Black women and gender non-conforming persons and technology-facilitated gender-based violence: A decolonial feminist exploration

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Authors

Mikhael Adams

Floretta Boonzaier

Kajal Carr

Lilitha Hole

Aphiwe Mhlangulana

Joel Omuron

Research team

Mikhael Adams

Floretta Boonzaier

Kajal Carr

Lilitha Hole

Aphiwe Mhlangulana

Joel Omuron

Research coordinators

Aphiwe Mhlangulana
 (University of Cape Town)

Kajal Carr (University of Cape Town)

Tigist S. Hussen (FIRN, APC)

Diana Bichanga (FIRN, APC)

Serene Lim (FIRN, APC)

FIRN reviewers

Srinidhi Raghavan

Tigist S. Hussen

Serene Lim

IDRC · CRDI
International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

Canada

1.

Introduction

The current surge in technology-facilitated communication has created an online space for various uses and a platform for possible harm. Men's voices have dominated the internet and social media, and as in much public discourse, women's voices are often relegated to the sidelines. Scholars argue that gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa (SA) merits the same urgency as the country's other health and socio-political issues.[1] In addition to the current spike in the prevalence of GBV in SA, the country context is highly racialised both in historical and contemporary terms, with an entrenched patriarchal system wherein men are systematically afforded more social and political power.[2] In this context, women are more likely to experience GBV.[3]

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is significantly under-researched in South Africa. Internationally, very little research on online forms of GBV adopts a more expansive, historical approach to the enactment of this violence. Furthermore, research on black women and gender non-conforming individuals' experiences of online GBV is notably lacking. All these factors encourage interest in how online spaces are used to combat GBV, as well as what the experiences of online violence look like for marginalised groups. We begin addressing these gaps in this report. Our research aims to address some of the gaps in the literature through contributions from two research projects: an honours research project on black women and gender non-conforming persons' experiences of TFGBV and a PhD research project on black African women and gender non-conforming journalists and bloggers' experiences of TFGBV. The data we present in this project is drawn from these two projects. Both projects take a decolonial feminist lens, which aims to take a historically contextualised view on GBV, recognising patriarchy's colonial roots within the context of South Africa

1.   Govender, I. (2023). Gender-based violence - An increasing epidemic in South Africa. *South African Family Practice, 65*(1), 1-2. https://doi.org/10.4102/safp.v65i1.5729
2.   Maluleke, R. (2018). *Crime against Women in South Africa: An in-depth analysis of the Victims of Crime Survey data 2018.* Statistics South Africa. https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-40-05/Report-03-40-05June2018.pdf; Carr, K. (2020). *The Pandemic of Being a Woman: A Qualitative Analysis of the South African Media on GBV at the Time of COVID-19.* University of Cape Town. https://open.uct.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/ff9cbc9a-96cb-4a2b-a656-8a0de00af5f6/content
3.   https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/gender-based-violence-in-south-africa

and the African continent and actively resisting coloniality through knowledge production. Below, we begin our discussion with an overview of the complexity of gender-based violence in South Africa in relation to the country's violent history.

1.1 THE COMPLEXITY OF GBV IN SOUTH AFRICA

GBV is a widespread problem with extensive real-life effects, and has permeated online platforms such as mainstream and social media.[4] As decolonial feminist scholars located in SA, a country recognised as the GBV capital of the world and a country that is highly racialised with a history of colonialism and apartheid, we recognise the scarcity of research relating to online GBV.[5] Furthermore, we realise that GBV in its different forms (including its online manifestations) needs to be understood alongside the country's historical context.[6]

Black women and gender non-conforming persons' experiences are influenced by the intersectionality of various social identities.[7] In addition to the comparatively high exposure to GBV, their experiences are still affected by a history of legalised racism, homophobia, misogyny and patriarchal structures, which serve as further political and social forms of marginalisation.[8] As decolonial feminists, we recognise that the coloniality of gender has subjected, and continues to subject, black women to extreme forms of gendered violence in general society and online spaces.[9] These forms of violence are fuelled by the colonial idea of black women not being recognised or considered as "natural" women.[10] Although the South African Constitution has made progressive legislative provisions to combat and prohibit the violation of human rights based on gender, sex and sexual orientation, these have not led to the prevention of the stigmatisation and hate crimes that for instance, minorities such as LGBTQIA+ persons face at a societal level and, by extension, in the online space.[11]

4. Oparinde, K., & Matsha, R. M. (2021). Powerful discourse: Gender-based violence and counter-discourses in South Africa. *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 8*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1911035; OUT. (2024, 29 January). South Africa LGBTIQ+ Rights Watch: December 2023. https://out.org.za/south-africa-lgbtiq-rights-watch-december-2023/

5. Carter, E. (2023, 12 March). OPINION: GBV at the click of a button: even online, misogyny is out of line. https://www.sahrc.org.za/index.php/sahrc-media/opinion-pieces/item/3499-opinion-gbv-at-the-click-of-a-button-even-online-misogyny-is-out-of-line; Gqola, P. D. (2015). *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. MF Books Joburg; Yesufu, S. (2022). The scourge of gender-based violence (GBV) on women plaguing South Africa. *EUREKA: Social and Humanities, 1,* 96-100. https://doi.org/10.21303/2504-5571.2022.002261

6. Gqola, P. D. (2007). How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender based violence in contemporary South Africa. *African Identities, 5*(1), 111-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725840701253894; Pagel, J. M. (2021). *#AmINext: The Link Between European Colonization and Gender-Based Violence in Contemporary South Africa.* Arcadia University. https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/showcase/2021/is/2

7. Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241-1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039; Debnam, K. J., Milam, A. J., & Finigan-Carr, N. (2022). Superwoman, Racial Identity, and Teen Dating Violence Victimization among Young Black Women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37*(17-18), NP15970-NP15991. https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211021984; Gouws, A. (2016). Women's activism around gender-based violence in South Africa: recognition, redistribution and representation. *Review of African Political Economy, 43*(149), 400-415. https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2016.1217838; Cornell, J., Hearn, J., Ratele, K., & Kessi, S. (2023). Sexual Justice and Sexualities. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of Social Sciences and Global Public Health.* Springer Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96778-9_120-1

8. Govender, I. (2023). Op. cit.; Maluleke, R. (2018). Op. cit.; Müller, A., Daskilewicz, K., & the Southern and East African Research Collective on Health (SEARCH). (2019). *Are we doing alright? Realities of violence, mental health, and access to healthcare related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in South Africa: Research report based on a community-led study in nine countries.* COC Netherlands. https://out.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SOGIE-and-wellbeing_07_South-Africa.pdf; Pagel, J. M. (2021). Op. cit.

9. Mendoza, E. (2016). *States of dismemberment: state violence and the un/making of queer subjectivities.* The University of Texas at Austin. https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/items/c7e6a59a-20ac-49c5-b301-f4f8255ed233

10. Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a Decolonial Feminism. *Hypatia, 25*(4), 742-759. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x

11. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf; Victor, C. J., Nel, J. A., Lynch, I., & Mbatha, K. (2014). The Psychological Society of South Africa sexual and gender diversity position statement: contributing towards a just society. *South African Journal of Psychology, 44*(3), 292-302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246314533635.

In this report we focus on persons who self-identified as gender non-conforming, many of whom form part of the LGBTQIA+ community. In our review we focus on the literature on violence against the LGBTQIA+ community as this has been most extensively covered and includes violence as a result of non-conformity to norms around gender and sexual identities. South African scholars concur that the high rates of sexual, gendered and homophobic violence in SA are not isolated from the country's history of systemic violence through colonisation and apartheid.[12] The systematic violence inflicted on persons who do not conform to norms around gender and sexuality is still visible in the form of hate crimes, which seek to psychologically, physically and emotionally harm individuals based on their gender and sexual identity.[13] Psychological and emotional targeting can range from subtle microaggressions based on assumptions of gender identity to explicit and derogatory language aimed at isolating or harming the dignity of the individual, and even physical violence.[14] Women in the LGBTQIA+ community, and particularly black women within this community, are subjected to extreme forms of sexual violence, which has been called "corrective rape", where rape is used as punishment for a woman's sexual orientation or gender identity.[15] The prevalence of GBV in SA is historically fuelled by the racist, homophobic and sexist ideologies of the apartheid system, and the remains of this system continue to manifest in the violence perpetrated against black women and those who do not conform to normative ideas around sexual and gender identity and expression.[16] The following section will explore how these themes in GBV research enter the online space.

1.2 GBV AND THE ONLINE SPACE

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence, also referred to as online gender-based violence, is a relatively new phenomenon brought about by the increased use of social media, the development of information technology and the growing accessibility of the internet.[17] Like GBV, TFGBV disproportionately affects women, girls and members of the LGBTQIA+ community.[18] Scholars studying TFGBV

12. Boonzaier, F. (2017). The Life and death of Anene Booysen: Colonial discourse, gender-based violence and media representations. *South African Journal of Psychology, 47*(4), 470-481. https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246317737916; Gqola, P. D. (2015). Op. cit.; Kessi, S., & Boonzaier, F. (2018). Centre/ing decolonial feminist psychology in Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology, 48*(3), 299-309. https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246318784507

13. Barker, K., & Jurasz, O. (2018). *Online Misogyny as Hate Crime: A Challenge for Legal Regulation?* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429956805; https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201804/b9-2018preventioncombatingofhatecrimeshatespeecha.pdf

14. Youth Policy Committee Gender Working Group. (2021, 2 August). Hate Crimes against Members of the LGBTQIA+ Community in South Africa. *SAIIA.* https://saiia.org.za/youth-blogs/hate-crimes-against-members-of-the-lgbtqia-community-in-south-africa/

15. Koraan, R., & Geduld, A. (2015). "Corrective rape" of lesbians in the era of transformative constitutionalism in South Africa. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal, 18*(5), 1930-1952. https://doi.org/10.4314/pelj.v18i5.23

16. Snodgrass, L. (2016). The sins of the father: Gender-based violence in post-apartheid South Africa. *Commonwealth Youth and Development, 14*(2), 57-70. https://doi.org/10.25159/1727-7140/1798; Morrell, R., Jewkes, R., & Lindegger, G. (2012). Hegemonic Masculinity/Masculinities in South Africa: Culture, Power, and Gender Politics. *Men and Masculinities, 15*(1), 11-30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X12438001; Kessi, S., & Boonzaier, F. (2018). Op. cit.; Mokgwathi, K. (2021). *Situating Southern African Masculinities: A Multimodal Thematic Analysis of the Construction of Rape Culture and Cultured Violence in the Digital Age of #MenAreTrash & #AmINext?* Ohio University. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ohiou1620124202447593

17. Vlahakis, M. (2018). *Breaking the Silence: Ending Online Violence and Abuse against Women's Rights Activists.* Womankind Worldwide. https://www.womankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/breaking-the-silence-policy-briefing.pdf

18. Iyer, N. (2021). Alternate Realities, Alternate Internets: African Feminist Research for a Feminist Internet. In A. Powell, A. Flynn, & L. Sugiura (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Gendered Violence and Technology.* Palgrave Macmillan Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83734-1_6

have reported that this form of violence is a growing problem internationally. However, more research is needed to understand its effects on survivors, particularly in SA, where there is a dearth of research on TFGBV.[19]

TFGBV is rooted in systems of gender inequality, oppression and patriarchy, and it is used as a tool to advance unequal power relations and discriminatory social norms.[20] As such, international research indicates that the prevalence of TFGBV in women's lives has become an expected part of their online interactions, where hate speech and harassment are used against them daily.[21] Dunn (2020) highlights how intersecting marginalised identities make certain groups targets for TFGBV.[22] Tsandzana et al. (2021) also discuss how GBV is rapidly permeating online spaces, presenting as an extension of the epidemic faced by women in southern Africa.[23] This suggests that the well-researched interplay of racial and gendered violence may also be reflected in the online space in South Africa.

While there is no doubt that online spaces are a site for violence, they are also a site for resistance, where groups can mobilise and come together to discuss social issues on an equal footing. However, the documentation of and literature on such resistance is not abundant, as existing literature tends to focus on violence and victimisation. Further, the literature on the experiences of black African women and gender non-conforming journalists and bloggers doing work on feminist issues suggests that online attacks on these populations are rapidly increasing, particularly in the context of the "shadow pandemic" of violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic.[24] Reporting to the UN General Assembly on "The Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity" in 2017, the Secretary General wrote: "Women who cover topics such as politics, law, economics, sport, women's rights, gender and feminism are particularly likely to become targets of online violence".[25]

While online resources, such as dating applications, may circumvent the possibility of highly prevalent physical danger, these resources are not well-researched.[26] Simultaneously, dating applications that are designed to maximise

19. Dunn, S. (2020, 7 December). *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Overview.* Centre for International Governance Innovation. https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/SaferInternet_Paper_no_1_coverupdate.pdf

20. Vlahakis, M. (2018). Op. cit.; Mokgwathi, K. (2021). Op. cit; Dhrodia, A. (2018). Unsocial media: A toxic place for women. *IPPR Progressive Review, 24,* 380-387. https://doi.org/10.1111/newe.12078

21. APC. (2015). *Technology-Related Violence Against Women – a briefing paper.* APC. https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/HRC%2029%20VAW%20 a%20briefing%20paper_FINAL_June%202015_0.pdf; Henry, N., & Powell, A. (2015). Embodied harms: gender, shame, and technology-facilitated sexual violence. *Violence Against Women, 21*(6), 758-779. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215576581

22. Dunn, S. (2020, 7 December). Op. cit.

23. Tsandzana, D., Nkowami, B. T., Matimbe, T., Mandala, C., Dube, P., Nyamweda, T., Njuguna, W., & Brown, E. (2022). *Understanding Online Gender-based Violence in Southern Africa: An eight country analysis of the prevalence of digitally enabled gender-based violence.* Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria. https://www.chr.up.ac.za/images/researchunits/dgdr/documents/resources/FINAL_v_Understanding_oGBV_in_Southern_Africa.pdf

24. Lewis, D., Hussen, T. S., & van Vuuren, M. (2013). Exploring new media technologies among young South African Women. *Feminist Africa, 18,* 43-64. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48725818; Carlsson, U., & Pöyhtäri, R. (2017). *The Assault on Journalism: Building knowledge to protect freedom of expression.* NordPub. https://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1168137/FULLTEXT01.pdf

25. Posetti, J., & Shabbir, N. (2022). *The Chilling: A global study of online violence against women journalists.* International Center for Journalists. https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/ICFJ%20Unesco_TheChilling_OnlineViolence.pdf

26. Mfeka, L. (2020). *Tap and Go (meet) – Examining Identity Construction in Queer Partner-seeking Virtual Environments Within Johannesburg.* Loughborough University London. https://doi.org/10.17028/rd.lboro.13251281.v1; Dhrodia, A. (2018). Op. cit.

the safety of gender non-conforming persons have been used for targeted hate and life-threatening crimes.[27] The experiences of black women and of those who do not conform to gender and sexual norms contain a range of contributing factors to be considered, as their experiences online are not isolated from this societal complexity. These experiences necessitate relevant research into how they use the internet against GBV. For this reason and to establish an inclusive criteria and obtain a diverse sample, we chose to work with black participants self-identifying as women or gender non-conforming. This choice is not meant to generalise the experiences of either of these groups nor the LGBTQIA+ community in its entirety but to offer an analysis of depth and complexity as a contribution to the growing literature on TFGBV.

We aim to contribute to the knowledge on perspectives from lower- and middle-income countries by focusing on the experiences of people living on the African continent, their experiences of TFGBV, and the effects of this form of violence on their online experiences. Existing research on the demographics in southern Africa relates to social media applications such as Facebook and messaging applications such as WhatsApp.[28] Far fewer inquiries have been made into TFGBV on private telecommunication, such as direct messaging on dating applications. Additionally, the literature on black women's experiences in this context, in SA, is underdeveloped. Scholars have in fact highlighted that women, people of colour and sexual and gender minorities are unevenly represented on dating applications, and are more prone to the potential harm and violence produced within these contexts.[29]

Minimal research seeks to contextualise GBV within South Africa's broader history of colonialism, and more recently, apartheid. We recognise the need for an exploration of the role of whiteness and a broader concept of violence, one which centres the everyday experiences of women and gender non-conforming persons. Additionally, existing research scarcely explores the myriad systemic factors taking effect when black women journalists dedicate their work to anti-GBV coverage.[30] We are therefore taking a decolonial feminist approach in our research, one which centres black women and gender non-conforming persons' experiences and their resistance against online violence, and understanding of their own experiences.[31] Thus, we aim not only to look at their experiences of TFGBV, but also the resistance to TFGBV both online and offline.

27. De Barros, L. (2024, 13 April). Beaten, Strangled and Robbed: New Grindr Gang Syndicate Cases in Durban. *MambaOnline.* https://www.mambaonline.com/2024/04/13/beaten-strangled-and-robbed-new-grindr-gang-syndicate-cases-in-durban/; Dhrodia, A. (2018). Op. cit.; OUT. (2024, 29 January). Op. cit.; Barker, K., & Jurasz, O. (2018). Op. cit.
28. Dunn, S. (2020, 7 December). Op. cit.; Tsandzana et al. (2022). Op. cit.
29. Filice, E., Abeywickrama, K. D., Parry, D. C., & Johnson, C. W. (2022). Sexual violence and abuse in online dating: A scoping review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 67,* 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2022.101781; Henry, N., & Powell, A. (2016). Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence: A Literature Review of Empirical Research. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 19*(2), 195-208. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838016650189; Khumalo, Z., & Lamola, O. (2022, 9 July). Warning against gay dating app Grindr after users fall victim to robbers, rapist. *News24.* https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/warning-against-gay-dating-app-grindr-after-users-fall-victim-to-robbers-rapist-20220709
30. Chiumbu, S. (2022). Reporting Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: A Decolonial Gaze on Women Journalists in South Africa. In G. Daniels, & K. Skinner (Eds.), *Women Journalists in South Africa.* Palgrave Macmillan Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-12696-3_3
31. Boonzaier, F. (2019). Researching Sex Work: Doing Decolonial, Intersectional Narrative Analysis. In J. Fleetwood, L. Presser, S. Sandberg, & T. Ugelvik (Eds.), *The Emerald Handbook of Narrative Criminology.* Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78769-005-920191037; Kessi, S. (2019). Towards a Decolonial Psychology: Defining and Confining Symbols of the Past. *Museum International, 71*(1-2), 80-87. https://doi.org/10.1080/13500775.2019.1638032

2.

Methodology

2.1 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

What are black women and gender non-conforming persons' experiences of TFGBV?

Sub-questions
- From a decolonial feminist perspective, how does TFGBV affect the experiences of black women and gender non-conforming persons on digital platforms?
- Based on the diversity of identities, realities and lived experiences of our participants, how do we begin to understand how power is embedded in technology and how technological power facilitates and sustains the continued existence and perpetuation of violence and abuse online?

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our study employs decolonial feminism as its theoretical framework. The decolonial feminist framework aims to centre the individual experiences of participants by considering the effects of the overlapping issues of gender and race due to the social hierarchies upheld by colonialism.[32] Moreover, the framework aims to bring forth the narratives of women and gender non-conforming individuals, narratives which have historically been silenced or erased. Decolonial feminism requires us to acknowledge the role that slavery, colonialism and apartheid have played in how we engage with gender, sexuality and identity more broadly. Acknowledging these things assists us in understanding the meanings attached to being gendered, racialised and classed beings.[33]

We understand individual experiences and identities to be intertwined, the two thus influencing one another and therefore, these influence each other.[34] For instance, race is constantly left out in research and conversations around sexual and gendered violence.[35] By using decolonial feminism as its theoretical lens, our research attempts to resist the ongoing silencing and overlooking of race and racial histories in the discourse on gendered violence, sexism and racism, as these contribute to the neglect of black women's intersectional experiences of violence. Through a decolonial feminist lens, we seek to theorise

32. Boonzaier, F., & van Niekerk, T. (2019). Introducing Decolonial Feminist Community Psychology. In F. Boonzaier, & T. van Niekerk (Eds.), *Decolonial Feminist Community Psychology.* Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20001-5_1
33. Segalo, P., & Fine, M. (2020). Under lying conditions of gender-based violence—Decolonial feminism meets epistemic ignorance: Critical transnational conversations. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 14*(10), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12568
34. Garry, A. (2011). Intersectionality, Metaphors, and the Multiplicity of Gender. *Hypatia, 26*(4), 826-850. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01194.x; https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf; Velez, E. D. (2019). Decolonial Feminism at the Intersection: A Critical Reflection on the Relationship Between Decolonial Feminism and Intersectionality. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, 33*(3), 390-406. https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.33.3.0390
35. Mhlangulana, A., Zimri, C., Thusi, K., Mpofu, T., Mosime, L., Daya, J., Chirape, S., Carr, K., Boonzaier, F., & Behari-Leak, Y. (2024). Researching Violence, Researching Ourselves: Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence. *Social and Health Sciences, 22*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.25159/2957-3645/12038

and acknowledge black African women and gender non-conforming persons' experiences of violence, specifically at the intersection of the individuals' race and gender. It is necessary to acknowledge the experiences of black women and gender non-conforming persons who have been and continue to be disproportionately affected by GBV. We seek to acknowledge the complexities of black women and gender non-conforming persons' experiences of GBV on online platforms, how these experiences are influenced by their intersecting identities and how these experiences intersect with other experiences of inequality.

2.3 METHODS

Research design

In alignment with critical feminist psychological approaches, we employ qualitative research methods.[36] As such, our research approaches centre questions of politics, positionality, reflexivity and power. Our deployment of qualitative methods is supported by a decolonial feminist research framework, which additionally centres criticality.[37] The flexibility of this design allowed for the identification of new insights and offered a more exploratory approach, one considered ideal for relatively underexplored topics such as the one on which the current research is based.[38]

Narrative approach

Feminist research critically examines the relationship between participants and researchers. As decolonial feminists, we acknowledge the power dynamics that exist within the research process. Thus, it was mandatory for us to practice reflexivity and to consider our positionality throughout the research process. Decolonial feminism requires that we take our gendered, racial and identity markers into consideration when working with participants, especially in research that studies experiences of violence. As such, components of this project (research on black African women journalists and bloggers, and research on black South African women and gender non-conforming persons' experiences of TFGBV) incorporated a narrative approach to centre the participants' narratives.[39] Colonial legacies have and continue to maintain power through the production of knowledge, and by determining whose knowledge is legitimised in academia.[40]

36. Gergen, M. (2017). Qualitative Methods in Feminist Psychology. In C. Willig, & W. S. Rogers (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology.* Sage.
37. Harari, T., & Pozzebon, M. (2023). Metodologia otra: Challenging modern/colonial matrix with Paulo Freire and decolonial thinking. *Management Learning, 55*(1), 63-80. https://doi.org/10.1177/13505076231204293; Manning, J. (2018). Becoming a decolonial feminist ethnographer: Addressing the complexities of positionality and representation. *Management Learning, 49*(3), 311-326. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507617745275
38. Stebbins, R. A. (2001). *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences.* Sage. https://methods.sagepub.com/book/mono/exploratory-research-in-the-social-sciences/toc
39. Wang, C. C., & Geale, S. K. (2015). The power of story: Narrative inquiry as a methodology in nursing research. *International Journal of Nursing Sciences, 2*(2), 195-198. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnss.2015.04.014
40. Kessi, S., & Boonzaier, F. (2018). Op. cit.; Boonzaier, F., & van Niekerk, T. (2019). Op. cit.

By centering our participants' voices in narratives of their experiences, we have documented the knowledge of black women's and gender non-conforming persons' experiences of violence in general society and in online spaces and brought it into the academic space, a space that frequently only recognises some types of knowledge as legitimate.

The use of a narrative approach has been pivotal in allowing the participants to resist the silencing of their narratives about their experiences of TFGBV as it foregrounds the agency of the tellers but also takes questions of positionality seriously. Thus, decolonial feminism seeks to reassign power to marginalised persons by prioritising knowledge created through the centring of these persons and their experiences, and by working against knowledge created through the colonial gaze.[41] In both projects that this paper draws on, we collaborated with participants through the research process. At times, this involved sharing the interview schedule prior to our interviews and an open discussion built on whichever stories our participants told, methods through which we allowed them to drive the agenda and direction of the interviews. This also enabled participants to form solutions to the problem of online violence, as agents of change.[42] In the PhD study, participants were also invited to contribute to a report, which will be used to influence policy at the social media platform level. The report will be sent to content moderators and developers as a way of raising awareness around the safety concerns of their platforms.

Digital archiving

In the first phase of the study on black African women journalists and bloggers' experiences of TFGBV, digital archiving was used to collect supporting digital evidence of these individuals' experiences of TFGBV. This supporting digital evidence consists of screenshots taken from blogs and journalists' posts on the internet. All of the screenshots were anonymised, i.e. all the names and identifiers were removed from all the screenshots used in this project. Further, Aphiwe, the researcher, approached the Women for Change team to obtain consent to use the screenshots in the project as proof of experiences of TFGBV. All of the screenshots on the report are from the Women for Change page. These screenshots are used as evidence of the violence experienced by the team when they post about issues affecting women, GBV in the main.

41. Kessi, S., & Boonzaier, F. (2018). Op. cit.
42. Kiguwa, P., & Segalo, P. (2019). From Where We Stand: Reflecting On Engagements With Decolonial Feminist Community Psychology. In F. Boonzaier, & T. van Niekerk (Eds.), *Decolonial Feminist Community Psychology.* Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20001-5_9

Participants and sampling

The convenience sampling method was used for research on black women's experiences of dating applications and research on journalists and bloggers' experiences of TFGBV. The same method was used when recruiting our gender non-conforming participants, whose experiences were centred around the Facebook platform. Persons interested in participating had to meet the inclusion criteria of being a black woman or a person who identifies as gender non-conforming. In this study, we use the term "black" to refer to individuals belonging to racial groups previously oppressed under the institutionalised racial divisions of the apartheid regime.[43] We also use the term "black" in lowercase to counter the essentialisation of race and racial categorisation. "Women" and "gender non-conforming" include all persons who self-identify as women and gender non-conforming, respectively. We interviewed 15 participants aged 18 to 35 for the dating application study. Given that these were the only specifications, we had participants with various other identities. These included individuals who are mothers, LGBTQIA+, academics, creatives, active community members and those who have experiences living abroad. Additionally, as recruitment was done through social media, our participants represented a variety of South African backgrounds and cultures. Our sample however was skewed toward black women specifically and we recognise that this limits our data and the possible conclusions we can draw about the online experiences of those who identify as gender non-conforming.

The research project on black African women bloggers and journalists, being a PhD project, is still ongoing and is currently in its second phase. The first phase involved digital archiving, as discussed in the above subsection. The second phase has involved conducting narrative interviews about the participants' experiences of TFGBV. The recruitment criteria for this project are that participants must: (1) identify as a black African woman or gender non-conforming person, (2) reside and work in one of the South African Development Community (SADAC) countries, (3) be over 18 years old, (4) identify as a journalist or as a blogger and (5) have written about or be doing work on feminist issues. The participants in this research were recruited through social media posts on LinkedIn, Facebook, X (previously Twitter) and Instagram. Participants who met the above criteria responded to the advert, indicating their interest in participating. Participants were then contacted via the contact details they had provided, and interviews were arranged.

The honours research, which focused on experiences of TFGBV on dating applications, was completed and submitted for honours evaluation in November

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43. De Barros, L. (2024, 13 April). Op. cit.; Isaacs, S., & Nel, J. (2023). *Experiences of online gender-based violence amongst black and/or queer South African influencers: A Decolonial feminist inquiry.* University of Cape Town.

2024. The first phase of the PhD research on journalists and bloggers' experiences of TFGBV was completed in December 2024. The second phase, which will be narrative interviews, commenced in January 2025 and is still ongoing. Additionally, our work has led to the recruitment and inclusion of two additional Master's projects, initiated in 2025. The data from these projects is not yet available and is therefore not included in this report, as this work will continue until 2026. The data included in this report thus includes work from the completed honours project (13 interviews) and digital archival data and some narrative interview data (3 interviews) from the ongoing PhD project.

2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Potential risks

GBV has been recognised as a sensitive area of study.[44] Several scholars have raised concerns about the risks, safety and sensitivity of research around GBV.[45] Thus, we approached data collection on TFGBV with this in mind. As decolonial feminists, we have been careful about how we engage with the topic of violence. We have deeply reflected on and engaged with questions of what it means for us to respond to violence and trauma as persons who also share these experiences. All of the safety measures implemented in our research were in the best interests of the participants. Research participants were provided with a list of psychological and GBV-related contacts and resources they could access if they needed psychosocial assistance after the interviews. On the whole, we approached the research being mindful of our feminist decolonial approach, one that considers ethics in a more expansive way and not just as a regulatory exercise. In our research lab, the Hub for Decolonial Feminist Psychologies in Africa, we have had long-standing conversations about the harms of academic research that often only works in the interest of researchers' and academics' careers.[46] Our work at the Hub has been deliberate in challenging these harmful approaches to research by attending to how we can utilise this work to advance social justice and form meaningful engagements with those who took the time to participate in our study.

44. Sikweyiya, Y., & Jewkes, R. (2011). Perceptions about safety and risks in gender-based violence research: implications for the ethics review process. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 13*(9), 1091-1102. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23047513
45. Heise, L., Ellsberg, M., & Gottmoeller, M. (2002). A global overview of gender-based violence. *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics, 78*(1), S5-S14. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7292(02)00038-3; Jewkes, R., Watts, C., Abrahams, N., Penn-Kekana, L., & García-Moreno, C. (2000). Ethical and methodological issues in conducting research on gender-based violence in Southern Africa. *Reproductive Health Matters, 8*(15), 93-103. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(00)90010-7
46. Mhlangulana, A. et al. (2024). Op. cit.; Mhlangulana, A., Adams, M., Hole, L., & Boonzaier, F. (2025, 28 April). Black women, gender non-conforming persons and technology-facilitated gender-based violence: A decolonial feminist exploration. *GenderIT.* https://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/black-women-gender-non-conforming-persons-and-technology-facilitated-gender-based

Informed consent

Informed consent is an essential principle to abide by in qualitative research. Informed consent refers to ensuring that participants have a clear understanding of what the study is about, the risks and benefits involved, as well as all other necessary information related to the study.[47] All the details of the study and how the research was conducted were shared with the participants through the consent form and a debriefing that took place before and after the interviews. Participants were given the choice to remain anonymous. Participants were also reminded of their ability to withdraw from the study at any point.

Confidentiality

Literature has shown that research on GBV has the potential risk of leading to more violence against those who participate in studies on GBV.[48] Additionally, one of the major concerns in research around GBV and TFGBV is confidentiality.[49] Thus, for online interviews, our participants were given the option to have their cameras on or off. If participants opted to keep their cameras on or meet in person, their identities were only known to the research team, who conducted the interviews themselves. The participants were also given the option to be assigned a pseudonym. All usernames and profile pictures of third parties were removed from the screenshots retrieved from the digital archival phase of the data collection (screenshots that served as evidence of TFGBV). This was done to protect the identities of the individuals who posted these comments, and also because the researchers did not obtain consent to use these comments for research purposes, even though they are easily accessible, public content. All of the data from the research is kept in a password-protected OneDrive folder under a UCT domain. Thus, the data can only be accessed by the research team for this project.

Lastly, as decolonial feminists, we aim to hold ourselves accountable to our participants and their stories throughout the research process. Accountability for us means fulfilling the promises we have made to our research participants and ensuring that participants' stories and information are protected. As a way of maintaining accountability, the participants have (and will continue to) receive their transcripts for review. This process allows them to have a final say over how they are represented in the final analysis and the report. Additionally, we intend to share the final reports with the participants as per our promises to them.

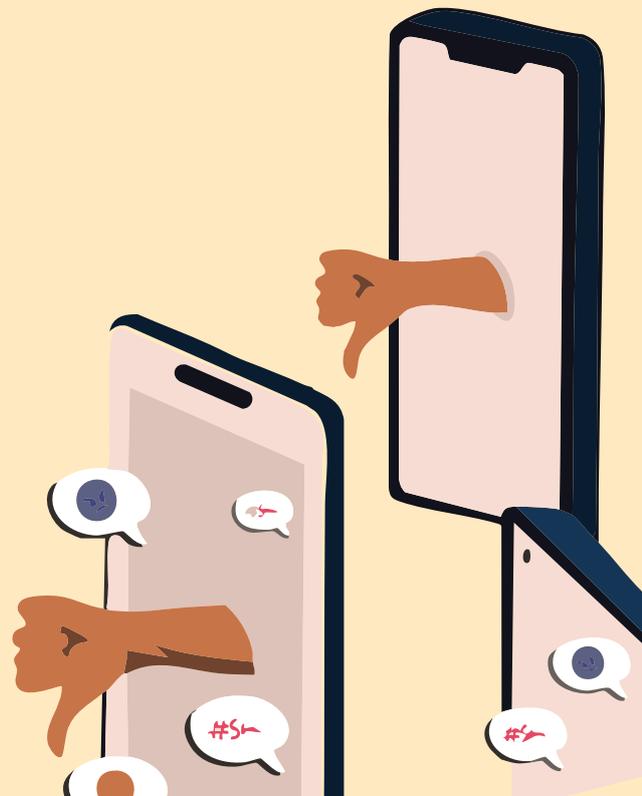47. Klykken, F. H. (2021). Implementing continuous consent in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 22*(5), 795-810. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941211014366
48. Segalo, P., & Fine, M. (2020). Op. cit.
49. Mokgwathi, K. (2021). Op. cit.

3.

Data analysis

What follows is an analysis and discussion of our larger FIRN-funded project in which data collection is still ongoing. The PhD project is still ongoing and will be completed in 2026. Additionally, as we work with the emerging data, we will work to integrate it more closely with the literature, integrating a stronger decolonial feminist lens as we proceed. Below, we present the themes that emerged from our analysis of 15 interviews with black South African women and gender non-conforming persons from both projects as well as a preliminary digital archival analysis of responses to feminist blog posts. These themes are as follows: (1) the normalisation of violence online, (2) dehumanising, racialised experiences online, (3) the policing of self, (4) offline implications of online violence and (5) delegitimising feminist issues. In the analysis below, pseudonyms are used to ensure participants' identities are protected.

3.1 THE NORMALISATION OF VIOLENCE ONLINE

In this theme, we explore the notion of normalised violence against black women and gender non-conforming persons online. This normalisation is evident in the offline manifestations of GBV, and our data shows that the online space is not exempt from this problematic culture as the normalisation of GBV permeates the online space.[50] We note the nuances of the normalisation of violence against the participants based on what they shared about their experiences on social media platforms and dating applications. While violence is normalised in both online dating spaces and social media more generally, respondents on dating applications also articulate the normalisation of violence to the point of it being considered almost "acceptable".

Feminist activists, researchers and knowledge producers have long articulated the nature of gendered violence as something that is deeply intertwined with structural power, in the form of patriarchy and coloniality.[51] The depictions of structural violence can be seen in traditional news media, advertising, institutional communications, policies and many other social structures and discourses.[52] One of our participants, True – a working single mother who has lived both in parts of South Africa and in Europe – observed this during her time in South Africa and abroad. Active on social media since her teenage years, she related this to the normalisation of online violence in the following way:

> I think there's definitely a culture… I hate to say it, but music and media and stuff which make sex so much more available, I guess. We're [on] social media, you can find porn on Twitter, you can find porn on TikTok.

50. Ibid.; Mkhize, G., & Vilakazi, F. (2021). Rethinking gender and conduits of control: A feminist review. *Image & Text, (35)*, 1-22. https://doi.org/10.17159/2617-3255/2021/n35a10; Orton, B. (2018). *Women, Activism and Apartheid South Africa: Using Play Texts to Document the Herstory of South Africa. Emerald Publishing Limited.* https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78754-525-020181009
51. Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System. *Hypatia, 22*(1), 186-209. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4640051
52. Victor, C. J. et al. (2014). Op. cit.

> So, it's like it's almost that the removal of sex and sexual identity being
> something sacred and where it's so easily handed out that it almost stops
> being [sacred]. That, I feel on some level people don't see it as harassment
> because it's so readily available to them.

True saw the hypervisibility of sexual content across various channels as central to the experience of social media users and as creating a situation in which sex is seen as being more "available", thus breeding a culture that normalises the expectation of sex being "handed out" and that understands women's bodies to be freely accessible. In the quote above, True alluded to the entitlement which drives unwanted sexual advances and how this entitlement is linked to the availability of sexual content online. This paints a picture whereby the misogynistic objectification of women, present in our everyday offline experiences, is fed by the hypervisibility of sexual content in online spaces, where people can take action against one another without ever being confronted with the reality of the other's humanity. This contributes to a situation in which sexual violence online is seen as potentially more "normal" and "acceptable" than it would be in person.

Another participant, Amina, a student with a passion for sociopolitical justice, shared how her struggles with self-confidence and belonging caused by her experiences of fatphobia, xenophobia and being economically disadvantaged have affected how she presents herself and navigates society. She shared how her experiences influenced her interactions on dating applications and social media. She recounted how social media has been a space where violence is perpetrated through directed and harmful manipulation and unsolicited commentary on her personal life. In the following quote she describes how, as a young black woman, one's consent to engage with someone online is interpreted as also consenting to how they may harm you. "I think when you're in an active conversation with somebody on social media there's a perception that you consent to that harm because you are in conversation with that person." As per Amina's account, violence is expected and accepted when one engages in conversation with someone on social media. There is also a sense in which victim-blaming frames the harm on social media. Victim-blaming narratives and discourses are extremely pervasive in men's accounts of their violence, in online and other communications, in media reporting on GBV and even in women's accounts of their experiences of GBV wherein they actively resist these discourses.[53] It therefore makes sense that this framing is echoed in the online space, or rather, amplified by the online space.

53. van Niekerk, T. J., & Boonzaier, F. A. (2019). An Intersectional Analysis of Responses to Intimate Partner Violence in Two Marginalised South African Communities. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies, 10*(1), 26-48. https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs101201918805; Boonzaier, F. A., Carr, K., & Matutu, H. (2019). Communicating About Sexual Violence on Campus: A University Case Study. *African Safety Promotion, 17*(1), 17-31; Carr, K. (2020). Op. cit.; Boonzaier, F. (2008). `If the Man Says you Must Sit, Then you Must Sit': The Relational Construction of Woman Abuse: Gender, Subjectivity and Violence. *Feminism & Psychology, 18*(2), 183-206. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353507088266; Boonzaier, F. (2019). Researching Sex Work: Doing Decolonial, Intersectional Narrative Analysis. In J. Fleetwood, L. Presser, S. Sandberg, & T. Ugelvik (Eds.), *The Emerald Handbook of Narrative Criminology.* Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78769-005-920191037

The idea that online spaces constitute places where GBV is more permissible is articulated by respondents, more so on dating applications specifically. As a femme-presenting non-binary individual who also identifies as queer, Luna shared how people on dating applications were more comfortable with using harmful and presumptuous language about their queer identity. This is language that Luna pointed out would otherwise be more "filtered" in-person, thus alluding to the nuances in the manifestations of violence and the spaces that they occupy. According to Luna, the men who utilise these applications behave in more violent ways with little to no shame. "I feel like it's even more so than on specific dating applications, once something exists with the premise of dating and hooking up, they lose the shame or like they lose the thing that tells them, "Hey, you probably shouldn't say that." Luna suggested that if they were to interact with these men in other contexts, they might behave differently, which is a particularly stark example of how violence is normalised on online platforms and dating applications specifically.

Luna's narrative also intersects with how the question of consent was raised by Amina earlier – that is, the assumption that consenting to engaging on a dating app opens up the possibility for other forms of interactions that are undesirable. Below, Eustacia expressed how common TFGBV is on dating applications. She said: "But I think for the most part it happens to almost everyone. It's just that in the black community, when a guy does something like that, it's not reprimanded like it's almost like it's okay. It's expected." Eustacia's reflection highlights complexities around the intersections of race and gender. As someone who identifies as black, she experiences the endorsement of GBV within the spaces she interacts in and occupies as a black South African woman. Eustacia highlighted her views on the normalisation of GBV, which often "coddles" men, thus not holding them accountable for wrongdoing.[54] Her construction of the violence as being "expected" within her community is arguably paralleled by the "boys will be boys" discourse universally employed to justify GBV at a societal level. However, Eustacia's reflection, in which she highlights race as an important factor, points to how she feels unsupported and unprotected within her own community. It highlights the fact that she experiences her race as a compounding oppression in this regard.

The distrust in community, society and the justice system was raised by most participants. For example, this is echoed by another participant, Fun, who describes herself as a digital sociologist:

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54.   Boonzaier, F. A. (2022). Spectacularising narratives on femicide in South Africa: A decolonial feminist analysis. *Current Sociology, 71*(1), 78-96. https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921221097157; Boonzaier, F., Huysamen, M., & van Niekerk, T. (2020). Men from the 'South': Feminist, decolonial and intersectional perspectives on men, masculinities and intimate partner violence. In L. Gottzén, M. Bjørnholt, & F. Boonzaier (Eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Intimate Partner Violence.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429280054

> Even being hit can be swept under. The people can make dockets disappear. So, I think when we think about how online violence might be seen as trivial or you're just being too much. How? How when you're in an environment where physical forms of violence can be taken "unseriously", digital forms of violence can be taken even less seriously.

Fun drew a link between the normalisation of violence against black women in online spaces and the normalisation of violence against this population in general society. She further suggested that this normalisation might even be worse in online spaces because "physical forms of violence can be taken "unseriously" and digital forms of violence can be taken even less seriously". Fun suggested that because TFGBV does not always produce visible effects on its survivors, this exacerbates it being normalised and not being taken seriously. Fun here articulated that GBV, which is challenging to report, is often dismissed, and perpetrators are often not brought to justice despite physical evidence. Further, online violence poses the additional challenge of persuasively "proving" the extent to which this violence is harmful. Likewise, scholarship confronts a gap in recognising online violence as part of the conventional definition or understanding of GBV through women's narratives about the harm of psychological, verbal and other forms of abuse.

Another participant, Lilly, shared the same sentiment regarding how reporting instances of online violence does not often yield results because the police do not categorise or acknowledge them as violence that warrants their attention. "For me, it's how they react to things. 'Oh, you're not dead or you're not injured; it's not for us. Just go to the court.'" She further elaborated on her experiences with the police in Nyanga, a township in Cape Town, as well as her general experience with getting justice on the matter:

> The police, they should do their jobs properly, try to investigate and give time in cases, not just to [say], "Oh, so something like this happened on Facebook? Oh, okay, let's leave it for the court." So, if I'm actually telling the police that I'm also being harassed, maybe assaulted physically, so that I feel like that has to do with them more than the court. That they should intervene because now it's not actually happening on the social media platform. It's also the reality now.

Lilly, like the majority of participants, expressed a problem faced by many with the justice system, where reporting GBV leads to a dead end, thus leading to distrust and doubtfulness.[55] Through inaction, the justice system perpetuates

55. Gonzalez, C. M. F. (2022). "I Went From Being Held Captive to Captivity Again": How the Criminal Legal System Fails Black Women and Girl Survivors of Sex Trafficking. *Qualitative Criminology, 11*(3), 293-327; Hester, M., Williamson, E., Eisenstadt, N., Abrahams, H., Aghtaie, N., Bates, L., Gangoli, G., Robinson, A., Walker, S., McCarthy, E., Matolcsi, A., & Mulvihill, N. (2023). What Is Justice? Perspectives of Victims-Survivors of Gender-Based Violence. *Violence Against Women, 31*(2), 570-597. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231214772

the normalisation of GBV in the sense that legal recourse is likely to benefit the perpetrator by not holding them accountable and by dismissing the survivor of GBV through inaction.[56] Frustration with the ignorance of the police seems to dominate experiences of TFGBV, with participants expressing that they were often dismissed and, in some cases, felt obligated to present physical evidence, such as in Lilly's case above.

The evidence from participants' stories shows that the "culture" of accepting GBV as a norm also exists in the case of TFGBV. Just as with offline GBV, there are underlying gendered, racial and patriarchal dynamics perpetuating violence against black women and gender non-conforming persons. The disregard that is experienced by those who report experiencing TFGBV is exacerbated by the fact that the police do not give these matters the attention warranted, as they are not classified as violence. Thus, like offline violence, injustice constructs online violence as normal because its effects are deemed intangible and thus not worth pursuing or simply unpunishable.

3.2 DEHUMANISING, RACIALISED EXPERIENCES ONLINE

Given the normalisation of violence online, it is no surprise that many respondents shared multiple dehumanising experiences, in their experiences of dating online, respondents recount how they feel sexualised and objectified. In this theme, particularly, we see how objectification is entangled with racism and how that manifests on dating applications. The story of Sara Baartman is a heart-wrenching example of how the racist and sexist ideals of slavery and colonialism resulted in the systematic abuse and objectification of a young black, indigenous woman for the simple reason of her being a black woman.[57] Critical scholars have recognised how the colonial imaginary hyper-sexualised black women, fetishising their bodies. This, coupled with the ways in which ownership is entangled with racism in our history of slavery, means that there is a sense in which black women's bodies are thought as available, or as Gqola articulates it, "unrapable" due to black women's presumed promiscuity.[58]

In alignment with our decolonial feminist approach, we see this history as haunting the experiences articulated by respondents. Below, True spoke about how Europeans fetishise and perceive her in alignment with the colonial imaginary around race and African identity:

56. Kiguwa, P., & Segalo, P. (2019). Op. cit.; Swaine, A. (2003). Traditional Justice and Gender Based Violence in Timor-Leste. https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.1440231
57. Victor, C. J. et al. (2014). Op. cit.; Abrahams, Y. (1998). Images of Sara Bartman: Sexuality, Race, and Gender in Early-Nineteenth-Century Britain. In R. R. Pierson, & N. Chaudhuri (Eds.), *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race,* Indiana University Press.
58. Gqola, P. D. (2015). Op. cit.

Is it that you really liked me, or are you fetishising me in some way? And then, especially coming from like the Europeans and stuff that are coming here [South Africa], like they're kind of coming here for an African woman. And what is like there's something there that you have a saviour complex, has nothing to do with me.

True hinted at how whiteness is violent and turns violent as it comes into contact with her identity. She hinted that she is constructed as needing saving and as a sexual conquest by the European men she refers to. True's experience highlights an important issue underreported in our knowledge-making around GBV. Research on the perpetration of GBV in South Africa is overly focused on poor black communities, yet here we see the presence of white men, Europe and the Global North in a black woman's experience of feeling dehumanised, sexualised and being situated in relation to a "saviour". True further evidenced this by giving examples of the terms used to describe her: "Ebony chocolate goddess, jungle fever queen." True quoted these as some of the names she was called by white men on dating applications, names she felt were used to fetishise and dehumanise her.

This experience of fetishisation and dehumanisation is echoed by Joy below, who demonstrated additional nuances in the way that online spaces are a place where men go to do things they wouldn't want people to know about. Here, we see Joy's statement as alluding to the racism that is entangled in the fetish: "Outside, they don't want to be seen with a black girl. They don't wanna be seen with me, but because of their fetish and what they see, their secret desires and guilty pleasures, obviously, the first place they're gonna go and seek that is online." In the context of South Africa, where Joy has publicly dated white men in parts of Johannesburg and Cape Town, she recognised these men's desire for her as something they see as "secret" and a "guilty pleasure", implies shame around their connection to a black woman. These are the kinds of everyday violence respondents face online, and the implication is often that it is perpetrated by white men, Europeans and foreigners who position black people as "other" as they construct them as a novelty. Another participant, Ella – a student and young professional thriving in Stellenbosch, who has found Christian dating sites to be the most effective in connecting with peers and potential partners – spoke about the implications these kinds of online experiences have had for her. "These men also live literally over large bodies of water overseas. And yet I still feel that I could potentially be objectified. It makes me feel, to a degree, more unsafe because of that." Thus, online dating spaces do not feel safe for black women. Their identities are regularly objectified, fetishised and constructed as something to be ashamed of.

Black women's experiences of gendered violence often intersect with other forms of violence. They still experience racism and sexism in the various spaces

they occupy, including dating applications.[59] The online space is one in which the fetishes documented in the colonial project find expression. In these ways, black women's experiences online and in general society are shaped by their identities and South African history in important ways that point to how whiteness, and the Global North, are not only complicit in ongoing patriarchy and coloniality in South Africa but are actively perpetrating it.[60] Additionally, what Ella shared reflects on the way that the online space obscures the perceived proximity and access between interacting platform users. The fact that she shared that her safety was threatened without being in the same geographical location as the men she interacted with suggests that danger can transcend physical proximity by way of the online space. Therefore, Ella's excerpt supports the theory that the online space presents another platform for potential harm, one with complex manifestations of danger.[61] The objectification of black women's bodies here is reminiscent of the perceived promiscuity, deviance and, ultimately, disposability of black bodies in colonial contexts; bodies that are, therefore, merely viewed as commodities.[62] Under the colonial order, gender is hierarchical and racially differentiated.[63] Consequently, in the South African context, the remains of the apartheid system also present themselves through the violence perpetrated against black women.[64] Thus, we see that online violence reflects the "culture" of normalising gendered violence in South African society.

Contrarily, but equally as harmfully, with black women using the online space for anti-GBV activism, participants report being villainised and persecuted for their content. We see the experiences of violence being normalised in online spaces are shared by journalists and bloggers. ZKD, a blogger in South Africa, shared that they have experienced online spaces as hostile towards black women who post about feminist issues. "The space continues to be aggressive towards people like us. I think that perhaps many of us, we have experienced that. We have been targeted as black women." ZKD's statements mirror what has been found in previous research. Literature suggests that black women journalists and bloggers experience more violence than their white colleagues, and that the violence often targets their race and gender.[65] What ZKD's statement suggests is that not only are they targeted as a black women blogger at the intersection of their identities, but that this is further exacerbated by the anti-GBV content that they produce.

59. Snodgrass, L. (2016). Op. cit.; Youth Policy Committee Gender Working Group. (2021, 2 August). Op. cit.; Zviyita, I., & Mapudzi, H. (2023). An Intersectional Analysis of the Experiences of Women Journalists in Selected African Newsrooms. *Global Media Journal, 13*(26), 1-18. https://globalmediajournaltr.yeditepe.edu.tr/sites/default/files/sayilar/2023_bahar/03_itai_zviyita_hatikanganwi_mapudzi_0.pdf
60. Koraan, R., & Geduld, A. (2015). Op. cit.; https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf; Snodgrass, L. (2016). Op. cit.; Pagel, J. M. (2021). Op. cit.; Youth Policy Committee Gender Working Group. (2021, 2 August). Op. cit.
61. Tsandzana, D. et al. (2022). Op. cit.
62. Boonzaier, F. (2018). Challenging Risk: The Production of Knowledge on Gendered Violence in South Africa. In K. Fitz-Gibbon, S. Walklate, J. McCulloch, & J. M. Maher (Eds.), *Intimate Partner Violence, Risk and Security: Securing Women's Lives in a Global World.* Routledge; Victor, C. J. et al. (2014). Op. cit.; Gqola, P. D. (2015). Op. cit.
63. Lugones, M. (2010). Op. cit.
64. Youth Policy Committee Gender Working Group. (2021, 2 August). Op. cit.; Koraan, R., & Geduld, A. (2015). Op. cit.; Snodgrass, L. (2016). Op. cit.
65. Posetti, J., & Shabbir, N. (2022). Op. cit.

3.3 THE POLICING OF SELF

The participants' experiences of online violence have been shown to have effects beyond just specific interactions. These experiences of online violence have affected ways of interacting online that the participants deem safe, consequently often resulting in self-censorship as a protective measure.[66] A constant anticipation of experiences of violence combined with a lack of accountability for perpetrators creates a hostile online environment. To navigate this, many participants censor the content they post on online platforms to avoid experiences of violence. Moreover, participants share the need to also monitor and restrict their movements offline in cases where violence progressed to physical spaces. For instance, Lilly shared the difficulties she has encountered with restricting her movements in the residential area she lives in to avoid being exposed to the harassment she experienced once more. "It makes me scared in a way that now I have to think, what is this person gonna do to me? Always, I have to expect the unexpected. If I go that side [the area in which she was harassed] sometimes, then I'm not even interested." She further shared how she has established the necessity of restricting her interactions with people in the general public as a way to ensure self-preservation. "In terms of public, I would say I'm very much of an isolated person. I'm not that friendly because I think I have learned so much, and the way that I carry myself, I think it has changed me." From Lilly's statements, two coping mechanisms emerge, with one coming as a reported consequence of physical violence and the other of online violence.

Firstly, Lilly expressed what scholars identify as "mental mapping", a measure often practised by those who have experienced gender-based violence.[67] This involves an individual categorising physical places and spaces wherein they feel safer and free to move, versus those that they associate with a violent encounter.[68] Lilly constructed a similar safety map where she avoids visiting the area where she is most likely to come across the person who went from hacking her Facebook account to cyberbullying her, and ultimately harassing her in person. Secondly, self-censorship is a reported consequence of TFGBV, which often results in a review of how one represents oneself in one's online profiles, as well as feeling obligated to make changes to one's presentation to change interpersonal appeal.[69] Another participant, Miles, shared how they were affected by the homophobia and cyberbullying that they had experienced through the hacking of their Facebook account. "I think it affected my self-esteem, it affected

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66. Bhuptani, P. H., & Messman-Moore, T. L. (2019). Blame and Shame in Sexual Assault. In W. T. O'Donohue, & P. A. Schewe (Eds.), *Handbook of Sexual Assault and Sexual Assault Prevention.* Springer Cham. https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23645-8_18; Eaton, J. (2019). *'Logically, I know I'm not to blame but I still feel to blame': Exploring and measuring victim blaming and self-blame of women who have been subjected to sexual violence.* University of Birmingham.
67. England, M. R., & Simon, S. (2010). Scary cities: Urban geographies of fear, difference and belonging, *Social & Cultural Geography, 11*(3), 201-207. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649361003650722
68. Klykken, F. H. (2021). Op. cit.
69. Baekgaard, K. (2024). *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Emerging Issue in Women, Peace and Security.* Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence/

how I express, it was as if I detached from being queer for a short period, up until I knew who was behind the fake profile." Miles' experience depicts the effects of TFGBV, which transcend the online space in which the violence began. This reminds us of the very real people behind the profiles, whose self-expression, safety and openness to online and offline engagement are all affected by exposure to online violence.[70] The above excerpts also demonstrate that the distinction between online and offline violence is indefinite when considering the consequences thereof. Moreover, Miles expressed how their queer identity was weaponised, resulting in self-censorship.

Another participant, Athira – who navigates being an arts student at the University of Cape Town as a young Muslim woman of Nigerian heritage – shared that initially, assumptions are often made of her based on her Muslim name and as an African woman on dating applications. Most of the experiences she shared allude to how her body is sexualised on dating applications:

> I had this photo where my chest was showing a bit, and anybody that matches is always like – no "hi" or "hello". It's always just, "Your boobs look great," and it's a very aggressive interest. It's like now I'm not, like, I'm putting up photos that I'm not looking great [in]. However, it's not showing too much… I still get the weird people, but it's definitely less than when I had photos that I really liked, or I thought were really great.

Because her body is sexualised, Athira finds herself policing her photos, choosing photos that show less of herself in the hopes that she will receive less sexualised aggression. We understand from this comment that Athira hopes to engage in a dating experience where she feels safer and is engaged more holistically, rather than a sexually motivated experience, and to achieve this, her experience makes her feel as though she must hide her body. There is a particularly long history of the sexualisation of black women's bodies, from the fixation on making a spectacle of their bodies as scientific commodities, to the violence, enslavement and expendability of black bodies during slavery, colonial times and apartheid.[71] Athira attempts to resist this through the way she represents herself in photos on dating applications; however, she communicates discontent with this, indicating to the interviewer that she wishes she could share the photos of herself she likes, yet she feels this is not possible.

Ultimately, based on the participants' narratives, the effects of online violence are

70. Hinson, L., Mueller, J., O'Brien-Milne, L., & Wandera, N. (2018). *Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: What is it, and how do we measure it?* International Center for Research on Women. https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICRW_TFGBVMarketing_Brief_v8-Web.pdf; Standish, K. (2023). *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence and Democracy.* Toda Peace Institute. https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-181_gender-based-violence-and-democracy_standish.pdf

71. Victor, C. J. et al. (2014). Op. cit.; Abrahams, Y. (1997). The Great Long National Insult: 'Science', Sexuality and the Khoisan in the 18th and Early 19th Century. *Agenda,* (32), 34-48. https://doi.org/10.2307/4066151; Agathangelou, A. M., & Ahmed, M. (2020). On the Question of Bodies, Flesh, and Global Racial Capitalism. In S. A. H. Hosseini, J. Goodman, S. C. Motta, & B. K. Gills (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Transformative Global Studies,* Routledge; Baderoon, G. (2018). Surplus, excess, dirt: Slavery and the production of disposability in South Africa. *Social Dynamics, 44*(2), 257-272. https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2018.1494243; Bakare-Yusuf, B. (1999). The Economy of Violence: Black Bodies and the Unspeakable Terror. In J. Price, & M. Shildrick (Eds.), *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader,* Routledge; Boonzaier, F. A. (2022). Op. cit.

seen to affect not only online and offline engagement but also the negotiation of both spaces, as well as the navigation of the representation of oneself in these spaces. In this regard, Lilly shared:

> It didn't help me in any way [the online reporting of the cyberbullying and hacking of her Facebook account], because if it did help me, maybe today I would maybe be doing something on social media or maybe having my own personal brand, or maybe I would have done so many things.

Like Lilly, ZKD shared how reporting her experience of violence on the blogging page was not helpful. Instead of getting assistance, they were asked to pay for better security on their page, further infringing on their freedom and adding an economic burden. In telling their story, KZD said:

> And I explained to them, I said this is gender-based violence that I am experiencing, and they said to me that I can only privatise my space once I've paid a certain amount of money to them, which I don't have. Well, I cannot afford it. And if I do that, then I'll be able to restrict certain people and whatnot. And since that time, I have not been able to pay that amount because I don't have it. And I said to them, please, you need to consider this because GBV is a global thing, and I know you guys are like a company from abroad, but come on. I mean, I want to continue with my blogging in peace.

These statements speak to how the participants are not only being violated by online violence, but their freedom to exercise and benefit from their rights as users of social media or dating applications have been infringed upon.

3.4 OFFLINE IMPLICATIONS OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

There are instances where the violence progressed from being inflicted online to an in-person violation. In the discussions above, the link between online and offline manifestations of GBV and the experiences thereof is recognisable. This link is especially evident in how participants carried themselves following their experiences of violence, as well as in how their interpersonal relationships were affected – especially if the perpetrator was known to them prior to the incident. For instance, Miles reflected on dealing with the time that a select few of their relatives outed their queer identity by taking down their protected Facebook posts and disseminating them to the rest of their family:

> In real life, I was miserable. I thought I found it difficult to trust people around me because it's like there's an imaginary thing that you are tied to, that you can't free yourself from. You are not true to your friends; your friends are not true to you. It's just as if you don't know whether you're coming or going.

Miles expressed, once again, the very real offline consequences of experiencing TFGBV. In a similar way to offline GBV, systems of community and safety are dismantled for participants, and they now have to navigate and "map out" a way forward that is safe and trustworthy. Lilly also shared the interpersonal conflict that stemmed from the hacking and use of her account to verbally abuse other Facebook users:

> Having to say all these things, swearing at people with my account, first of all. So, of course, that is gonna cause conflicts or fights between me and the people. Now the next thing I'm gonna see is people not talking to me because they were insulted, of which, maybe I do not know. Even I can't access my account because it's hacked. They changed the password. So, I do not know. All in all, there have been people insulted and people who were harassed also.

Below, Miles shared how they navigated uneasiness and feelings of betrayal due to receiving threats on social networks:

> I was not letting anyone from my family come near me. I think it puts an emphasis on the fact that we, most queer folks' families, you choose to be your family because of the stigma and discrimination that you face from those that gave birth to us and those that we grew up with or around. There's only people that you get to meet at a later stage in life, then actually go, sit around and yeah, create that very same you and your family. We are your family. We are going to protect you from everything.

Here, Miles engaged with the concept of a "chosen family" after experiencing discrimination from their blood relatives. Since the concept of chosen families is familiar to the LGBTQIA+ community, we see how Miles seeks refuge from their undesirable experiences in kinship formed through their identity.[72] This shows how their experiences are not isolated from their intersecting identities. During the interview, Miles shared that their identity as a practising traditional healer also came into play when navigating their interpersonal relationships following the hate crime. They reported experiencing demands to access their services from their blood relatives even though they were wronged. What this further solidifies is that Miles' intersecting identities are not isolated from their lived experiences even beyond the instances of TFGBV.

Similarly, Lilly shared how her relationships have been affected by her experiences, as well as her perception of herself and the spaces she occupies. "Now it's also affecting my relationship with my mother, because now, I can't go

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72.   Roberts, T., Haueisen, S., Jones, A. D., Yensch, G., & Smith, T. (2023). Building a Family: An Exploration of Queer Resilience Through the Formation of Family. In J. M. Koch, E. E. Townsend-Bell, & R. D. Hubach (Eds.), *Identity as Resilience in Minoritized Communities: Emerging Issues in Family and Individual Resilience*. Springer Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38977-1_3; Le Vay, L. (2019). Queer Futures: Chosen Families and Alternative Intimacies. In L. Le Vay (Ed.), *Surrogacy and the Reproduction of Normative Family on TV*. Palgrave Macmillan Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17570-2_5

to my mother's house because of a certain person. This thing is also affecting my mother, it's affecting my partner, it's affecting my whole life, personally, and it's taking too much of my time." Although scarcely documented, interpersonal networks are heavily affected as a consequence of TFGBV, and ZKD echoes Lilly's statement: "It really had an impact because it separated our family like that." Both Lilly and ZKD's statements evidence how TFGBV is not an individual issue. TFGBV also has ripple effects on those around the survivors. The multiple connectivity feature of the internet allows attackers wide access to many people, including survivors, within a short period of time, thus affecting not just the survivor but also those who are in close proximity to them.[73]

With regard to navigating interpersonal relationships following exposure to online violence that progressed to an in-person encounter, Lilly said:

> The whole experience has changed me into a different person because now I'm no longer the same person. I'm so anti-friendly, I don't want too [many] friends in my space. I don't want too [many] people in my space. I don't want too [many] people wanting to know about my life, or maybe what I do, or how I get to live every day. And I'm only, most of the time, at home, I'm always inside the house. And yeah, I mean, I guess I had to deal with everything that was happening. I'm still dealing with [it].

What is suggested by the participants' reflections is that TFGBV needs to be viewed through a broader lens, with an appreciation of the complexities of the experiences and the resulting consequences. Neither one of these factors can or should be isolated. Furthermore, similarly to GBV, TFGBV tends not to be an individual experience. The violence and its effects also trickle down to those nearest to the survivors.

3.5 DELEGITIMISING FEMINIST ISSUES

Strongly related to the issue of normalising TFGBV was how respondents described the delegitimisation of feminist issues. Respondents indicate how their experiences of GBV, and the outbreaks of violence they see on social media, are minimised by the systems that they seek help from. For instance, speaking up against the violation of women is often met with scrutiny, and audiences seldom advocate for the perpetrator to be held accountable. Echoing this, our archival research demonstrates how people's comments on feminist blog posts seek to minimise and delegitimise the claims made therein. This theme represents ways that the online space and offline space interact with one another in ways that fail to support survivors of GBV, as well as feminist action and activism.

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73. Iyer, N. (2021). Op. cit.

Before delving into the delegitimising experiences of feminist bloggers, one of our participants expressed how delegitimisation also exists at the communal level, in the offline spaces that she occupies and social networks that she trusts. Below, Amina described how she spoke up against multiple women being taken advantage of, as well as how her mother experienced emotional turmoil in relation to these instances of sexual violation. Through taking action within her immediate community and amongst her relatives, she aimed to expose her stepfather's dishonest behaviour and his sexual misconduct against young women. In taking this story to his church, she had hoped to garner support in holding him accountable; instead, he was supported, while her motives and behaviour were met with scrutiny:

> Finding evidence of my stepfather cheating on my mom, he was entertaining relationships with multiple women on social media and using online platforms as a way to initiate physical, sexual interactions, and financial interactions. I took all the evidence and I shared it with his church members, hoping that they would hold him accountable. He was engaged with minors; it was paedophilic rape. Instead, he was condoned and he was offered immunity. There was a conversation going on like I'm the problematic one, that I have mental issues. How they accounted for that was that I had mental issues and that my agenda was to destroy the relationship between him and my mom.

In shifting the focus from her stepfather's misconduct to Amina's motives for exposing it, the church community, in this case, punishes feminist action, delegitimises Amina's concerns by placing them in the realm of "mental issues" and legitimises the behaviour of the perpetrator.

Similarly, Oni spoke about how GBV is minimised by the police. "They go and report a GBV case, and it's like, 'It's just a small bruise.' Like, what the hell? It's a bruise? She was beaten." We see the same normalisation of TFGBV in journalists and bloggers' experiences of TFGBV. Below, ZKD shared how she experienced TFGBV after speaking out about being violated by a politician. ZKD discussed how she started blogging as a way of finding healing from her experiences of GBV. In one of her blog posts, she shared her experiences of being violated by a well-known political figure. In response to her blog post, she experienced severe TFGBV, with some people threatening her safety. Below, she shared how one responder suggested that she should have known that this would be the reaction she would get when she spoke out against "people in positions of power":

> So, this is a backlash that I'm experiencing as a victim simply because I spoke out against somebody who's very well connected in the political space, right? So, I was busy talking about it and somebody made a

comment and said, "Yeah, well, we feel if you're going to be complaining about people in positions of power, then you need to make sure that you're always protected."
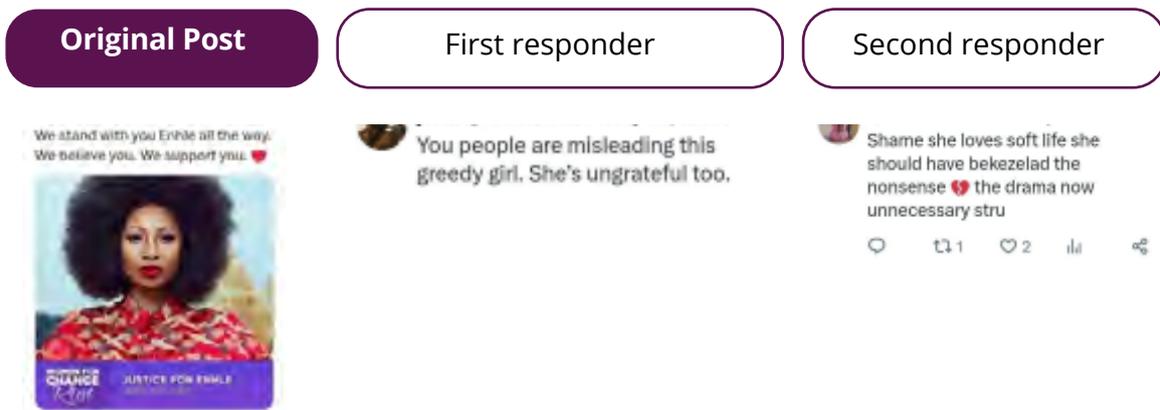
The perpetration of TFGBV against black women emphasises Lugones' assertion that black women have and continue to be placed at the bottom of the colonial order, where black women were (and are) not seen as natural women.[74] Thus, they continue to be subjected to extreme forms of sexual and gendered violence in all of the spaces they occupy.[75] We also see this devaluation in the normalisation of online violence against black African women and gender non-conforming persons, with participants being subjected to dehumanising racialised experiences online.

We see the continuation of violence and the delegitimisation of black women bloggers' voices and women's experiences of violence in our digital archival data. We see evidence of attackers delegitimising organisations' efforts to speak out about issues affecting women. In the posts below, the blog Women for Change showed support for Mbali Enhle (Mbali), a South African actress who shared her story of alleged financial abuse perpetrated by her (at the time of the post) estranged husband. The post received much criticism from those who disagreed with the support Mbali was getting. In response to the bloggers showing support for Mbali, one responder said the Women for Change bloggers were "misleading" Mbali and that she was "greedy and ungrateful" for taking her estranged husband to court. The responder suggested that Mbali should be grateful for what she receives and further, that the bloggers are in the wrong for showing her support. Additionally, the second responder further delegitimised Mbali's experiences by positioning her as someone who enjoys a lavish lifestyle. Even though the responder noted the relationship as being "nonsense", they suggested that Mbali should have stayed to enjoy the lavish lifestyle. Lastly, the second responder labeled the posting of the story as being "the drama", which they deem as being unnecessary. These comments suggest that women have an ulterior motive for disclosing/claims of abuse and, in so doing, they imply that the abuse itself is not real or not important. This narrative speaks to the silencing of women, bloggers and journalists working on feminist issues by delegitimising posts in support of survivors of violence.[76] Therefore, the work of organisations like Women for Change is delegitimised and deemed "unnecessary".

74. Heise, L., Ellsberg, M., & Gottmoeller, M. (2002). Op. cit.
75. Mendoza, E. (2016). Op. cit.
76. Sanusi, T. (2021, 17 November). Online Gender-Based Violence: What You Need to Know. *Global Citizen.* https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/what-is-online-gender-based-violence-2/

Original Post	First responder	Second responder

We stand with you Enhle all the way. We believe you. We support you. ♥️

You people are misleading this greedy girl. She's ungrateful too.

Shame she loves soft life she should have bekezelad the nonsense 💔 the drama now unnecessary stru

Similarly, ZKD shared that she is constantly ridiculed as a black woman blogger focusing on anti-GBV advocacy as a women's and human rights defender. "Society still looked at me and said, 'But why are we talking about this only now? Why are you only coming out now? Yeah, I see you are after a successful man, you're trying to break his career or something?'" This line of questioning once again reflects South African society's tendency to victim-blame instead of holding perpetrators accountable. Literature has suggested that judgment is the main reason why some victims do not report.[77] Victims fear being judged by those in their close networks and their communities. We see the same being reflected in survivors of TFGBV. Above, participants have shared experiences of a lack of support from those close to them. Some of those who fall victim to these incidents do not have the means to access formal support.[78] Thus, both victims and anti-GBV voices are shut down, scrutinised and ultimately villainised in the public's view as being the creators of a smear campaign against the men being accused.

The three frames below were taken from the Women for Change blog. Women for Change showed support for South African singer Moneoa and called for justice using the hashtag #justiceforMoneoa. Moneoa had shared her experience of being abused by one of her producers. In support of Moneoa, the Women for Change blog shared a post. The first and second respondents' responses questioned the reasoning for the writer's support. Both respondents implied that the only reason that the writer supported her was because she was a woman, thus normalising violence towards women by questioning the intention behind their support and reducing it to "Do you believe her because she is a woman?" The second response went as far as to call the writer "sexist" and the organisation "a sexist org" for showing their support and for writing about Moneoa's experience of violence.

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77. Hendricks, E. A., & Kanjiri, N. K. (2020). The upsurge in sexual harassment of female students in universities in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development, 9*(4), 157-175. https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2020/v9n4a7

78. Kiguwa, P., & Segalo, P. (2019). Op. cit.
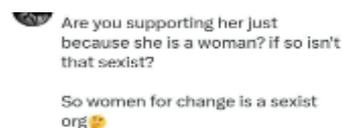
| **Original Post**	First responder	Second responder

Here we see the ways in which sexism is weaponised against feminist bloggers, in favour of minimising feminist issues. Rather than engaging in the prevalent issues of GBV, commenters derail the conversation by questioning the legitimacy of the claims and the organisation's motives for legitimising claims of GBV. This technique, of derailing conversations about feminist issues, is prevalent in our analysis of the *Women for Change blogs.*

On 25 August 2024, a young woman went missing in the small town of Potchefstroom. Her lifeless body was then found on 8 September 2024 after numerous social media posts circulated urging people with information to come forward to the police. Women for Change sent out an update on 9 September 2024, informing the public of the devastating news. The posts below are responses to the announcement of the death of Nomsa Jass. The writers of the blog were attacked and accused of being in support of foreign nationals attacking South African women (she had allegedly been killed by a Mozambican national). On the online blog, the commenters shifted the narrative from a case of femicide to a focus on the nationality of the attacker. The tragedy that befell the young woman was no longer the main issue of discussion. The post was no longer about her death but about the failure to mention the perpetrator's nationality, illustrating the intersection of anti-feminist attitudes with xenophobic ones.
In the first post, the perpetrator is hypersexualised and his humanity is questioned when he is labelled as having "evil desires", and as worshipping demons with "no regard for human life". Additionally, in both posts the perpetrator's citizenship is tied to their identity as a perpetrator. In the second post, the respondent uses clown emojis, which further negatively challenge the gravity of the post and the issue being reported.
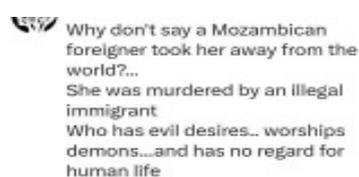
First responder	Second responder
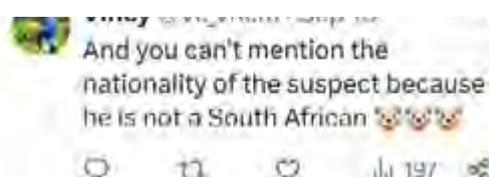
The second post given above assumes that the writers of the blog would have mentioned the perpetrator's nationality if they were South African. Both posts suggest that by focusing on reporting the tragic death of a young woman, the writers intended to protect the perpetrator by not mentioning their nationality. This focus further speaks to how nationalist ideologies reinforce masculinist ideals. Nationalist ideologies supplement heteropatriarchal knowledge systems of masculinity. In this way, the second respondent alludes to the idealised ways in which hegemonic masculinity is constructed and protected. This is an example of the kinds of abuse and trolling that women experience when they speak out about feminist issues.[79] The speaking out is often overly scrutinised and delegitimised, resulting in the undermining of those who challenge patriarchy and GBV. As a way of delegitimising the work done by the writers, the next post questions the writer's nationality.

> I am starting to suspect the admin of this account is a foreigner with fake documents.
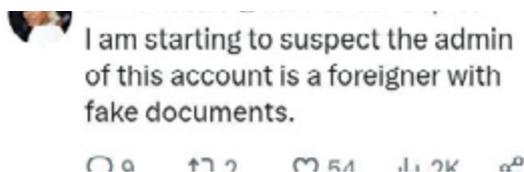
The intersection of anti-feminist attitudes and an anti-immigrant, xenophobic stance is made visible in the post above. The perpetrator's Mozambican identity has been used to shift the discourse from the violence experienced by and the death of the young woman, and used to attack the bloggers who have written about femicide.

We see the many barriers the participants face when attempting to address and resist GBV, whether it is experienced online or offline. In both online and offline spaces, these themes indicate how feminist action is severely discouraged and derailed. Despite social media's power as a tool for mobilisation, it also exists as a space in which patriarchy and anti-feminism are strongly enforced.

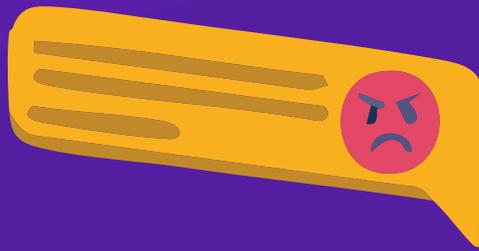79.   Lewis, D., Hussen, T. S., & van Vuuren, M. (2013). Op. cit.

4.

Closing remarks
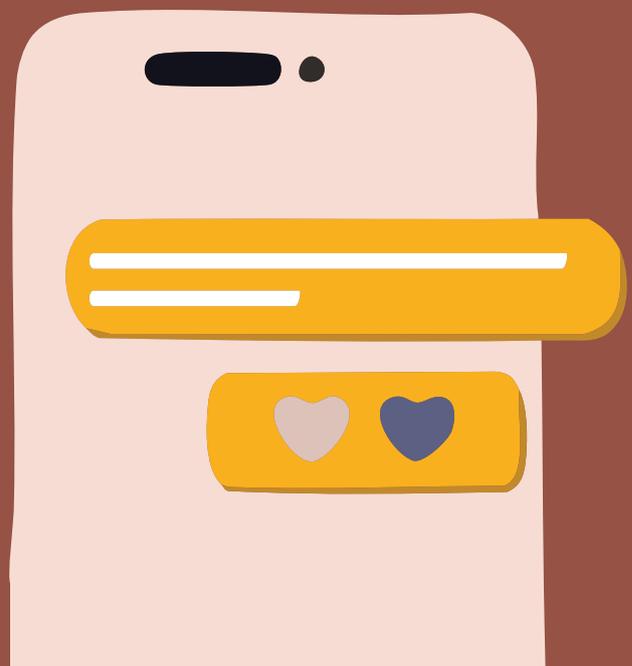
Emerging from our data thus far, there are indications that not only are online and offline spaces deeply intertwined, but that GBV is in some cases enabled by the online context. The ways in which feminism, social norms and women have worked to resist gendered violence in everyday offline interactions seem to have been circumvented by men who feel that their misogyny and violence are more acceptable online. This is particularly evident on dating applications. Additionally, feminist blogs face strong backlash online as many people with anti-feminist sentiments have easy access to platforms to share their views in direct relation to feminist work. This is more difficult to execute offline, and thus, just as social media can act as a tool for mobilisation around social justice, it can also be used as a harmful tool opposing the cause. In these ways, online spaces can feel particularly unsafe for women. Resultantly, we show how participants highlight the normalisation of violence against women online. In some cases, they suggest that social media and dating applications in particular engender more violence than other spaces, such as in society in general. The threads of victim blaming, and indications of how communities endorse TFGBV, demonstrate the precarity of women's safety online, the lack of support women have when facing TFGBV and the societal lack of feminist conscientisation around TFGBV.

Our analysis highlights complex implications for black women in particular and how online spaces can create a sense of privacy and perhaps "alter ego", to allow racist and harmful stereotyping and fetishisation to shape their online dating experiences. This is a particularly dominant expression of how coloniality enters online dating spaces for black women. Our ongoing analysis will pay special attention to how black women speak back to the coloniality they experience and how they use social media to their benefit. Additionally, we hope to explore in more detail how these experiences may be nuanced by gender identity and heteronormativity. Related to this work, our future and ongoing research explores how identity construction and the protection of masculinities in men's online discourses surrounding GBV produce gendered violence. This research aims to highlight how men's perspectives contribute to the relevance and amplification of TFGBV. Additional future research explores the under researched growth of violence against gender non-conforming people on online platforms in South Africa, and their navigation of these experiences.

*Black women and gender non-conforming persons and
technology-facilitated gender-based violence:
A decolonial feminist exploration*