operates as a primordial political grammar. In constructing cases of struggles around anti-rights discourse and hate speech in social media we sought to interrogate not only an overwhelmingly hostile environment, but also queer and feminist vernacular uses of Twitter and Instagram as ways inhabiting social media spaces, resisting that hostility and claiming those technologies, languages and spaces as their own. In the following section we address those struggles from the point of view of social media users who engage gender and sexuality issues, elicited from data collected using a more directive methodological approach: an online survey and video interviews conducted during the second half of 2020.

Engaging challenges | Violence, politics and social media

As noted, the internet has become a laboratory for conservative pedagogies and unregulated forms of violence. The hostility against feminists and LGBT+s by Bolsonaro and his entourage cannot be dissociated from the

primary role of the anti-gender and anti-sexual rights agenda of his government (Corrêa & Kalil 2020). Nor can the surge in misogynist, racist and homo-lesbo-transphobic online threats and verbal attacks against candidates to public office in the 2020 municipal elections (Azmina & InternetLab 2021) be dissociated from that hostility.

In response, engagement with gender and sexuality issue networks in social media involves the frequent denunciation of not only aggressions against individuals, but also of that generalized climate of hostility against feminist women, LGBT+s, defenders of social and minority rights and against members of subordinate or minorized social categories. That has produced a heightened widespread perception of risk associated with the engagement of gender and sexuality issues online. Online violence has evident material effects, such as having a device or online profile hacked, losing one's job or being expelled from school as the result of an attack on one's reputation, but whether or not there is physical or otherwise material harm involved, it can be said that it always produces moral damage.

Our survey about political engagement and violence on social media in Brazil gathered a sample of predominantly female, schooled (often currently enrolled in institutions of higher education), urban internet users with ample internet access, engaged online in debates on feminism, gender and sexuality. Out of 311 respondents, 126 (40.5%) had already been the target of name-calling or offensive language on the internet, 24.4% had been harassed, provoked, trolled, stalked or bullied, 22% had received threats or violent messages or comments and 12.9%, that is, 40 respondents, had been slandered, the victims of defamation or had their reputation questioned (**Figure 6**). Additionally, 30% had been intimidated by reactions to something they posted, 26.3% needed to correct false, distorted or out of context information (normally referred to as fake news), 16% had something they posted reported as offensive and 14.1% had to remove or edit content due to a threatening reaction or comment. Finally, 16.7% had sought safer online spaces to conduct their affairs and, of the 37.6% who had not been the target of aggressions themselves, almost two-thirds (23.15%) had witnessed them happen to someone else. The survey was conducted during the month of October 2020.

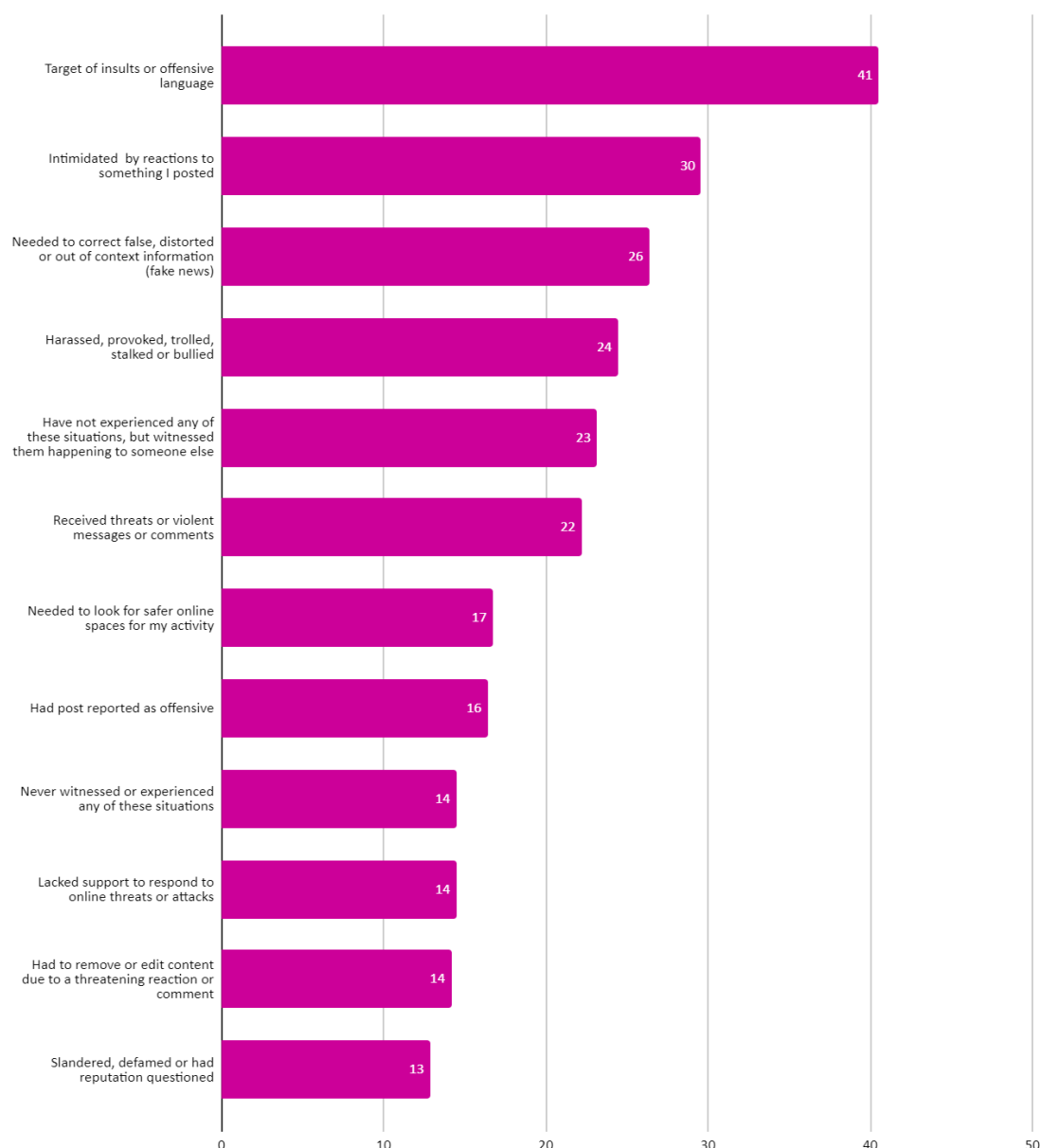**Have you ever experienced one of these situations?**

Figure 6: **Online Challenges**, unlimited multiple choice. CLAM-APC 2021 N=311.

The situations typified in the questionnaire are only differentiated for analytic purposes; they configure a continuum of experiences. They often overlap with each other or one leads to another in a sequence. This can be inferred from the selection of multiple options by a single respondent, further confirmed in brief descriptions of their "worst experience" online and in more detailed narratives collected at in-depth interviews. For example,

threats, insults and violent language often constitute a violent response to a post by anonymous haters or by acquaintances. Situations also repeat themselves and accumulate over time. That sometimes led participants to remove posts after being attacked or as a preventive measure after receiving several attacks, as narrated at interviews. Participants also mentioned their own posts being taken down by platforms after being equivocally flagged for their feminist or sex-affirmartive content.
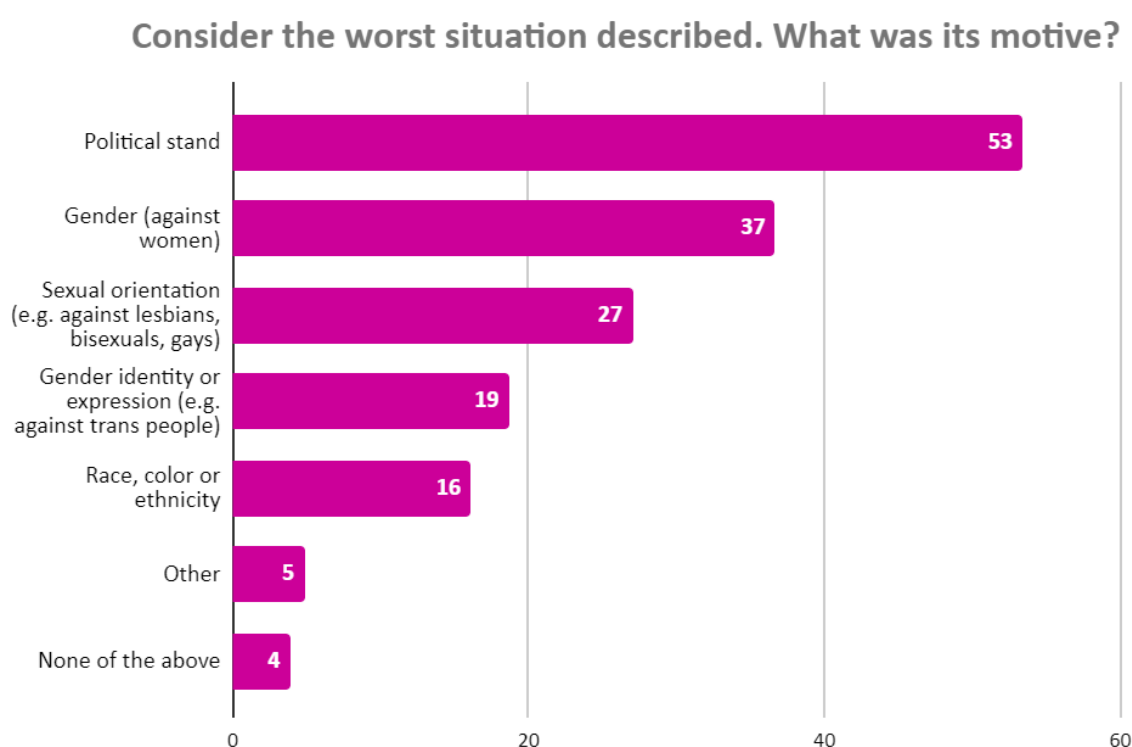
A situation mentioned by over one quarter of the sample, also addressed at in-depth interviews, which illustrates the role of anti-rights discourse in the construction of a hostile environment, was encountering deliberately falsified information. Finding fake news about scientific facts and political issues in one's own timeline, posted by acquaintances, siblings, parents or relatives in a WhatsApp group (as is often the case, according to our interviewees) is as a rule taken as something personal, that offends one's own personal convictions. However, that does not characterize such an event as an individual matter: the act of spreading a distorted version of facts out outright false information regarding activism for the rights of minorities, their causes, the knowledge about them or the reputation of their defenders constitutes a provocation and is read as a direct attack on the dignity and personal rights of one person and those of a whole group or social category at the same time.

> *I received a video in a WhatsApp group talking about feminists, calling them names and with false information about the feminist movement. I corrected the information, identifying as a feminist and stressing that I didn't do anything of what was pointed out in the video. My response sparked* [a verbal dispute in the group]*, including private messages to me, contesting my feminism.*
>
> 39 year-old white cis-hetero woman, on WhatsApp

The situations described are deemed violent in the sense that, with different degrees of intention, spontaneity, brutality or refinement, they cause damage upon someone. Furthermore, in the context of hostility this research investigates, the victims of acts that they characterize as offenses, as a rule, attribute intentionality, motive and, therefore, authorship to them. When asked about the motive behind the "the worst situation" respondents had experienced or witnessed online (**Figure 7**), most respondents (53.4%)

mentioned the victim's political stands, but an also high 36.7% were cases of gender-based violence. In 27% of the cases the motive was the victim's *gay, lesbian or bisexual orientation*, and in 19% it was their transgender identity or expression. This rate almost doubles the number of trans respondents in the sample, meaning that at least half of those cases were reported by cisgender respondents who had witnessed them. An alarming incidence regardless of the context. Note also that respondents often marked more than one, revealing the articulation of different social markers in the motive of aggressions.

Consider the worst situation described. What was its motive?

Motive	Count
Political stand	53
Gender (against women)	37
Sexual orientation (e.g. against lesbians, bisexuals, gays)	27
Gender identity or expression (e.g. against trans people)	19
Race, color or ethnicity	16
Other	5
None of the above	4

Other motives mentioned (edited and recoded): Fatphobia (in memes); Moral panic; Ideological persecution in higher education and research institutions; Religious intolerance; Censorship (political art and erotic images); Xenofobia.

Figure 7: **Worst online experience**. CLAM & APC, 2021. N=311

Aside from political ideology being the motive most mentioned, the type of hostility documented in this report can be considered political in the sense that its meanings and motivations are elaborated collectively and its effects are publicly disputed. They can hardly be construed as individual or claimed

to be private. As tragically revealed in Marielle Franco's assassination,[14] and highlighted in a report on the surge of online violence against women and LGBT candidates at the 2020 municipal elections by Azmina magazine and InternetLab (2021), gender, race and sexual orientation have recently come to play a significant role as signifiers in political violence more than ever before. Markers of social inequality articulated in hate speech and other forms of online violence are not only a matter of idiosyncratic cultural prejudice; but strategically mobilized in order to silence the voices of women, people of color and sexual minorities, who are attacked not only because of what they think, but also for what they are (Ibid.).

Political ideology was, as noted, the prevalent motive attributed to aggressions and violent behavior on social media by a majority of survey respondents and interviewees. Also observed in our direct observation, those attacks were configured by what we may call a reactive dynamic: participants reported frequent aggressions that took place *in response to* something they posted or to an online event that bothered haters in their conservative convictions or their patriarchal pride. Some survey participants and interviewees refrained from posting or commenting on, or else abandoned social media networks as measures to avoid the emotional burden of dealing with the nuisance of endless, pointless discussions or, worse, violent outbursts in reaction to posts that conservatives and haters found offensive.

Affordances and vernaculars | The materiality of social media

The platformization of digital media has enhanced the role of algorithmic design as a reproducer of inequities, to which artificial intelligence tends to be faithful. The dizzying effectiveness of digital architecture to commodify information, maximizing connectivity for this exclusive purpose, constitutes yet another challenge to the agency of women, minorities, youths, the elderly, the poor and the working classes, subject to various forms of tutelage, destitution and violence. It seems critical, in this sense, to adopt a non-deterministic approach to social media, to the connections and types of

---

[14] See section On digital feminisms and violence against women, above.

interaction they encourage or impede. Jessalynn Keller's proposal for "critical digital socialities" (2019) seems adequate to account for the current "incorporated, embodied and everyday" character of the internet highlighted by Christine Hine (2020). Thus Hine pays attention to the constitutive role that the internet has played in different layers and arenas of social life. Keller adds 'critical' to the conceptualization of digital socialities in the sense of recognizing "not only the multiple qualities of social relations facilitated by digital media, but also the unequal power relations that often shape these encounters" (2019:2).
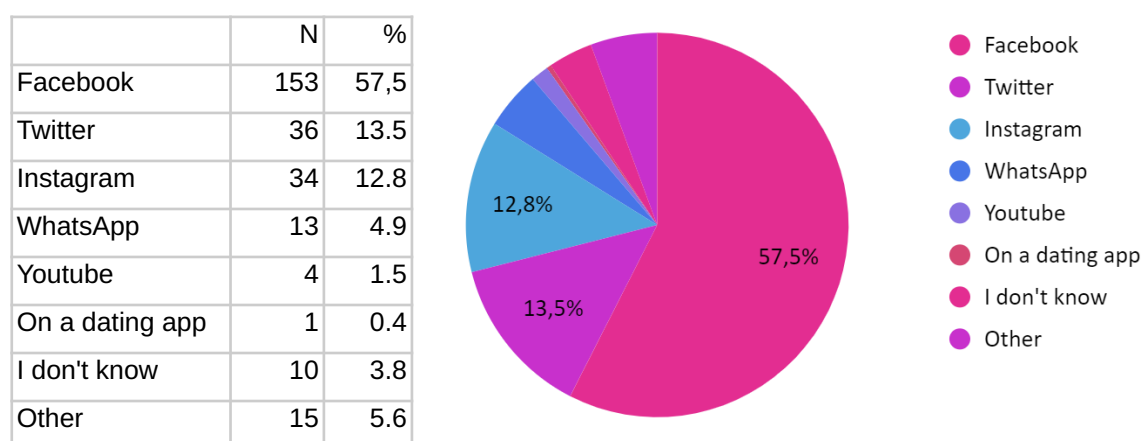
The early imaginative creation of alternative digital worlds facilitated by the Web 0.2 highlighted the meaning of the digital medium as an *environment*, on the one hand, represented as a space with a landscape of different qualities and tonalities. This landscape may or may not resemble offline landscapes, or involve the latter in different ways. It can look human-made or mimic the surfaces and extensions associated with nature. If landscape as metaphor serves to capture the textures of the web as both a concrete and an imaginary space, other notions of spatiality must complement it to interpret how the inhabitants of this imagined space perceive other actors to whom they are connected. The avatars we find in these realms may or may not represent offline flesh-and-blood human beings; our interviewees often reminded us of this when they referred to bots and connections managed by algorithms. Also important from the perspective of experiences of violence reported by research participants is that those with whom we interact on digital networks can be more or less intimate or distant, familiar or strange. A typology of social bonds and degrees of social distance is key to understanding experiences and trajectories in relation to the hostility reported in this research.

The development of portable devices, on the other hand, highlights the meaning of medium of communication as an instrument, whose uses and meanings are varied, co-constructed between its materiality and its use, both in terms of design and material composition, as well as of the changes that have occurred as a result of use and of its own functioning over time. The latter, as well as the result of different human uses, are essentially indeterminate, but in the case of the web 2.0 platforms, they started to be managed more and more intensely by so-called artificial intelligence. Human agency, in this context, can be contemplated as both individual and

collective. In the perspective that we defend as a feminist, we privilege the second, as the dimension where the meanings of actions can be conceived as political, that is, as a site for questioning relations of domination.[15]

The survey question regarding "where" their worst online situation took place (**Figure 8**), in this case meaning *on what social media platform*, also present in the narratives collected in in-depth interviews, is an appropriate entry point to address the materiality of social media, in the dual sense of the term.

Worst situation described. Where did it take place?

|	N	%
Facebook	153	57.5
Twitter	36	13.5
Instagram	34	12.8
WhatsApp	13	4.9
Youtube	4	1.5
On a dating app	1	0.4
I don't know	10	3.8
Other	15	5.6

Other options mentioned (open-ended): Online games, Google Meet, Orkut, Zoom, Blogs, Tandem.

Figure 8: **Social media challenges**. CLAM & APC, 2021. N=282.

Answers are varied, but paradoxical if compared to the frequency of use of different social media platforms in the sample (**Figure 9**). That frequency went down a sliding scale starting with WhatsApp at 95.7%, followed by Instagram at 79.4%, YouTube at 71.5%, Facebook at 65.5% and Twitter at 44.5%. Inversely, most unpleasant events took place on Facebook (57.5%), distantly followed by Twitter and Instagram, both slightly above 10%, with WhatsApp at a surprisingly low 5% and YouTube and others at even lower levels.

---

[15] In this definition, feminism covers a wide range of identities allied by their distinct subordinate places in society, marked by gender, but also articulated to race, class, sexual orientation, body size, ability and gender identity (cis, trans or non-binary).
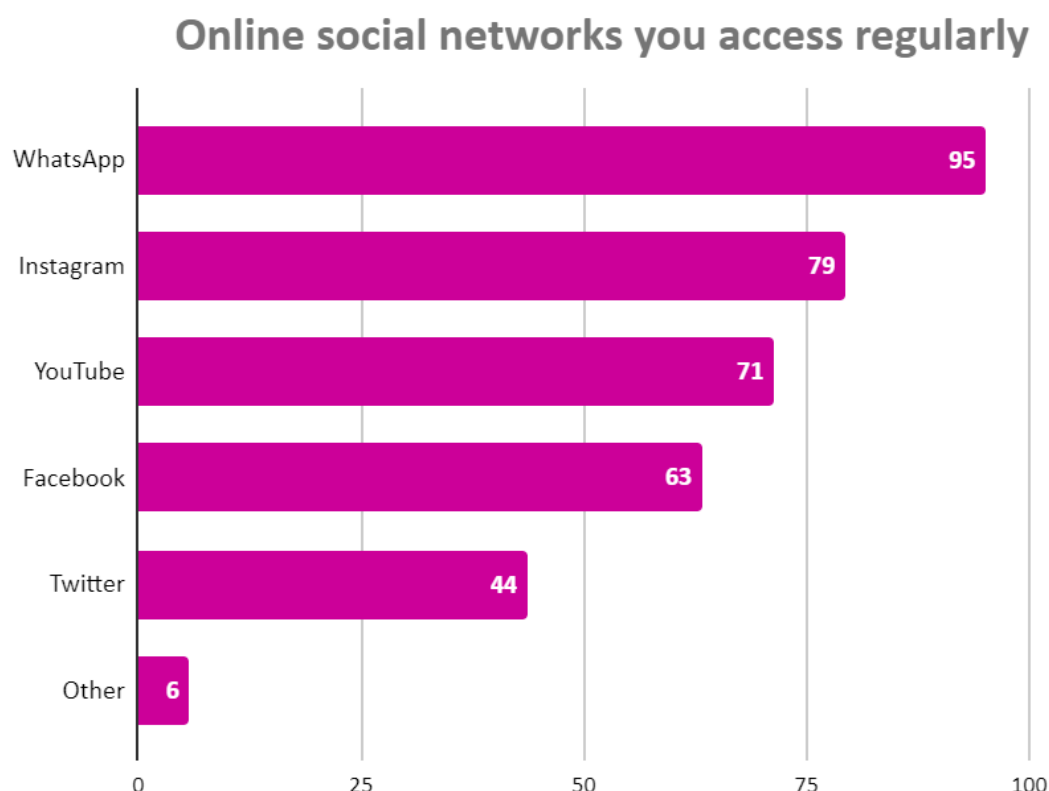
Online social networks you access regularly

Other options mentioned (open-ended): Linkedin;Tik Tok; Medium; Reddit; Pinterest Tumblr; Mastodon; Discord; Twitch; Letterboxd; Strava; Articles.

Figure 9: **Social media regularly accessed**. CLAM & APC, 2021. N=311.

Participants of in-depth interviews provided clues about Facebook's lead as a violent environment and means of communication: they mentioned the platform's relative longevity, predated by Orkut.[16] However, by the time Orkut was discontinued in 2014, there had already been a large migration to Facebook. In the second half of the 2000s decade, Facebook and Twitter rose as the social media of choice among several interviewees, as the type of content they consumed expanded and matured. The platform's ever increasing popularity facilitated the exploration of affinities among a vast universe of fellow users and groups. But it also brought together distant relatives and close ones of different generations, present and former colleagues and acquaintances, etc., that is, not bound by ideological affinity. This heterogeneity, together with the prevalence of written content, made it

---

[16] Orkut had a significant impact on Brazilian publics. In 2008 it became fully managed and operated locally. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orkut

a medium propitious to debate, as one interviewee recalls about feminist groups on Facebook:

> *It was around 2012 that I remember feminism on the internet started to boom. Everyone became feminist. It was an issue everybody talked about. And there were rows, especially on Facebook. At that time there was a lot of arguing between* [different] *feminist currents. Those arguments made me leave all the groups. Now I am not a member of any group. It's a headache. Then it was after 2012 that I realized that everybody was talking too much on the internet, everybody was too sure* [of what they were saying]*. So I started to cut down on it, especially on Facebook. Then I started to use Instagram, but to look at pictures, pretty pictures, as a way to unwind.*
>
> 32 year-old white female from a suburb of a Southern state capital

But in the second half of the 2010s decade, as right wing populist anti-politics took grip in Brazil and public opinion became more and more polarized, the tone of arguments raised. Most interviewees recalled heated arguments with strangers and acquaintances alike on Facebook. Its integrated instant messaging tool also contributed to the hostile climate in the medium. Violent private messages, as interactions where the victim finds herself alone with the aggressor, became a more frightening form of intimidation. Facebook's design affordabilities and the ways they were appropriated under a group logic involving heterogeneous social circles exposes users, especially women and minorities to such inbriddled aggressive behavior.

Interviewees also described conflicts in WhatsApp groups. This medium's capacity to disseminate false or otherwise offensive contents among close acquaintances is notorious. Reacting to those contents involved "taking things personally," which our engaged interlocutors did. Among strangers and known persons alike on Facebook, among close circles on WhatsApp groups, but in both cases involving an ideologically heterogeneous captive audience, their group-as-forum logic propitiates that kind of escalade. Conversely, the focus on the individual voice on Twitter and on the self image on Instagram alleviate those tensions. In the survey's open-ended

descriptions, YouTube videos were also mentioned as a source of hate messages and disinformation.

To one of our female interviews, in her thirties, "Instagram is the social network for happiness, and Twitter for depression; however, Twitter is better suited for debating issues." Such reflections about the suitability of social media for different purposes were a recurring feature in almost all interviews. In a study of British and American teenage girls about their use of social media platforms to develop their own kind of feminist activism, Keller highlights how girls "carefully weighed issues of privacy, community and peer support as determining factors in their engagement with either platform" (2019:2). Keller further notes that those decisions have to do with "each platform's distinctive vernacular language, of which the girls have a fine understanding." According to the author, these forms of communication "are developed not only from the affordances of each social media platform, but also from the mediated practices and communication habits of users". In addition to capturing what is specific about each social media and different forms of engagement with what happens in them, the notion of vernacular adopted by Keller allows "attention to the registers of meaning and affection produced in the social networks of these platforms" (2019: 4-5). It is in those registers, in that mediation, that online violence acquires political meaning.

In episodes and events involving strangers, although to some extent random and impersonal, violence was always aimed at deeply felt social identities and convictions, affecting individuals in their personal dignity. Conversely, when it took place among family members, co-workers or within church, neighborhood or school community networks, although it affected intimate, private relationships, it mobilized issues, identities and convictions that are public. In that sense, the violence produced can be considered political in both cases. It brings a message not to an individual, but to a whole category of people, about the will to destroy them or the power to make them stay in their subordinate place.

We asked how survey participants responded, if at all, to the worst incident that they described (**Figure 10**). Over one third of the sample (37.3%) found a solution by means of tools from the same platform. The fact that this was the most prevalent response should be handled with caution, since none of the rest of the multiple-choice options indicates positively that a solution was

actually found. Regardless of the variety of possible responses (technological, legal, solidary, etc.), a majority of online challenges and conflicts went, to a great extent unresolved or, at the most, remedial measures were taken. Thus the sense of frustration and the inevitability often attributed to online negative experiences by research participants. And the naturalization of fellow users' uncivil behavior, lowering the bar about what is admissible, compared to what they have seen happen to friends, acquaintances and public figures with whom they sympathize. Many descriptions of the worst situations faced open by stating that what is going to be told "was not serious," compared to what goes on today in social media.
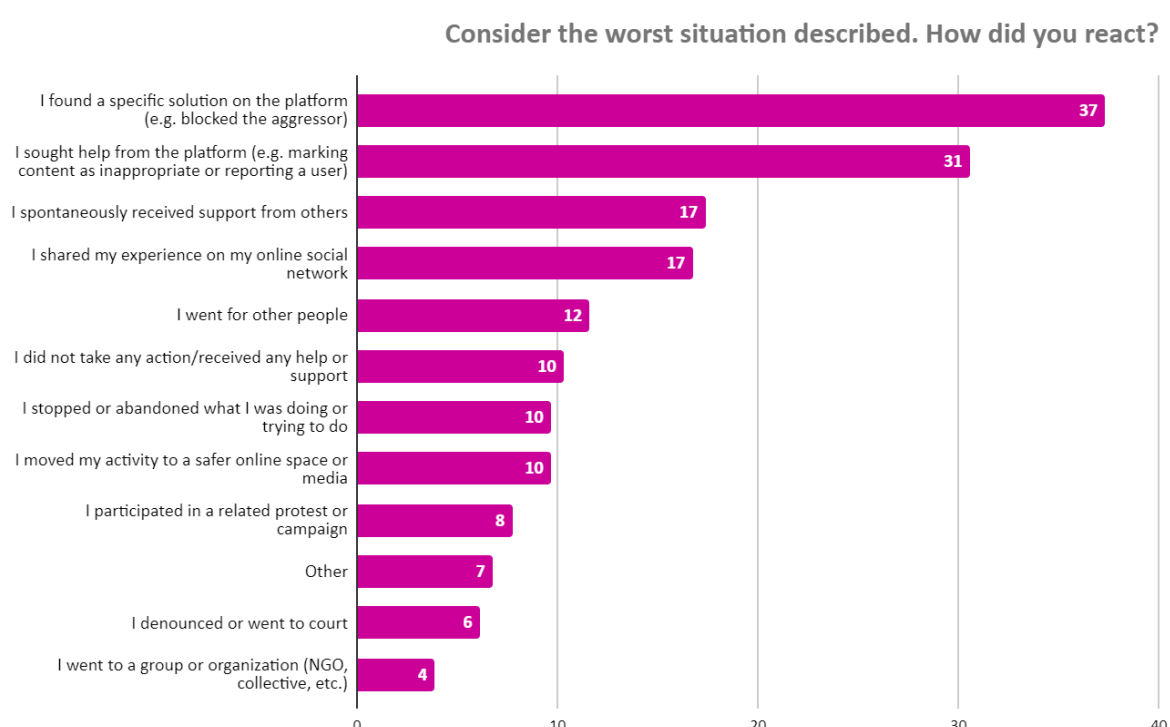
Other relevant responses: I said I would sue, sought help from a lawyer, threatened to report; I responded directly to the author using the same medium; I gave support to someone who had gone through the experience; I ignored the person and their comments; I deleted information.

Figure 10: **Responses to challenges**, unlimited multiple choice. CLAM-APC 2021 N=311.

In conclusion

Approaching a context coextensive with the one we address in this report, Brazilian anthropologists Laura Moutinho, Heloisa Buarque de Almeida and Júlio Assis Simões (2020) note that "statements of suffering allow perceiving that which had been experienced only as individual suffering is a collective experience and is revealed to be a question of social inequality" (Ibid. p.18). In discussing the distinct, competing *grammars of damage* enacted by "both those who feel affected by or vulnerable to escalating discourses and practices of sexist, racist, homophobic and class violence, and others who have in some way adhered to conservative and exclusionary discourse" (p.4), they observe the "diffusion of a sense of distress and annihilation at a time when the state itself has assumed a discourse of hate against women, blacks, the indigenous, LGBTs, and more recently towards the environment" (p.18).

Right-wing anti-gender hostility on Brazilian social media has provoked on the interlocutors of this research a collective feeling of outrage, of indignation for offenses committed against them and their peers. Interviewees interpret that the aggressions that they experience are made possible by the usurpation of spaces and rights in strict correspondence with what happens in the state's institutional sphere under the present government. That is understood as an expression and effect of systemic injustices, of rights being violated.

They perceive that their vulnerability as women, as queer, as black has increased. They have seen the formation of hostile, violent environments, facilitated by platforms that only seek their own profit and are not concerned with promoting peaceful coexistence among users. And with that they have seen the potential for progressive communication and sociability, for the pursuit of knowledge, peace and for the free expression of identities and ideas largely been suffocated. It is evident to all that this is not the result of restrictive policies or legal frameworks but, on the contrary, of lack of control over the criminal conduct groups and individuals who enjoy the sympathy of those in power under current circumstances.

But the focus on hate speech reminds us of the ambivalent power of language to both subjugate the subjects it names and propitiate their political action. This research also interrogates the possibilities for agency

open by the misappropriation of injurious language (Butler 1997:41). Narratives of suffering and understandings of trauma as signs of structural vulnerability also indicate a collective engagement with a struggle. The search for online well-being is both an intimate and public pursuit, negotiated in close-knit networks that are seldom anonymous. Collective responses to violent acts whose meanings are materially and symbolically shared in and by digital networks represent both challenges and opportunities for feminist networks of resistance and care.

References

Agre, P, Surveillance and capture: Two models of privacy, in: *The Information Society - An International Journal*, 10 (2) (1994), pp. 101-127.

Almeida, Heloisa B, 'From Shame to Visibility: Hashtag Feminism and Sexual Violence in Brazil,' *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad - Revista Latinoamericana*, 33 (2019a), pp.19-4, http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1984-6487.sess.2019.33.02.a.

Almeida, Ronaldo de, 'Bolsonaro Presidente: Conservadorismo, evangelismo e a crise brasileira,' *Novos estudos CEBRAP*, 38(1), Epub May 06 (2019b), pp. 185-213, https://dx.doi.org/10.25091/s01013300201900010010.

Alves, Schirlei, 'Julgamento de influencer Mariana Ferrer termina com tese inédita de 'estupro culposo' e advogado humilhando jovem,' *The Intercept Brasil*, November 03 (2020), https://theintercept.com/2020/11/03/influencer-mariana-ferrer-estupro-culposo/.

Appadurai, Arjun, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy,' *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (1990), pp. 295–310, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F026327690007002017.

Awan, Imran & Irene Zempi, '"I Will Blow Your Face OFF"—VIRTUAL and Physical World Anti-muslim Hate Crime,' *The British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 57, Issue 2, March (2017), pp. 362–3801, https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azv122.

Azmina magazine & InternetLab, *Monitora: Report on online political violence on the pages and profiles of candidates in the 2020 municipal elections*, São Paulo: InternetLab, 2021, https://www.internetlab.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/5P_Relatorio_MonitorA-ENG.pdf.

Bailey, Moya Z, 'All the Digital Humanists Are White, All the Nerds Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave,' *Journal of Digital Humanities* (2011).

Bastian M., S Heymann & M Jacomy, 'Gephi: an open source software for exploring and manipulating networks,' *International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* (2009).

Bergamo, Mônica, 'Máscara é "coisa de viado," dizia Bolsonaro na frente de visitas,' *Folha de São Paulo*, 7 July (2020), https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/monicabergamo/2020/07/mascara-e-coisa-de-v-dizia-bolsonaro-na-frente-de-visitas.shtml.

Blakemore, Brian, *Policing Cyber Hate, Cyber Threats and Cyber Terrorism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2016.

Bucher, Taina & Anne Helmond, 'The Affordances of Social Media Platforms,' in: Jean Burgess, Thomas Poell, Alice Marwick (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018.

Butler, Judith, *Excitable speech: a politics of the performative.* New York: Routledge, 1997.

Cesarino, Letícia, 'When Brazil's Voters Became Followers,' *Anthropology News*, Sep. 14 (2020), https://doi.org/10.14506/AN.1497.

Corrêa, Sonia, & Isabela Kalil, 'The case of Brazil,' in: *Anti-Gender politics in Latin America. Country Case Studies Summaries,* ed. Sonia Corrêa, Rio de Janeiro: ABIA, 2020, pp. 47-65, http://sxpolitics.org/GPAL/uploads/E-book-Resumos-completo.pdf.

Chun, W. H. K, 'Big Data as Drama,' ELH 83, no. 2 (2016), pp. 363-382, https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2016.0011.

Davies, William, 'What's wrong with WhatsApp,' *The Guardian*, 2 Jul 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jul/02/whatsapp-groups-conspiracy-theories-disinformation-democracy.

Dieter, Michael, Carolin Gerlitz, Anne Helmond, Nathaniel Tkacz, Fernando N. van der Vlist, Esther Weltevrede, 'Multi-Situated App Studies: Methods and Propositions,' *Social Media + Society*, April-June (2019), pp. 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119846486.

Ganesh, Bharath, 'The ungovernability of digital hate culture,' *Journal of International Affairs*, Dec 19 (2018), https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/ungovernability-digital-hate-culture

Geertz, Clifford, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,' in: *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

Gomes, Carla & Bila Sorj, 'Corpo, geração e identidade: a Marcha das vadias no Brasil,' *Revista Sociedade e Estado,* (29)2 (2014), pp. 433-477.

Ferreira, Carolina Branco de Castro, 'Feminisms on the web: lines and forms of action in contemporary feminist debate,' *Cadernos Pagu* [online] 44 (2015), pp.199-228.

Ferreira, Gleidiane de S, 'Feminismo e redes sociais na Marcha das Vadias no

Brasil,' *Revista Ártemis*, vol. XV, nº 1 (2013), pp.33-43.

Haraway, Donna, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,' *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, (1988), pp. 575-599.

Hine, Christine, 'The E3 Internet: Embedded, Embodied, Everyday Internet,' in: *Ethnography for the Internet*, London: Routledge, 2015.

IBGE, *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua Anual, 2018*. Available at https://sidra.ibge.gov.br/

Latour, Bruno, Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

Kaiser, Anna Jean, 'Woman who Bolsonaro insulted: "Our president-elect encourages rape",' *The Guardian*, 23 December (2018), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/23/maria-do-rosario-jair-bolsonaro-brazil-rape

Keller, Jessalynn, '"Oh, She's a Tumblr Feminist": Exploring the Platform Vernacular of Girls' Social Media Feminisms,' *Social Media + Society*, July-September (2019), pp. 1-11, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2056305119867442.

Leurs, K, 'Feminist data studies. Using digital methods for ethical, reflexive and situated socio-cultural research,' *Feminist Review - Methods themed issue*, 115(1) (2017), pp. 130-154, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41305-017-0043-1.

Lyon, D, *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, risk, and digital discrimination*, London: Routledge, 2003.

Machado, Caio C V, 'WhatsApp's Influence in the Brazilian Election and How It Helped Jair Bolsonaro Win,' *Council on Foreign Relations 100*, Nov. 13 (2018), https://www.cfr.org/blog/whatsapps-influence-brazilian-election-and-how-it-helped-jair-bolsonaro-win.

Machado, Lia Zanotta, 'From the Time of Rights to the Time of Intolerance. The Neoconservative Movement and the Impact of the Bolsonaro Government,' *Vibrant: Virtual Brazilian Anthropology - Dossier Anthropology in times of intolerance: challenges facing neoconservatism,* Vol. 17 (2020), e17458, http://doi.org/10.1590/1809-43412020v17d458.

Mahmood, Saba, 'Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,' *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 16, No. 2, May (2001), pp. 202-236.

Messias, Johnnatan, Pantelis Vikatos, Fabrício Benevenuto, 'White, Man, and Highly Followed: Gender and Race Inequalities in Twitter,' *Proceedings of the IEEE/WIC/ACM International Conference on Web Intelligence (WI'17). Leipzig, Germany*, August (2017), https://people.mpi-sws.org/~johnme/pdf/messias_wi17_inequality.pdf.

Moutinho, Laura, Heloisa Buarque de Almeida & Júlio Assis Simões, 'Grammars of Damage and Suffering in Brazil Today,' *Vibrant: Virtual Brazilian Anthropology*, v.17 (2020), e17453, http://doi.org/10.1590/1809-43412020v17d453.

Nakamura, Lisa, 'Cybertyping and the Work of Race in the Age of Digital Reproduction,' in: Wendy Hui Kyong Chun & Thomas Keenan (eds), *New Media, Old Media*, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 321-338.

Neris, Natália (coordinator); Mariana Valente, Francisco Brito Cruz, Thiago Oliva (colaboration), *Outras Vozes: Gênero, Raça, Classe e Sexualidade nas Eleições de 2018,* São Paulo: InternetLab, 2019,

https://www.internetlab.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/OutrasVozes_2018.pdf.

Omena, Jana J, Elaine T Rabello, A .Mintz, S. Ozkula, G. Sued, E. Elbeyi, A. Cicali, 'Visualising hashtag engagement: imagery of political polarization on Instagram,' *Digital Methods Initiative Summer School Wiki* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2017).

Piscitelli, Adriana, '"#queroviajarsozinhasemmedo": novos registros das articulações entre gênero, sexualidade e violência no Brasil,' *Cadernos Pagu* [online], n.50 (2017), Epub 175008.

Rogers, Richard, 'Otherwise Engaged: Social Media from Vanity Metrics to Critical Analytics', *International Journal of Communication*, 12 (2018), pp. 450-472.

Rogers, Richard, *Doing Digital Methods*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019.

Shephard, Nicole, *Big Data and Sexual Surveillance*, APC Issue Papers, 2016, https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/BigDataSexualSurveillance_0.pdf.

Silva, Daniel N, 'The pragmatics of chaos: parsing Bolsonaro's undemocratic language,' *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, (59)1, Epub May 22 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1590/01031813685291420200409.

Sívori, Horacio F & Bruno Zilli, 'Sexuality and the internet: 2017 survey findings', in: Mariana Palumbo & Delfina Schenone Sienra (eds), *EROTICS Global Survey 2017 - Sexuality, rights and internet regulations*, v. 1, p. 6-8, 2017. https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/erotics-global-survey-2017-sexuality-rights-and-internet-regulations

Sívori, Horacio, et al, 'Anti-Feminist and Anti-LGBT Discourse Networks in Brazil: qualifying social media engagement around the 2018 presidential election,' *SMART Data Sprint 2020 - Digital Methods: theory-practice-critique Project Report* (2020), https://smart.inovamedialab.org/2020-digital-methods.

Souza, Maria Erica Santana de, *Formas de militância feminista em cenário de auto-organização e ciberativismo no Brasil contemporâneo: tendências atuais a partir do caso de Aracau, SE*. PhD Thesis in Sociology, Federal University of Sergipe, 2017.

Szwako, José & Horacio Sívori, 'Performing family in Fernando Lugo's and Dilma Rousseff's impeachment processes,' *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Paraguay 2012 and Brazil 2016, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2021.1946415

PART 2

Research procedures and descriptive results

On Twitter

Ele Não dataset

Tools and instruments

A dataset of 22,631,123 tweets and 453,178 user accounts assigned to a Brazil location corresponding to a six-week time frame around the 2018 general elections (29 September to 5 November) was assembled at the 2020 iNOVA Media Lab #SMARTDataSprint (Sívori et al. 2020).[17] User accounts inferred to be from other regions by information provided in free text were also removed. The top ten hashtags by day were ranked by number of users and of tweets. The ones classified qualitatively as related to national politics were then filtered by frequency (N>200). 95 "political" hashtags were selected out of 2,366 and sorted in relation to gender, sexuality and feminis politics as either 'pro-rights,' 'anti-rights,' or 'neutral,' based on their verbal content. They were also ranked by the reason of tweets containing those hashtags, and that of their users.

Descriptive analysis

The first circle packing grid (**Figure 11**) shows the top trending political hashtags. The bigger red circle corresponds to the pro-rights 'Ele Não' hashtag, followed by the 'neutral' hashtags 'eleições2018' (2018 elections),

---

[17] The general elections subset was selected from a larger sample of Brazilian trending topics provided by the Twitter Stream API collected by data scientist Johnnatan Messias, using an original script to capture a random 1% of all tweets and associated metadata every five minutes (Messias et al, 2017:2).

and haddad2018 (the name of the Workers Party candidate running against Bolsonaro). The fourth and sixth most used hashtags, 'mudabrasil17' (change brasil 17) and obrasilvota17 (brasil votes 17) all refer to Bolsonaro's ballot number. The fifth is a variation of Ele Não, 'Ele Nunca' (Never Him). The second circle packing grid (**Figure 12**) shows the evolution of those hashtags over the six-week period starting before the election first round and ending with the second, distinguishing between hashtags classified as pro-rights, anti-rights or neutral. Since this analysis does not contemplate contents other than hashtags, candidates names alone are classified as neutral. Note the decline of the Ele Não hashtag over the period, as the second round (Bolsonaro's triumph) approaches.
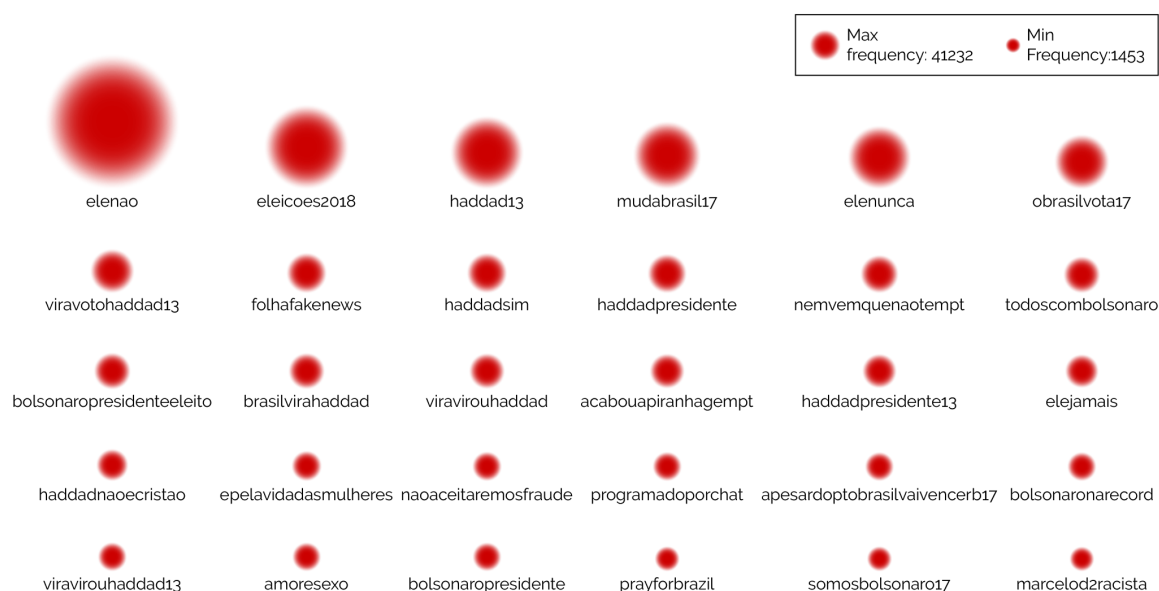

Figure 11: **Political trending hashtags during the 2018 general election period. Twitter.** CLAM & APC, 2021. Tool: RawGRaphs.

Figure 12: **Six-week flow of political tweets, 2018 elections**. CLAM & APC, 2021.
Tool: RawGraphs.

Estupro and *Maricas* datasets

Tools and instruments

We collected tweets using Netlytic, described by their developers as a "community-supported cloud-based text and social networks analyzer,"[18] and later exported them to a visualization platform for Social Network Analysis (SNA). Twitter monitoring using Netlytics started on November 12, 2020, with 83 exploratory terms, hashtag and account queries based on four types of qualitative imput: timeline suggestions at our Twitter research profile; 2020 municipal elections feminist and diversity candidates; emerging controversies on gender and sexual politics; and gender and sexuality issue-related lexicon. Two queries were finally selected for processing, based on their quantitative relevance, in order to construct "cases" for qualitative analysis. The two full datasets were compiled and curated for network and

---

[18] Furthermore, Netlytic "can automatically summarize and visualize public online conversations on social media sites." Twitter posts were collected by random sampling every 15 minutes. See https://netlytic.org

content analysis: one of tweets with ocurrences of the term *estupro* (rape) and another one the term *maricas* (sissy/ies), whose timely local relevance was discussed in the Findings section, from 12 November to 28 November 2020.

Our methodological option for network analysis was the Co-Retweet Network, that is, the network of accounts whose posts one same account retweeted. That is understood as a "listening" network generated by the effective propagation of tweets by accounts other than the one that originated the posts. All auto-retweets were removed from the sample to avoid distortions. Graphs were generated in Gephi software version 0.9.2 (Bastian, Heymann and Jacomy, 2009) using ForceAtlas2 layout. It was not necessary to make adjustments on the modularity coloring statistical calculation to define clusters among the several connected nodes to obtain a clear definition of main clusters in the two studied samples. In the representation chosen, node size is based on its centrality degree from the sample's minimum to its maximum on a scale from 1 to 10 (10 to 100 in the program's internal parameters). For the term "estupro" the "giant component," or largest set of interconnected nodes, represented 45.74% of the nodes and 98.63% of the edges; for the term "maricas" it was 67.71% of the nodes and 99.33% of the edges. Given this high representativeness among the edges, we can consider that the missing nodes are isolated or form very small clusters.

Descriptive analysis

"Maricas" co-retweet network

In the graph representing the co-retweet network found in the "maricas" dataset (**Figure 13**), four main clusters stand out: the largest, painted blue, was identified as *bolsonarista*, based on contents and profile identification. Accounts belong, for instance, to Bolsonaro's son Eduardo, very active on twitter; Olavo de Carvalho, a right-wing ideologue respected among bolsonaristas; as well as accounts not associated with public figures, nonetheless very vocal in their support of the Bolsonaro government and his figure on Twitter. The pink cluster, the smallest in the graph, is *bolsonarista*

as well. This cluster includes Bolsonaro's own account. This network did not adopt the term *maricas* as heavily, as reflected on its size, but was often mentioned or replied to in the tweet sample. One could say that those accounts did not "speak" (in this episode) as much as they were *spoken to* by the other accounts that adopted the term *maricas*. The orange cluster is also similar to the two ones just mentioned, the second smallest among the four in the network, characterized by not being exactly a cluster, as it is not as densely grouped but more pulverized in the graph. As far as we could identify, it might be a *bolsonarista* network centered in São Paulo. Finally, the green cluster connects the adoption of the term *maricas* with tweets around a post by a former Secretary of State who later became a Bolsonaro's detractor, criticizing the latter's "a country of sissies" speech. In the green cluster there are also some accounts challenging Bolsonaro's negationism, as expressed in the episode.[19]
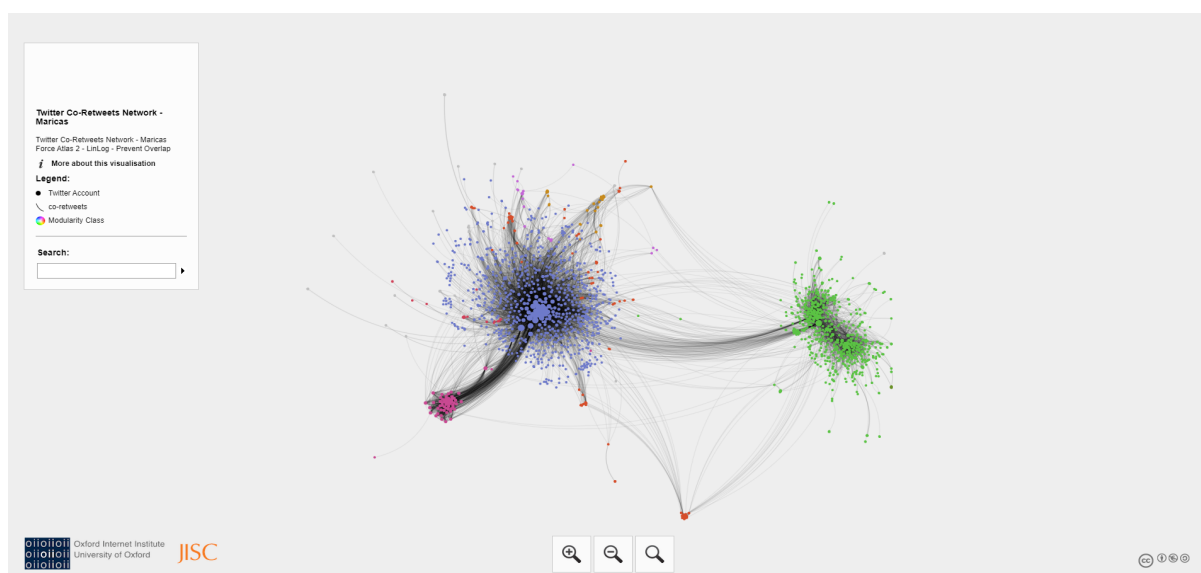

Figure 13: "Maricas" co-retweet network. CLAM & APC, 2021. Tools: Netlytic and Gephi.

"Estupro" co-retweet network

In the "estupro" dataset, most occurrences are for the expression "estupro culposo", directly linking the sample to the repercussion of Mari Ferrer's attack and its handling by the Judiciary (as described in the Findings). In the graph representing its co-retweet network (**Figure 14**) the blue cluster

---

[19] See an interactive version of the graph at:
http://www.webometria.com.br/MaricasCoRT/network/

represents a pro-rights network of accounts mainly belonging to young women with a large social media following and a prolific online presence. They mostly post about their daily lives and occasionally cover topics related to feminism, but mobilized to show support for Mari Ferrer. These accounts also retweeted in the orange and pink clusters, which show rarefied and dispersed distribution in the network. The orange is the one most scattered in the graph and connects accounts of women discussing the repercussions of the Mari Ferrer case among book fans (the "book twitter"). The smaller pink cluster includes the accounts of mainstream newspapers and journalists commenting on the case. The green cluster is the largest following the blue, being dominated by the controversy fanned by a right-wing comentator posting rape apology and victim-blaming. He was widely criticized by Mari Ferrer supporters who directly replied to or retweeted his account in their posts, as shown by the lines--the edges--connecting the blue and green clusters in the graph. The high frequency of these edges also represent the great repercussion of the criticisms he received in pro-rights networks, which provoked a polarized response among conservative networks in the green cluster.[20]
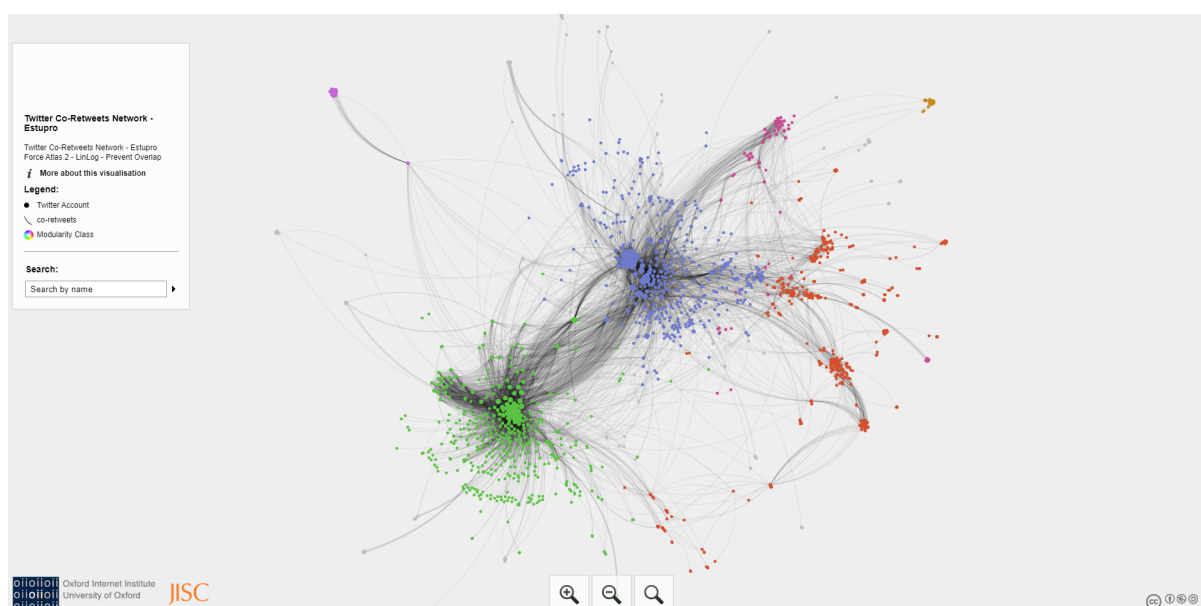

Figure 14: "Estupro" co-retweet network. CLAM & APC, 2021. Tools: Netlytic and Gephi.

---

[20] See an interactive version of the graph at:
http://www.webometria.com.br/EstuproCoRT/network/

Survey on Gender Sexuality and the Internet in Brazil

We developed an online survey aiming to provide a broad assessment of the impact of the current climate of rising political hostility towards internet users positively engaged with feminist and LGBT issues in Brazil, described in earlier sections. We obtained 311 valid responses to the questionnaire. Questions explored a variety of contemporary forms of online engagement with gender and sex politics and sought to provide insights on how markers of gender, sexuality and race might manifest in the everyday challenges that those users face in this polarized context. Among those challenges, we focused on common online incidents and situations that are socially defined as forms of online violence, to describe their characteristics and illustrate the complex ways in which social inequalities intersect them and are played out in different scenarios of online violence. Social definitions of violence and of what may be considered a crime vary historically and from one society or one place to another. The virtue of this type of survey is that its focus is not restricted to crimes or violations of rights officially regulated as such, or to a priori defined forms of violence, but inquires about relevant, precisely defined common situations that respondents would be able to characterize in greater specific detail, seeking and organic, intersectional understanding of how social inequalities are operating in their specific contexts of conflict, their outcomes, and their local interpretations.

Instrument and application

The questionnaire is based on the Erotics Global Survey (Sívori & Zilli, 2017), but extensively adapted to this projects' specific research questions and current local political and social media context, as well as to contemplate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. An earlier version of the questionnaire benefitted from feedback by the participants of a workshop held in 2019 to introduce the project to researchers, students and activists identified as prospective partners for their interest in issues of feminism, intersectionality, gender, sexuality and the internet, online engagement and online violence. A whole session of the workshop was dedicated for this collective revision. A

pilot of the final version was performed by 5 female colleagues familiar with the subject matter, who indicated several issues to be revised.

A self-administered online questionnaire developed as a LimeSurvey instrument by APC's tech support and hosted at APC servers.[21] It consisted of 22 multiple-choice and one open-ended questions and took approximately 10 minutes of volunteer time to answer. The first 14 questions address patterns of feminist and LGBT engagement in Brazilian social media and contemporary forms of online violence in that context. Besides the socio-demographic characterization of the sample, four other questions comprise a section dedicated to perceptions and opinions on internet regulation. The sample was opportunistic. The questionnaire was available for 9 weeks, between 14 September and 10 November 2020. The first question 'filtered' out volunteers who were not engaged in any way with feminism, gender or sexuality issues. Forms of engagement were broadly defined, including not only activists, academics and professionals, but also sympathizers and, for example, people who "follow" any of the issues listed in their social media timeline. The questionnaire only opened after agreeing to the detailed terms of an informed consent form. A link to that first screen of the instrument was embedded in a webpage within the "research" section of CLAM's .org.br domain, describing the research project. Posts calling for volunteers to take the survey were designed specifically for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and email.

Descriptive analysis

Sample

We obtained 311 valid responses, about 90% from **metropolitan areas**, including over 60% from **Greater Rio de Janeiro**. The minimum age to respond was **18** and almost 40% of the sample was **below 30 years of age**. About one-fifth was **between 30 and 39**, and the remaining fifth **40 and over**. The sample was mostly **female**. Over two-fifths identified as

---

[21] We thank APC Tech Coordinator Roxana Bassi and FIRN facilitator Mariana Fossatti for their partnership.

cis-hetero and one-fifth as **cis-lesbian or bisexual women**. Another fifth was **cis-gay or bisexual male** and those who identified as **trans or other genders** were just below 10%. Just the remaining 7.5 % identified as **cis-hetero male**.
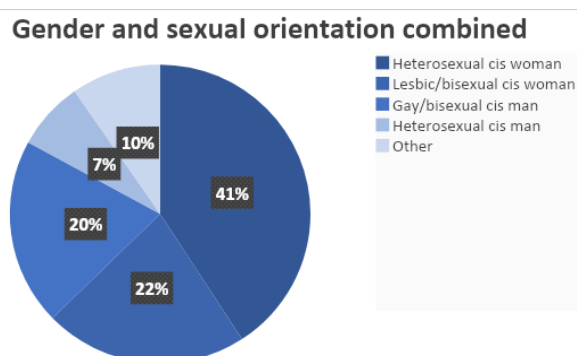
Age group (years)	N	%
Less than 20	12	3.9
20-29	110	35.4
30-39	90	28.9
40 or more	97	31.2
No answer	2	0.6
Total	311	100.0

CLAM & APC 2021.
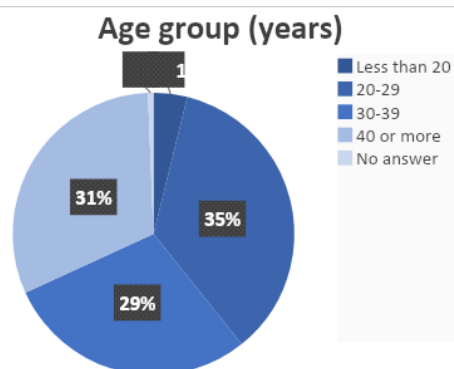
| Gender and sexual orientation combined	N	%
Heterosexual cis woman	127	40.8
Lesbian/bisexual cis woman	68	21.9
Gay/bisexual cis man	63	20.3
Heterosexual cis man	23	7.4
Other	30	9.7
Total	311	100.0

CLAM & APC 2021.

In terms of self-declaration of race/color, we followed the standard categories adopted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the national census authority: *branca* ("white"); *preta* ("black"); *parda* ("mixed"); *amarela* ("yellow," of Asian descent); and *indígena* ("indigenous", originary). In our sample of 311 respondents, the largest number (63%) identified as ***branca***; about one fifth of the sample (20.9%) as ***parda***; 12% as ***preta***; and 3 individuals (1%) identified as ***amarela***. As a reference, the IBGE's National Household Survey 2018 estimate was that 46.5% of the Brazilian population identified as *parda*; 43.1% *branca*; 9.3% as *negra*; 0.7% as *amarela*; and 0.4% as *indígena* (IBGE 2018). Aside from that characterization, our sample was highly educated and probably quite "academic," with over one half of all respondents (51.1%) having reached the **postgraduate** level, and

the great majority of the other half (44.4%) the **tertiary or university** level. A remaining 3.9% (12 individuals) had reached **high school** and one respondent **elementary school** only (0.3%).

Race/skin color	N	%
White	198	63.7
Parda	65	20.9
Black	38	12.2
Asian	3	1.0
No answer	7	2.3
Total	311	100.0
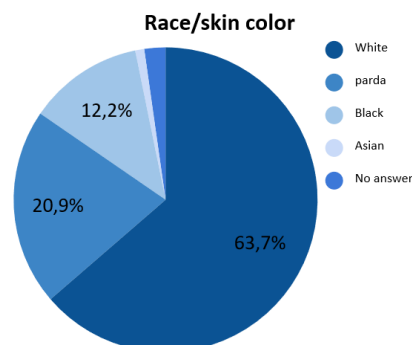
CLAM & APC 2021. N=304

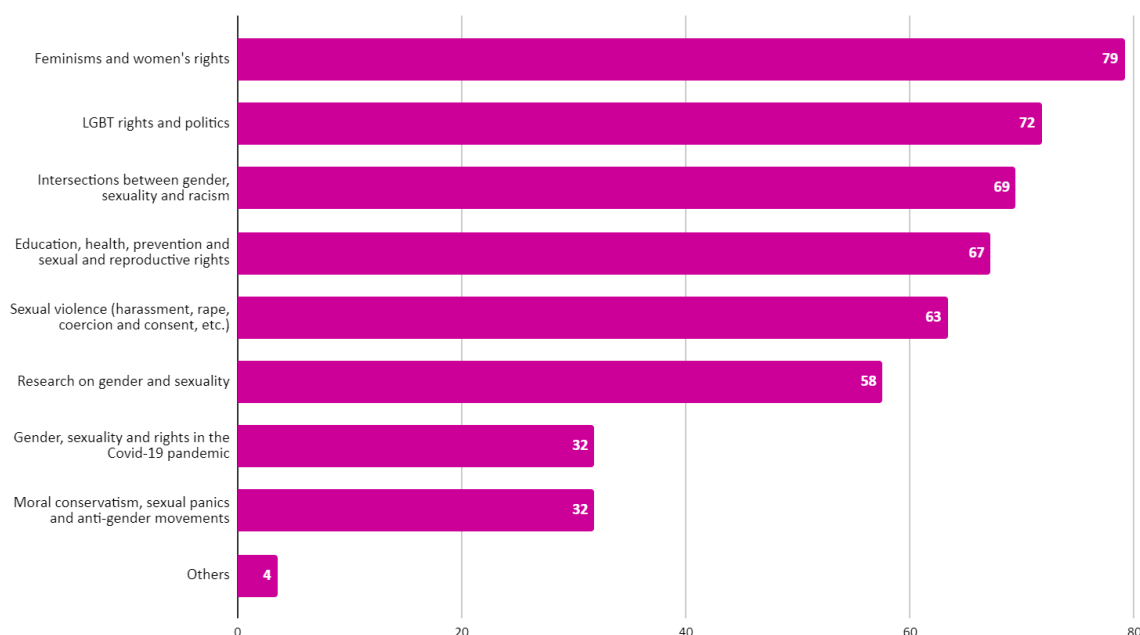| Schooling	N	%
Postgraduate	159	51.1
University (complete or incomplete)	138	44.4
Up to high school	13	4.2
I don't know/rather not answer	1	0.3
Total	311	100.0
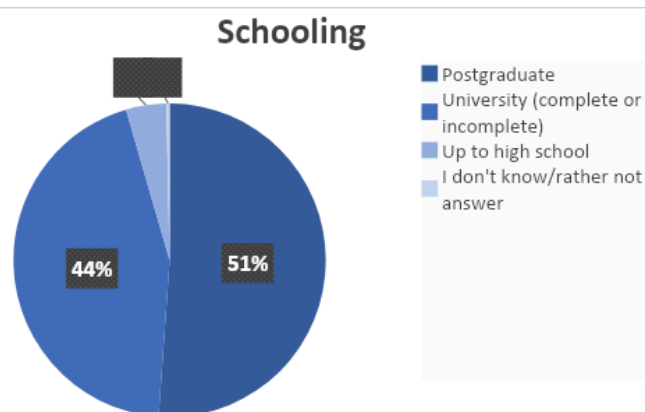
CLAM & APC 2021. N=310

As anticipated in the study design, this sample is not representative of any specific population. Although notably different from the sociodemographic characteristics of the Brazilian population, it possibly reflects some broad tendencies in the composition of the public engaged with feminism, gender and LGBT issues, and most probably of CLAM/IMS/UERJ's networks. Furthermore, the small sample size limited the comparison between different socio-demographic groups of interest. The descriptive value of survey results, in this case, lies in the testimony to the presence and at times the high prevalence of certain phenomena in the social universe where respondents were recruited. Furthermore, as far as variations within the sample show, our findings reveal the complexity of those phenomena and indicate the importance of further studies designed to better understand them.

Online engagement and gender and sexual politics

Respondents showed interest in a variety of topics with overlaps, permeable boundaries, zones of contestation and the entanglement of knowledge, politics, social identities and violence. As varied as the contexts of respondents' engagement in gender and sexual politics online are the degrees of institutionalization of that engagement. The four main multiple-choice, all-that-apply options in that regard were evenly mentioned by around 40% of the sample in each case: as related to **activism or as a member of a group or collective**, as **professional**, or academic work, and out of **personal interest**, in this case without professional, activist or academic connection. Gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women referred to their **activism** in a slightly higher degree (just above 50%) than their heterosexual counterparts (13% among men and 32.3% among women). Most heterosexual men (60.9%) declared an **exclusively personal interest**, and referred to all other options in a significantly lower proportion than the rest of the aggregated cis-gender sexual identities.
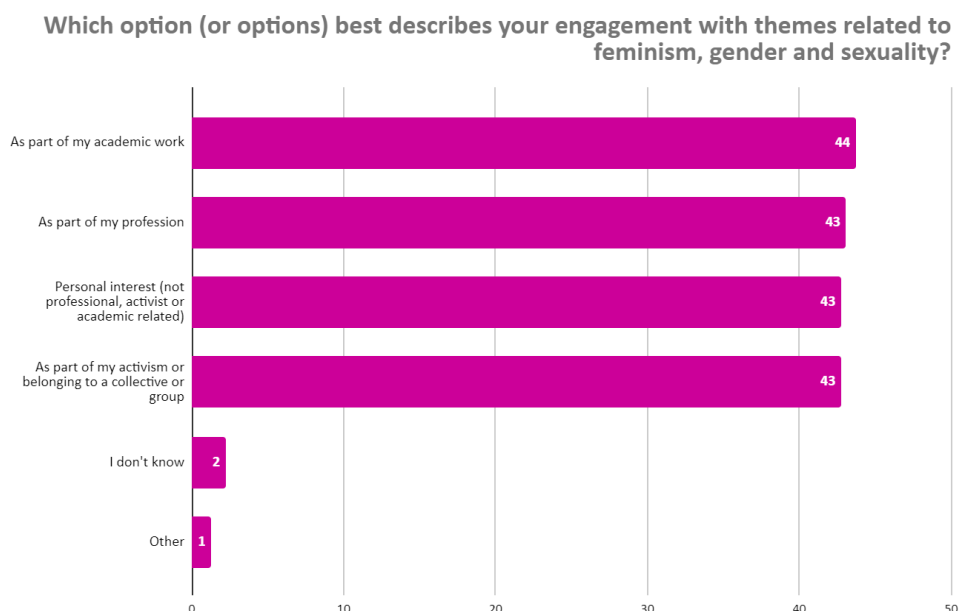
What themes related to feminism, gender and sexuality do you usually follow on the Internet?

Theme	Value
Feminisms and women's rights	79
LGBT rights and politics	72
Intersections between gender, sexuality and racism	69
Education, health, prevention and sexual and reproductive rights	67
Sexual violence (harassment, rape, coercion and consent, etc.)	63
Research on gender and sexuality	58
Gender, sexuality and rights in the Covid-19 pandemic	32
Moral conservatism, sexual panics and anti-gender movements	32
Others	4

Other options mentioned (open-ended): *Gender and sexualities in education; Drag queens; Gender and ableism, fatphobia; Gender and childhood; gender and education; Adoption lesbian*

and gay; families and by single women; The struggle for recognition of non-binary person's rights; Ethnic and religious minorities; Digital violence; Humanized childbirth; Monogamy, open relationships, polyamory, etc.

CLAM & APC 2021. N=311

Which option (or options) best describes your engagement with themes related to feminism, gender and sexuality?

| Option	Value
As part of my academic work	44
As part of my profession	43
Personal interest (not professional, activist or academic related)	43
As part of my activism or belonging to a collective or group	43
I don't know	2
Other	1

Other options mentioned (open-ended): *As part of my center-left political conviction; Social interest, as a form of everyday action; I belong to Mothers for Diversity; as a dimension of my life.*

CLAM & APC 2021. N=311

The mode of online political engagement most prevalent in our sample (96.5%) involved staying informed, by means of **access to news media or active searches**. In response to another multiple-choice all-that-apply question, about two-thirds of the sample reported **liking or commenting posts** (73.3%) and **sharing, re-sharing or forwarding posts** (72.7%), and 64% reported participating in online collective mobilizations such as online petitions and tweetathons, but less than one third (31.2%) **mentioned posting or creating online content**. As we will discuss below, when commenting on the results of our in-depth, open-ended interviews with survey respondents who volunteered to be contacted, many of our interlocutors admitted to refraining from exposure in order to avoid violent responses from reactionary actors that have become quite virulent and all too common.
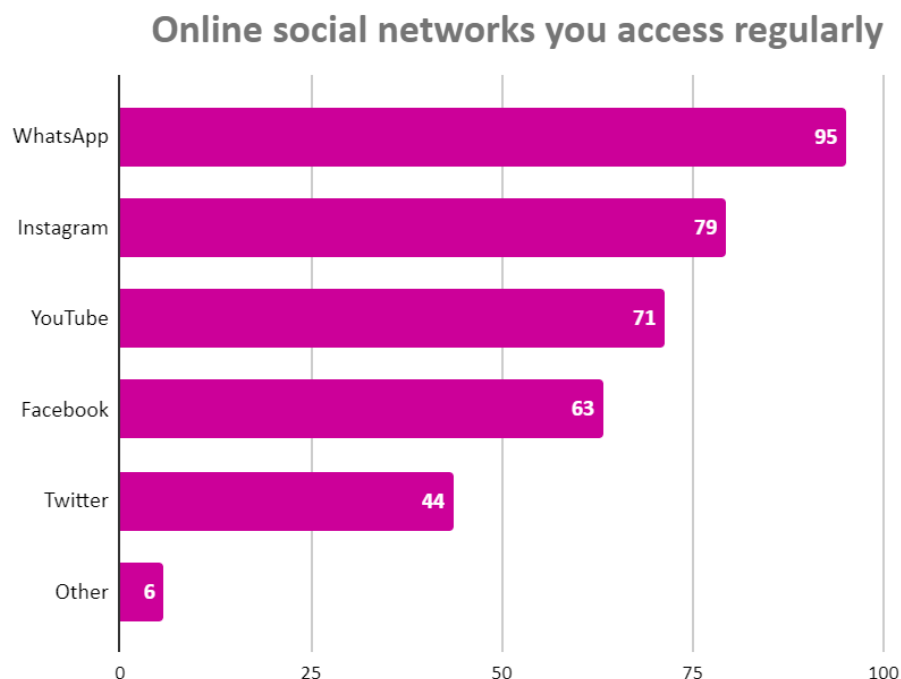
Check all options that describe your forms of online participation and political expression
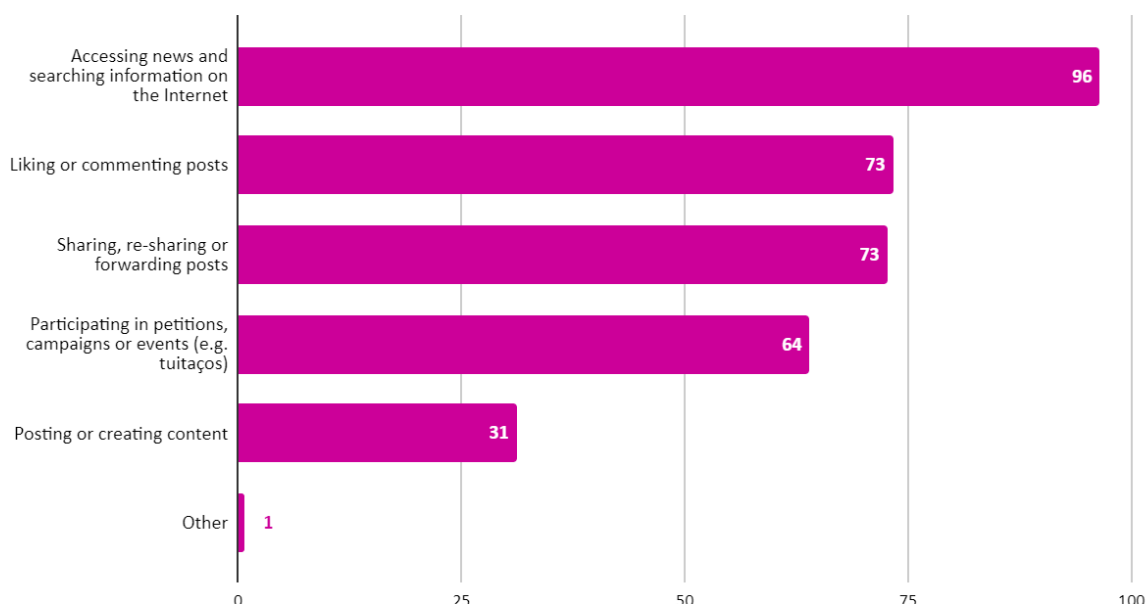
Other options mentioned (open-ended): *I write academic papers against the criminalization of abortion; I report hate speech*
CLAM & APC 2021. N=311

Almost all respondents reported using **WhatsApp** (95.7%), followed by **Instagram** (79.4%), **YouTube** (71.5%), **Facebook** (65.5%) and **Twitter** (44.5%), perhaps indicating the greater penetration of platforms that encompass a variety of social uses and of degrees of intimacy among its networks, with WhatsApp ahead for effectively filling a diversity of everyday instant communication needs, as opposed to those, like Twitter, more limited to more specific uses, notably and relevant to this research, public debate.

Online social networks you access regularly

| Network	Value
WhatsApp	95
Instagram	79
YouTube	71
Facebook	63
Twitter	44
Other	6

Other options mentioned (open-ended): *Linkedin, Tik Tok, Medium, Reddit, Pinterest, Tumblr, Mastodon, Discord, Twitch, Letterboxd, Strava, Articles.*

CLAM & APC 2021. N=311

Almost all respondents (98.1%) accessed the internet most often **from their homes using a broadband connection**. A majority of them (59.5%) also used the **mobile coverage of their phone plans**, plus a 36.7% that did so sometimes. A great majority (77.8%) also accessed the internet **at school or work** sometimes or often, but almost half of the sample (48.6%) did never use **free internet provided in public spaces**, while most of the rest of the sample (44%) did so only sometimes. Therefore, the challenges our respondents faced while using the internet were related to reasons other than difficulties of access.

How do you usually access the Internet?

At home (wi-fi or cable)

Mobile data (cell phone)

At school/work

Free Internet (public spaces)
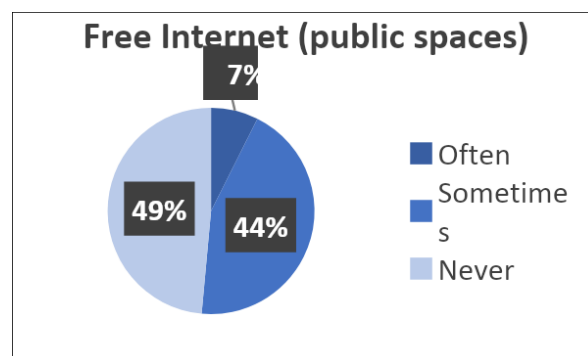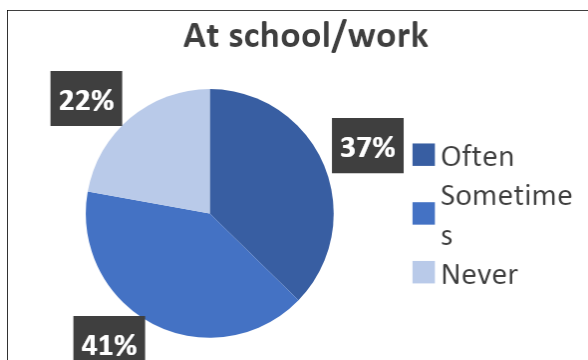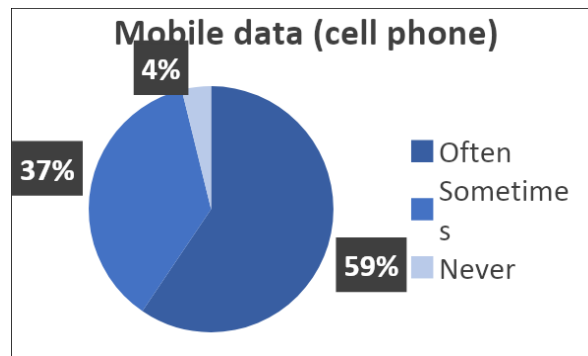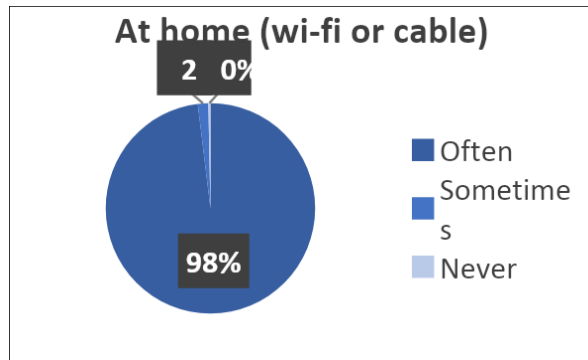
CLAM & APC 2021. N=311

Facing online challenges

We constructed an opening multiple-choice all-that-apply question about common unpleasant situations faced on the internet, mostly caused by others deliberately, most of which are socially classified as specific forms of violence. In further questions we explored the social markers of difference and inequalities that marked those aggressions, the parties involved, the contexts where they took place and how survey respondents reacted to them.
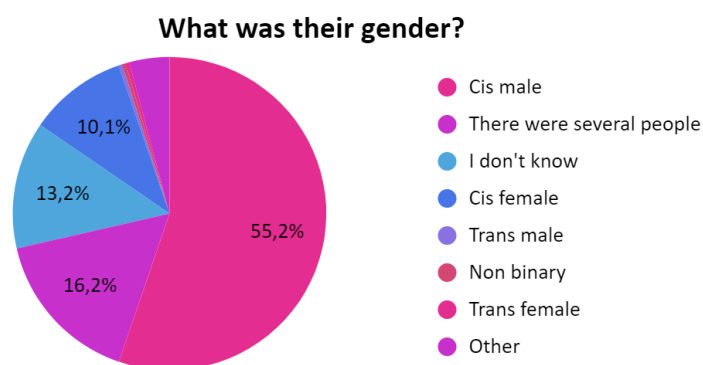
> NOTE: *This section describes aspects that were not addressed in the* **Findings** *section of this report. See subsection* **Engaging challenges | Violence, politics and social media** *for an interpretive description of the survey's most relevant findings.*

Unfortunately, stratified analyses of this question's results by gender, age, race/color and sexual orientation such analyses were impaired by the small number of individuals within the different strata of interest. We found statistically significant differences between gay-lesbian-bisexuals grouped and heterosexuals at being the **target of online insults or offensive language** 50.3% (IC 95% 42.4-58.2) vs 31.4% (IC 95% 24.5-39.2); receiving **threats or violent messages/comments** 30.1% (IC 95% 23.3-37.8) vs 15.0% (IC 95% 10.2-21.7); and **lacking support to respond** to such threats or attacks 21.6% (IC 95% 15.7-28.8) vs 7.2% (IC 95% 4.0-12.6), respectively. These findings highlight the potential of conducting new research with a larger sample aimed at making statistically significant comparisons.

Four close-ended questions inquired we asked respondents to recall who was the perpetrator of the violent act or behavior reported, first exploring the degree of social distance between the respondent and their aggressor or aggressors and then using the same sets of socio-demographic categories applied to respondents, but this time to establish the aggressor's attributes. Most situations (56%) involved unknown strangers, including cases involving a number of people (12%) and fake profiles (5.3). But nevertheless, one third of the situations involved known people, including acquaintances (19.9%) and close relationships (13.5%), showing that online violence affects all levels of social interaction in particular ways. Finally, aggressors were caracteristically white heterosexual males, something consistent with the
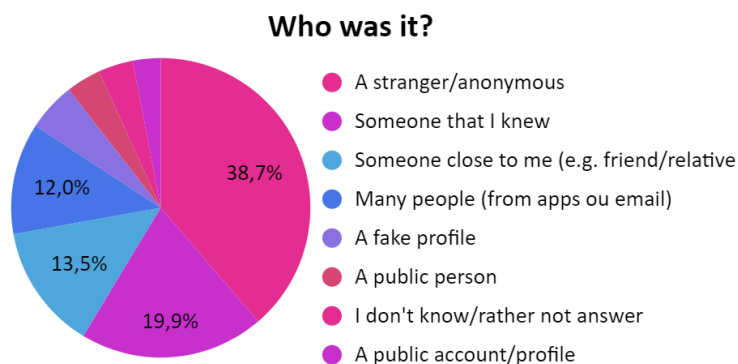
combination of a predominantly female, considerably gay lesbian and bisexual composition of the sample, and the patriarchal structure underlying the predominant forms of violence related in the survey.

Consider the worst situation described. Who caused it?	N	%
A stranger/anonymous profile	103	38.7
Someone that I knew	53	19.9
Someone close to me (e.g. friend/relative)	36	13.5
Many people (from apps ou email)	32	12.0
A fake profile	14	5.3
A public person	10	3.8
I don't know/rather not answer	10	3.8
A public account/profile	8	3.0

What was their gender?

- Cis male
- There were several people
- I don't know
- Cis female
- Trans male
- Non binary
- Trans female
- Other

CLAM & APC 2021. N=266

Consider the worst situation described. What gender were those who caused it?	N	%
Cis male	147	55.3
There were several people	43	16.2
I don't know	35	13.2
Cis female	27	10.2
Trans male	1	0.4
Non binary	1	0.4
Trans female	1	0.4
Other	11	4.1

Who was it?

- A stranger/anonymous
- Someone that I knew
- Someone close to me (e.g. friend/relative
- Many people (from apps ou email)
- A fake profile
- A public person
- I don't know/rather not answer
- A public account/profile

CLAM & APC 2021. N=277

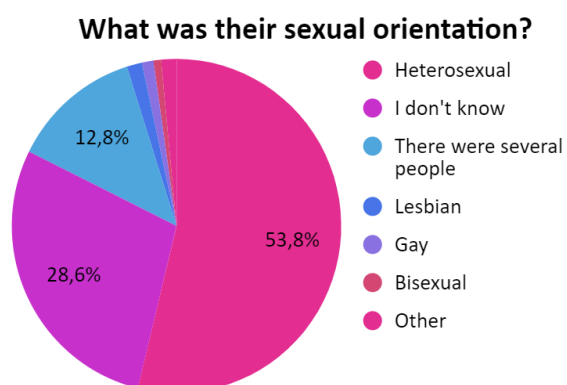| Consider the worst situation described. What was the sexual orientation of those who caused it?	N	%
Heterosexual	143,0	53.8
I don't know	76,0	28.6
There were several people	34,0	12.8
Lesbian	4,0	1.5
Gay	3,0	1.1
Bisexual	2,0	0.8
Other	4,0	1.5

CLAM & APC 2021. N=270

What was their sexual orientation?

Consider the worst situation described. What was their race/color of those who did it?	N	%
White	145	54.5
Several	41	15.4
Parda	16	6.0
Black	7	2.6
Yellow	1	0.4
I don't know	56	21.1

What race/color were they?

CLAM & APC 2021. N=270
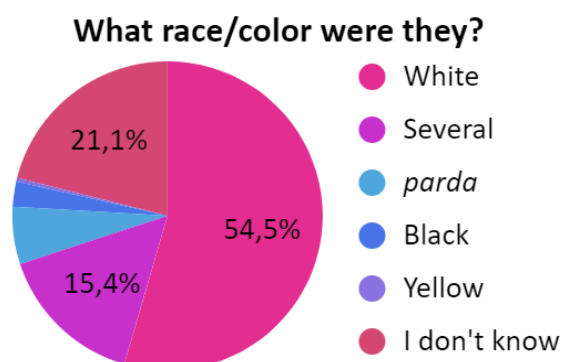
In depth interviews on digital engagement, violence and the Internet

When they reached the end of the questionnaire survey respondents were asked if they were interested in collaborating further with the research by participating in an in-depth video-interview. Of 60 respondents that showed interest by giving a contact email, we pre-selected 18 individuals who could represent the most diversity in terms of their race/color, gender, sexual orientation and gender expression, age/generation and geographic location. Expecting some would not respond or be unavailable, we aimed at conducting about ten interviews. We made a priority-list guided by that criteria and finally interviewed the 11 individuals that responded positively to our contact and were available to schedule a Zoom session between 10 december 2020 and 10 February 2021. We interviewed the only trans woman among the 60 volunteers. She identified as lesbian and white. As in the survey, the race/color options of self-declaration in the survey mirrored the categories used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, by its Portuguese initials). Of eight cis women interviewed, four identified as heterosexual, one of them as white and two as black. Three identified as lesbians, one of them as white and two as "*parda*", the conventional category in Brazil for mixed color or ancestry, used by the IBGE. One woman identified as bisexual and "yellow," used by IBGE to classify respondents of Asian background. One woman identified as pansexual and white. The two gay cis men self-identified as "*pardo*" as well. We also sought some balance in terms of age and generation.

Interviewee socio-demographics						
Age	Race	Gender	Sexual orientation	Occupation	Region	Interviewer
22	black	cis woman	heterosexual	social worker	Northeast	Silvia
24	*parda*	cis woman	lesbian	lawyer	Southeast	Silvia
29	yellow	cis woman	bisexual	education student	South	Silvia
30	white	cis woman	lesbian	theater, user experience (UX) research	Southeast	Bruno
32	*parda*	cis woman	lesbian	journalist	South	Bruno
32	white	cis woman	heterosexual	lawyer	North	Bruno
34	*pardo*	cis man	gay	educator	Southeast	Bruno
35	*pardo*	cis man	gay	biologist	North	Bruno
36	white	cis woman	pansexual	biologist	Southeast	Silvia
50	black	cis woman	heterosexual	lawyer	North	Silvia
56	white	trans woman	lesbian	psychologist, web design background	Southeast	Bruno

The open-ended semi-structured interviews began by exploring the life trajectories of the interviewees to contextualize the interviewee's experiences, usually starting from their early discovery of the internet or its role in their work or activism; then we explored their current internet use, focusing on social media and on their perceptions about safety and protection measures, as well as challenges and negative, often traumatic, experiences. We often prompted a "before" and "now" narrative frame, in order to get a sense of their recollections from the time when they first got

online and along their coming of age, or their trajectories as adults in the case of older respondents. That also brought perceptions about what, if anything, changed recently, focusing on online violence and hate speech in particular. All interviewees spontaneously framed those changes, for the worse, in relation to the 2018 presidential election and most also to the advent of the covid-19 pandemic.

Descriptive analysis

Then it was… | Coming of age on the internet

Sharing a family computer or going to internet cafes, joining Orkut, online gaming and going to chat rooms figure among the experiences narrated by those that first had internet access in their late childhood and teenage years in the 90s and early 2000s.[22] Due to our interlocutors' age, Orkut (discussed earlier in this report) was often mentioned as the social media of their first internet forays.[23] When Orkut was discontinued in 2014, Brazilian users had largely already migrated to Facebook. In the mid to late 2000s Facebook and Twitter rose as the social media of choice among several interviewees, as the type of content they consumed expanded and matured. Some related how internet expansion also meant the expansion of feminist debate online. In the 2010s some became content producers, even if only by more actively participating in online conversations about gender issues (for instance, participating in feminist Facebook groups). For LGBT interviewees, internet and social media expansion also meant more opportunities to consume otherwise inaccessible queer culture contents. Feminist and queer YouTube channels and Instagram accounts were also mentioned as important. The experience of coming into contact with gender and sexuality-related contents and information in a broader sense, and with like-minded people as well, was ultimately identified by many as the very purpose of the internet for them. Those first experiences marked how they signified online activity thereafter.

---

[22] More specifically Bate-Papo Uol which was very popular in Brazil during the 90s, actually a collection of chat rooms divided by Regions and by interests, including LGBT channels and chat rooms for paquera (flirting) and cruising, classified by sexual orientation, fetiches (kinks)., etc.
[23] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orkut

Two female interviewees now in their 50s came from a generation whose adulthood was marked by the expansion of digital communication but who are not digital natives. One of them, a trans woman who transitioned later in life, in the 90s worked as a web designer for a web hosting service, which modelled her technical take on digital issues. After transitioning, she used the internet as a means to explore and express her trans identity. The other woman in her 50s had an activist trajectory in land and poverty issues in Amazonia, which also marked her online experience.

Now it is… | Contemporary uses

Blogs, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube as mediums for work and activism were related by all interviewees as part of their current internet experiences. Most interviewees cited Twitter and Instagram as the main social media platforms they access. Facebook is flagged in almost all narratives of internet fatigue explored below. A 32 year-old woman from a Southern (whiter, richer) state who identified as lesbian and parda mentioned, regarding her daily Twitter access, that she read a lot and gave likes, but did not comment as often as she once did, compared to a past when she frequently confronted bigots in debates. It was her who reflected that "Instagram is the social media for happiness, and Twitter for depression. However, Twitter is the social media better suited for debating issues," as mentioned earlier in this report, Such reflections about the suitability of social media for different purposes were a recurring feature in almost all interviews. Facebook had fallen in disfavour by all who mentioned that platform.

A 29 year-old woman who identified as yellow and bisexual, also living in the South, mentioned following many podcasts, a medium we did not anticipate in the survey. A hybrid media, part social network, part communication tool, WhatsApp has ample penetration in Brazil. All interviewees were familiar with the platform and used it daily in both their personal and professional life.

The internet is for... | Enabling identities

All interviewees spoke of the internet in terms similar to those evoked by our trans interlocutor above: the internet is a means to explore and express one's sexuality and other identities, and for meeting like-minded people. A 24 year-old lesbian from the South said that, if it were not for the internet, she wouldn't "even had discovered" she was lesbian, or at least perceived that as a real possibility. Her first relationship was with someone she met online as a young woman. Many of her current friendships started online. Some went offline as well, but there are also people with whom she only interacts online. For her, there is no difference.

For almost all interviewees the internet meant entertainment, information, and a research tool. It provided access to contents that they woundn't have otherwise found, like queer art and culture, and feminism. Most first came into contact with those worldviews online. For one 36 year-old white pansexual woman from one of the two largest metropolitan areas located in the Southeast, her contact with feminism started when she joined Facebook between 2009 and 2010, and she more involved between 2013 and 2015. For a 22 year-old black heterosexual cis woman from the North, the internet is now her source of information: "if I removed Instagram from my life today, it would be like removing the *Jornal Nacional* [evening news]."

For a 29 year-old yellow bisexual woman from the South, the internet was a key means for the organization of street protests, making the transit between online and offline activism important. However, to her, street protesting created a level of "discomfort" from which a higher "efficacy for political mobilization is derived," something that, in her view, only happens offline, where time is spent to go from one place to another, sacrificing leisure and rest; that cannot be reproduced online. Conversely for a 50 year-old black heterosexual woman from the North, the covid-19 pandemic meant an important reorganization of political activities that migrated to online spaces.

An overwhelming feeling | Internet fatigue

Most interviewees spoke of an emotional onus in the use of social media. One 32 year-old lesbian from the South, a daily Twitter user, becomes emotionally exhausted when the platform is saturated with news of violence, specially femicide, which she needs to avoid. Other interviewees related similar feelings, and at the time of the interview many were avoiding one or more social media platforms. This feeling of fatigue relates to the way issues they care about, particularly feminist issues, are treated on social media, rather than the issues themselves. A 32 year-old white heterosexual woman from the North saw feminism "explode" on the internet after 2012, when "everybody started to speak about it." She used to post a lot about feminism on Facebook, where she had more than a thousand friends. But then sometime after 2017 she started being harassed by women she referred to as immature, who, in her opinion, "didn't know how to behave online."[24] This made her feel exposed, which led to her starting to avoid Facebook. She kept her original account, but created a new, more private one and with fewer, closer friends.

That sort of social media fatigue was aggravated during the covid-19 pandemic, and "lighter" uses such as "looking at pretty pictures" like cat images or watching videos and films, looking at memes, etc., became a way of dealing with an increasing amount of stress. References to Instagram as a source for more palatable content were recurrent. That may be associated with the platform's image-based conception and layout, while text-based contents both on Twitter and on Facebook were referred to as sources of stress. As a 35 year-old pardo gay man from the North recalled: "My relationship with social media was a love relationship, then a love/hate one, and today one of only hate."

Present in all interviews was this ambivalent perception of the internet, often described as a "good tool being misused," related to either: (a) spending too many hours online everyday, specially on social media, exposed to (dis)information, engaging too much with debates over polemic issues and

---

[24] This perception and the conflict she relates might have been informed by her sympathy with radical feminist views, increasingly under critique in those spaces, However, that hypothesis was not further explored during the interview.

all that becoming a source of anxiety and emotional distress;[25] (b) other users' individual or collective engagement with hate politics, their liberty to express prejudice, to troll, to manipulate information, to spread fake and harmful content; and (c) internet gate-keepers', particularly social media companies' indifference to hate speech content on their platforms, their failure to properly define what is harmful and their neglect of content flagged as inappropriate because of their focus on the extraction of personal data for commercial purposes.

Engaging and challenging conservative views and hate discourse online was felt as a moral obligation, but one with a severe emotional onus. A 34 year-old man from the Southeast who identified as gay and pardo, active in Catholic communities and engaged with LGBT issues, narrated episodes where he felt the need to correct pieces of information in peer groups on social media, which became something pointless and emotionally draining. Assuming the responsibility of challenging disinformation and hate speech online became a heavy burden that led him to avoid social media altogether, and to tightly restrict his use of the internet.

Our interlocutor spoke of efforts to find "balance," "conciliating" a better use of the internet as a tool. Others also felt that social media potentiated and explored their vulnerabilities. Others spoke of feeling unable to handle their own online safety and of the perception of having less and less control over information about themselves and less knowledge about how to deal with online violence.

A 32 year-old parda lesbiane from the South relates such feelings of frustration to issues of platform regulation: "I think social media companies could be more transparent about what they mean by hate speech and do more to really ban some users, you know? (...) I report all the accounts that I see that are there just to spread hate speech. And some are big! But I see few effective measures being taken. So a tweet gets deleted, but a person has an account that is all about hate, and it has a lot of followers."

---

[25] One interviewee who had sought mental health services after suffering panic attacks was actually "prescribed," along with medication, to reduce the amount of time she spent on the internet, which she reported as a successful measure.

Discipline and punish | Violence and regulation

As also anticipated in our online survey, sexual harassment by anoymous users, sexism, LGBT-phobia and misogyny, lots of name-calling and online hate were frequent in interviewees' narratives of past and present. As a reaction to something someone posted, or as the mere reaction to our interviewees' or their peers' online presence. But other users were not the only source of frustration when our interviewers tried to express themselves online. Social media platforms were also a source of censorship and silencing. According to a 34 year-old pardo gay man from the South, social media platforms' reporting mechanisms have always worked against him. That is something some survey respondents mentioned as well. His Facebook account was taken down because of an opinion he shared on a Facebook group of his church community. His own reports of racism and fatphobia ended up leading to the banning of his Tinder profile. He has only ever seen those tools succeed in reporting comments on YouTube.

Similar complaints about the role of social media platforms in silencing, censoring and restricting online expression and about companies not taking responsibility for curbing hate speech abound in other interviews. A 30 year-old white lesbian from the Southeast complained: "I can't post anything, [I do and] I already receive a suspension notice, the last time it was a video without sound from my mouth screaming. Facebook took the publication down, understanding that it was erotic, which I didn't understand."

This feeling of discomfort and helplessness aggravated since the 2018 general election. The electoral mobilization of anti-gender discourse and sex panics seemed as intense as before and during the 2020 municipal elections as well. In that regard, a 29 year old bisexual woman of Japanese background from the South narrated attacks by the men in her family, who banded in support of offensive comments on her posts on political issues. She left Facebook for some time, and since then her access has been only sporadic. While speaking about those negative experiences, she recalled the ordeals other people went through, such as the emblematic case of Lola Aronovich, a feminist university professor and blogger.[26] That has generated a pervasive atmosphere of insecurity, reflected by either the avoidance of social media

---

[26] Lola was an important feminist voice in the Brazilian blogosphere. Her blog *Write, Lola, Write* was expanded to an active Twitter presence. She is author of the feminist blog <https://escrevalolaescreva.blogspot.com/>.

altogether, or the self-policing of contents shared to avoid conflict, common among interviewees.

A narrative from a 35 year-old pardo gay man illustrates the emotional impact of this permanent feeling of overexposure, translated to practices of self-discipline in order to sort out the palpable risks to one's safety and reputation. Publicly open about his sexuality and serostatus after years of living with HIV, he had Instagram posts used against him in a family inheritance dispute. Paradoxically, pictures where he appeared happy, laughing with friends at parties were used to disqualify his claims of health needs. The story is expressive of the complicated entanglement of the intimate (a family conflict) and the public (legal procedures, social media exposure) when his online privacy was breached.

As mentioned earlier, WhatsApp has great penetration in Brazil, both for one-on-one and group messaging for personal, professional and business purposes. WhatsApp groups have facilitated the forwarding of images, videos, audio messages and internet address links to countrywide networks of users. The tool is user-friendly regardless of the limitations in formal education or digital literacy, to the extent that audio and video messages have largely substituted texting in everyday communications. Its popularity across generations explains its use as means of collective communication for family and peer networks, where contents either hosted in social media platforms or adapted to circulate as light digital objects not bound to a specific platform architecture are widely shared. By means of the synergetic interplay between human design and automated multiplication, often in the form of bot accounts and paid mass distribution, illegal for electoral purposes, WhatsApp groups became a fertile ground for disinformation and moral panics, reaching a peak in the eve of the 2018 Brazilian presidential election.

WhatsApp family and peer groups are an emblematic case of online media where interviewees experience the moral obligation to challenge hate speech and anti-rights discourse. This is related, on the one hand, to the need to deal with disinformation and hate politics coming from people they are socially near and emotionally attached to. But, on the other hand, it responds to the moral outrage felt when that type of content is shared by

people one may love, trust or respect, as is often the case with family, friends and co-workers.

Security Protocols

A 56 year-old white lesbian trans woman from a Southeastern metropolis describes herself as quite tech savvy. The value of her skill frames her perceptions about internet use, since she first experienced its inner workings from a backstage vantage point. From covering webcams and blurring profile pictures to tightly controlling what and where she posts and observing closely the type of content that is posted on social media, she made a strong point regarding the kind of precautions she considered necessary in terms of online security. For her, "people don't know how to be safe online. They don't manage their data security protocols, don't control their level of self exposure, and can't imagine the range or potential of the internet as a tool that can be used against them."

While not as precise in technical terms, all interviewees seem to agree with her. But to a majority of them, the only effective way of avoiding the kind of conflicts that would expose them to violations of their personal security or to acts of violence seems to be keeping a low profile or just avoiding social media platforms altogether, also as an effort to preserve their mental health and well-being. As put by a 32 year-old parda lesbian from the South, who was always afraid of becoming a target of attacks if she ever drew the attention of memebers of hostile conservative online networks: "It's for my sanity, [I am] exhausted from consuming all this media, so I do not engage [in controversies]. I could often argue. (...) I am not going to speak because I do not know what will happen, because I do not know what it will mean, because I do not know what direction things can take."

Besides avoiding controversy or any sort of ostensive engagement, another self-preservation strategy is the careful management of social media profile personal privacy options, that is, how "open" (public) or "closed" (private) a profile is. People often mentioned having had public "open" profiles for a while, then restricting access to their content or going back and forth making them more private in response to security breaches, as a preventive

measure, or just permanently restricting who can access them or know about their existence.

For a 24 year-old parda lesbian from the Southeast, "the way to learn how to be on, how to use the internet, is just using it." Consistent with this idea of a learning curve in online personal security, despite having been harassed on the streets, a 32 year-old parda lesbian from the South still felt safer offline than online, because online she feels less able to manage risks. Online risks are less visible, less known and harder to learn about: "I have a certain power to manage offline [risks]. But [offline] I feel much less afraid than [online]... You say something [on Twitter] and that tweet, for some reason, falls [on a reactionary network]... viralizes or something, you know?"

This sense of vulnerability was recurrent in all interviews, in narratives of breaches and felt risks that situated victims, aggressors, and subjects at risk in direct reference to their political ideology and their moral convictions, often the only or most visible, dramatized, aspect of conflict and disputes, but also and perhaps more importantly, in terms of complex arrangements involving their gender and gender expression, their sexuality, their corporeality, their racialized "color" and ancestry, their age and generation, their social class. Narratives show that political opinions become a higher risk when voiced by women, when voiced by gender and sexual dissidents, whose habits raise doubts about their morality, by persons considered too young, not literate enough, or who are dangerously learned. In the case of feminists because their social status doesn't justify their authority; in the case of queer scholars because they are suspect of having perverted that authority. Female bodies, fat female bodies, bodies not conforming to gender norms and also emotions deemed feminine make certain subjects also more vulnerable than others when exposed in images, when represented in memes and in hate speech. The operation of those markers is described in terms of emotional fragility, but also in narratives of empowerment, both individual and collective.

Taking the time to engage with bigots is a practice that many interviewees once engaged in, feeling a moral obligation to do so, but now most have given up. The emotional onus became too great, and some had a social onus to pay as well: not only expulsion from WhatsApp or Facebook groups, having to leave after receiving threats, but also jobs and benefits lost, or

being estranged from peer networks and communities of interest. In all, however, those challenges are not necessarily represented as dead ends, but as a very hard but not impossible task. As put by a 35 year-old pardo gay man from the North, in terms of cultivating a politics of care: "It isn't a matter of demonizing the web, but using it in a way that I don't know yet... [...] to create a safe environment. To me it isn't as safe an environment [for now, but] it isn't just a question of banning things. It's much more than that."

Technopolitics and generation

One recurring topic across different interview narratives is the idea of a generation gap in the ways digital technology is used and digital networks are engaged. In the perceptions of our interlocutores, "younger" and "older" types seem to be placed on opposite sides, the "older" internet users regarded as more conservative, more prejudiced, unable or unwilling to keep up with progressive debates regarding gender, sexuality and rights, and at the same time less equipped to recognize false information and scams, uninformed about their need for privacy and security measures, and in general unable to deal with online risks. This must be read also in reference to our interviewees' predominant background: highly educated and academic-oriented, politicized, left-wing, engaged with gender, sexuality and race issues, some formally as part of their organic activism, their profession as teachers, researchers and practitioners in care professions, some because of their studies.

While trying to explain "the problem with the internet," a 32 year-old white hetero woman from the North attibuted a particular usage styles to an older generation she identified as her parents'. When traditional mass media outlets were failing to meet people's expectations, in the context of the current conservative backlash, that generation migrated to online media only as a result of its massification, therefore they were digitalized already as adults. They are more vulnerable because they aren't familiar with internet etiquette, because they are unable to recognize dangers and risks. Furthermore, she observes that that older generation, her parents, uncles and aunts, attribute the (dis)information that reaches them on WhatsApp an equivalent degree of verisimilitude as they would to traditional news media. Since the picture of reality that professional journalists paint is not pleasing,

they tend to give greater credit to random, more digestible, versions they find online.

But also, as a woman in her early thirties she sees herself in the middle of two generation gaps, because to her, the younger generation (the "millennials," more truly digital native, perhaps) does not follow appropriate internet rules either. To her, no one seems to be using the internet in quite the right way. The distrust of traditional news media that she attributes to the older generation is publicly stimulated by President Bolsonaro and his entourage. It also means the legitimation of a visceral hostility towards feminists, LGBTs and the left by moral panics both off- and online and across generations: "The issue in Brazil, I think, is not the internet, but that [hate and hostility] are legitimized by authorities.(...) I don't know how to answer whether one thing or the other [online and offline hate], I think the two things go together at the same time."

Issues for further exploration

Interviewees also produced elaborate narratives of challenges faced not only online, but across the online/offline boundaries; and reflected about protection strategies, care and self-regulation in the use of the internet. They were also emphatic about the need to include a diversity of voices to discuss internet politics, regulation and security; in particular about the dialogue between social movements, IT specialists and lawmakers, to promote the development of alternative networking solutions, citing, for example, the idea of user-friendly open source social networks. They also made interesting considerations about privacy and the idea of "digital justice."