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Transfeminist Perspectives: Beyond Cisnormative Understandings of the Digital Public Sphere

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Abstract

In this essay we highlight the value of transfeminist theory for understanding the digital public sphere. Transfeminism allows us to challenge the devaluation of femininity that affects all women and femmes, while specifically challenging the marginalisation of people whose gender expression does not match societal stereotypes of the gender and sex binary, particularly those who experience oppression on multiple axes. Building on existing intersectional approaches to social media, we demonstrate how transfeminism's capacity to deconstruct binaries, such as online/offline and public/private, and the essential concepts it provides us, such as transmisogyny and networks of care, are crucial for understanding the operation of contemporary transphobia as well as possibilities and opportunities for resistance and solidarity. Using two recent cases in the UK, we firstly consider the circulation of transphobic discourse in the hybrid media system through the onslaught of abuse faced by Trades Union Congress Policy Officer for Industry and Climate, trans woman Mika Minio-Paluello. Secondly, we reflect on the possibility of transfeminist counterpublics of care emerging from protests around Drag Queen Story Hours. This discussion is not meant to be exhaustive but rather a call to action for further transfeminist scholarship in this area.

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Introduction

Trans people in the United Kingdom are in a critical situation, facing an 'increasingly radicalised climate of transphobia' (McLean, 2021). The Conservative Government is considering rolling back trans people's protections against discrimination under the 2010 Equality Act by redefining 'sex' as 'biological sex' defined at birth, proposed by the country's own Equality and Human Rights Commission (ECHR) (O'Thomson, 2023a). It has also promised – albeit now delayed – guidance for schools that would, among other things, require teachers to 'out' any child questioning their gender identity to their parents (Akass, 2023). The United Kingdom has fallen several points in the rankings of LGBTQ + friendly countries (ILGA Europe, 2022). This context of intensified transphobia is inextricably linked to the (social) media environment, with the Council of Europe (2021) noting that it has been driven by 'vitriolic' press coverage. The number of trans-related media stories increased three-fold between 2012 and 2019, most of them negative (Baker, 2019). In reflection of the negative media coverage, the latest British Social Attitudes survey has recorded a 'substantial' fall in public support for trans people's rights between 2019 and 2022, 'largely triggered by the intense political debate and media discussion' (BSA 40, 2023: 39). Concurrently, hate crimes against trans people increased by 56% in 2022, which the UK's Home Office linked to discussion of trans issues on social media (Home Office, 2022).

The severe violence faced by trans people online and offline raises questions about how we understand social media's role in contemporary democracies. In this Open Forum piece, we ask how transfeminist theory can help to understand the role social media plays within the democratic public sphere. Often building on Jürgen Habermas' (1974) conception of the public sphere as an open and equal space for democratic deliberation, social media scholars have argued that it offers new opportunities for political participation (Barisione and Michailidou, 2017: 8; see also Bossetta et al., 2017). Social media has enabled people to communicate and mobilise in new ways, often across borders (Barisione and Michailidou, 2017; Michailidou et al., 2014), while also presenting new challenges for public trust through the proliferation of disinformation, bots, filter bubbles, and post-truth discourse (Bennett and Pfetsch, 2018; Conrad et al., 2022; Harsin, 2018). Feminists, most notably Nancy Fraser (1990), have challenged Habermasian conceptions of the public sphere as reproducing the historical divisions between 'public' domain traditionally associated with masculinity, and the 'private' domain associated with femininity. In so doing, Habermas' conception of the public sphere legitimises a hegemonic mode of domination that marginalises women from the status of democratic citizens (p. 62).

In relation to social media, intersectional and Black feminist critiques have highlighted the opportunities offered to, and exclusions faced by women, non-binary, agender and gender-variant people (Bailey, 2021; Galpin, 2022; Sobande, 2020). Charlotte Galpin (2022) has argued that an intersectional feminist critique of the digital public

sphere needs to start from the perspective of marginalised people to gain a full picture of social media's democratic potential, particularly by unpacking key binaries: public/private; online/offline; and national/international. For example, the literature often implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) constructs a binary between the so-called 'online' and 'offline' spheres as though these are easily distinguishable (Galpin, 2022: 164). The idea of an 'online' space separate from the physical world imagines, as Beth E. Kolko et al. (2000) have noted, a 'disembodied cyberself' dislocated from its situatedness within broader societal structures of power (p. 6). The interconnectedness of 'online' and 'offline' is visible both in the well-documented use of social media to organise collectively and across borders and in the close connection between 'online abuse' and physical violence. Yet, the impacts of social media on people's material well-being are poorly understood, especially for people experiencing multiple forms of marginalisation.

In the United Kingdom context of intense media transphobia and related attempted rollbacks of trans people's legal rights, and in the international context of far-right rallying against 'gender ideology' (Honkasalo, 2022; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017), social media is used as a central mobilising tool. In this essay, we ask how the application of *trans*feminist theory might deepen a theoretical examination of this status quo. In what follows, we first set out our understanding of transfeminism more generally, before applying it to the digital public sphere using two recent cases in the United Kingdom. First, we consider the circulation of transphobic discourse in the hybrid media system through the onslaught of abuse faced by Trades Union Congress Policy Officer for Industry and Climate, Mika Minio-Paluello, a trans woman. Second, we reflect on the possibility of transfeminist counterpublics of care emerging from protests around Drag Queen Story Hours. This discussion is not meant to be exhaustive but rather a call to action for further transfeminist scholarship in this area.

Transfeminism

We understand transfeminism as an intersectional feminism that centres the experiences of trans people, interrogating the marginalisation faced by people who do not conform to the socially constructed gender and sex binary, and its intersections with other forms of marginalisation based on race, class, sexuality, etc. (Enke, 2012; Koyama, 2003; Serano, 2013: 45; Stokoe, 2019). Transfeminism encourages us to 'reconsider the intersections of bodies, identities, and desires, since transgender theory severs the normalized link between the female sex and feminine gender whereby both sex and gender are equated with being oppressed by patriarchal rule' (Bettray, 2021: 147). While sex and gender are crucial factors of oppression under patriarchy, this oppression manifests in complex ways, including in the form of attacks on reproductive rights, which disproportionately impact cis women and affect trans people of all genders. This oppression also emerges through transmisogyny (Serano, 2012: 171), which is directed at trans women and femmes due to their gender, gender expression, and trans status. Femininity, as a form of expression or embodiment, is multifaceted, and can be an important aspect of selfhood (Dahl and Sundén, 2018; Serano, 2012), yet it is also a form of expression seen as inferior within patriarchal society. Different groups of women and femmes

experience different kinds of misogyny and different kinds of assumptions and pressures surrounding the femininity they perform or are expected to perform (see, for example, Bailey's excellent work on misogynoir, 2021). When we examine transmisogyny, we critically challenge the devaluation of femininity, which affects all women and femmes, while also challenging a system which punishes those whose gender expression does not meet conventional gender norms for their assigned sex. Similarly, Bailey's work on transmisogynoir (for example, Bailey, 2021) demonstrates that the specific gender policing directed at Black women and femmes (misogynoir) intersects with transmisogyny, placing Black trans people at higher risk of harassment and assault.

Transfeminism equally allows us to critically analyse how gender norms operate and to see new possibilities for gender expression and expansion, including the revaluation of femininity. Serano's (2012) work, for example, provides a nuanced approach to femininity, which recognises that women and girls can be pressured into femininity to comply with gender norms, while equally emphasising that femininity can be chosen and embraced by people of all genders (Serano, 2012; Stokoe, 2019). This approach facilitates more productive analyses of femininity as both an object of harassment and disdain on social media and an important aspect of identity around which counterpublics can be built. In the following, we first apply these transfeminist ideas to understanding anti-trans hate on social media, before considering the contribution of transfeminist theory to better understand what Fraser describes as 'subaltern counterpublics'.

Online abuse and 'trans-sing' public and private spheres

Using transfeminism, we can see how discursive marginalisation in the digital public sphere employs not just a generic exclusion of 'women' or 'femininity' but also weaponizes hegemonic femininity by including 'women' and 'the private' insofar as they uphold the sex/gender binary. As well as providing intra-community knowledge that enables scholars to identify patterns and think beyond binaries, transfeminism furnishes us with concepts, such as cissexism and transmisogyny, which highlight dynamics of oppression not named elsewhere.

Two of Fraser's critiques are relevant here. First, Fraser (1990) argues that informal inclusions in the public sphere take place through a masculine 'process of discursive interaction' (p. 63). The digital public sphere reproduces the participatory inequality observed by Fraser through online abuse that typically excludes feminised bodies from public debate (Galpin, 2022: 165). Online abuse takes particularly gendered and misogynistic forms through sexualised imagery and rape and death threats that can also translate into verbal and physical harassment offline (see also Jane, 2014). On a symbolic level, these messages can be seen as aiming to remove or reduce women's contribution to public life, and to return them to their supposed rightful place in the private sphere. Sexually violent messages are also shaped by intersectionality since Black, trans, or minority women or queer people are specifically targeted with the use of dehumanising language or through 'ontological delegitizimization' which, in transphobic discourse, suggests trans women 'have no basis on which to make the claims because they are simply not *real*' (Dickey, 2022: 17). Second, Fraser (1990) challenges Habermas' concept of 'public matters' that are subject to debate. Through subaltern counterpublics (further discussed

below), feminists have successfully brought issues such as abortion and domestic vio-
lence – previously considered 'private' issues – onto public agendas (p. 71). Public
debate is not, then, about delineating which issues are 'of common concern' and which
are not, but a process of deliberation that *determines* collective interests, identities, and
opinion (Fraser, 1990: 72) that could, therefore, encompass any number of topics. The
terms 'public' and 'private' actually serve to 'delegitimate some interests, views and top-
ics' over others, while privileging already dominant groups (Fraser, 1990: 73).

Mainstream approaches to citizenship rely on a public/private binary that relegates
women and queer people – anybody not conforming to the cis male rationality of the
public sphere – to the private sphere (see e.g. Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 1999). While
feminist approaches to citizenship have demonstrated the difficulty of demarcating
between public and private spheres (e.g. Lister, 2003), they have also replicated this
binary. As argued by Parul Priya and Anurag Kumar (2020), Fraser's (2020) conceptuali-
sation of the public and the private rests upon essentialising categories of men and
women (p. 38) revealing a 'dichotomous wavering between masculinity and femininity,
leaving no avenue for third gender and gender non-conformers' (p. 38). The same can be
said of other feminist critiques of the public/private binary, arguably until Sally Hines'
(2007) work on transgender citizenship demonstrated the way in which current frame-
works fail to acknowledge the spectrum of gender diversity lived and expressed by trans
people. The experiences of trans women, in particular, complicate the public/private
binary. If we take the issue of 'public' toilets, for example, these are simultaneously pri-
vate *and* public spaces, and a location where boundaries are drawn around who can exist
as a woman – in both the 'public' space of shared bathrooms, and in the 'private' space
of the toilet cubicle.

The UK context of media transphobia also offers an additional dimension to our
understanding of the online/offline spheres, reminding us that social media does not exist
independently of legacy media.[1] Instead, the logics of broadcast and newspaper journal-
ism have become hybridised with the social logics of online media (Chadwick, 2017). As
a result, legacy media are now oriented towards user engagement and 'shareworthiness'
for advertising revenue (Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2019). The social logic of news
media incentivises the generation of outrage that results in online abuse directed at
minoritized groups (Galpin and Vernon, 2023) as well as polarisation around social and
political identities. Pro- and anti-Brexit movements, for example, shared mainstream
news that supported their arguments and generated anger, in order to mobilise followers
and activists (Brändle et al., 2022). Mainstream politicians also use social media to
entirely circumvent journalists in communicating with the public by tweeting and shar-
ing content directly.

What Alison Phipps (2020) describes as the 'outrage economy' of the new networked
media system is utilised by mainstream feminist movements in a way that, in its per-
formative nature, translates into a political whiteness inhibiting genuine action (p. 86).
That is, for Phipps, some mainstream feminist movements rely on a reductively defined
understanding of who counts as a feminist, and in the case of movements like #MeToo,
who counts, and is allowed to be visible, as a survivor of sexual violence. #MeToo,
Phipps argues, prioritised prominent white survivors while simultaneously erasing the
Black feminist origins of the movement. In turn, trans-exclusionary feminists,[2] Phipps

(2020) maintains, rely on the generation of outrage 'through constructing all trans women as dangerous' (p. 104) in a way that inhibits meaningful action to improve women's lives and address intersectional forms of marginalisation.

One recent case in the United Kingdom is particularly illuminating. Mika Minio-Paluello, who is a trans woman, received an onslaught of abuse after appearing in a segment on ITV's News at Ten on the challenges of the United Kingdom's cost of living crisis in her capacity as the policy officer for industry and climate of the Trades Union Congress (TUC). After Minio-Paluello spoke about the impact of rising water bills on her as a mother. Rosie Duffield, a member of parliament for the Labour party who is a 'gender critical' commentator,[3] tweeted that Minio-Paluello 'is not a struggling mother' as 'biological men cannot carry a baby or give birth' (Billson, 2023). After hostile commentators pointed out that a breast pump could be seen in the room from which Minio-Paluello made her intervention during the interview, Minio-Paluello explained that trans women can breastfeed and that, prior to a cancer relapse, she had breastfed her child. Minio-Paluello then received further harassment and was reported to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children as presenting safeguarding concerns, because she stated that she had breastfed her child (Billson, 2023). While Minio-Paluello was targeted for harassment due to her trans status, womanhood, and identity as a mother, she also received a statement of solidarity from the feminist organisation Level Up (2023), who share her commitment to elucidating the impact of high living costs on women and mothers. As we will argue later in this essay, the Level Up statement of solidarity shows that transfeminism and intersectional feminism can provide a springboard for solidarity between marginalised groups.

While Alexa Degagne argues that rollbacks and limitations on trans rights serve to protect the 'cisnormative and heteronormative forms and functions of the private sphere' (Degagne, 2021: 499), we also observe an expansion of the public sphere beyond 'the masculine' foundations that feminist theorists have long made visible. Seen through a transfeminist lens, the online abuse and harassment faced by Minio-Paluello shows that acceptability of the 'private', and of femininity within the digital public sphere (here, acceptability of a baby being breastfed and related materials – the breast pump – being visible), is conditional on patriarchal norms being upheld (i.e. by someone who fits the acceptable profile of 'woman' and 'femininity'). The publicly acceptable femininity is one that is a cisheteronormative femininity, which is defined in opposition to the 'trans woman'. In anti-trans discourses, which often aim to preserve '[w]hite, heteronormative, and (re)productive families as prototypical citizens and the bedrock of the nation' (Murib, 2022: 2), cis men, defined biologically, are positioned as sexual threats towards cis women and girls, while trans women become conflated with men and, therefore, 'become an imagined source of threat to cisgender women and children' (Schilt and Westbrook, 2015: 31). In addition to challenging frameworks that conflate gender with sex (Serano, 2007), transfeminism enables scholars to critically examine pervasive violence against women, while addressing how tropes, which position cis women and girls as *innately* vulnerable, define womanhood reductively. Transfeminism also makes it possible to highlight political whiteness by centring the experiences of Black women and women of colour and making white women's capacity to be both victims and perpetrators of violence visible (Phipps, 2019: 13).

As well as pointing towards a long feminist history of refusing to reduce women to their reproductive capacity (Ahmed, 2017: 229), a transfeminist lens also allows us to critically analyse how transmisogynistic tropes worked to obscure the issues that Minio-Paluello appeared on television to discuss. The ITV news segment, which initially showed how class and wealth interact with parenthood and gender, leaving working-class mothers especially vulnerable to rising costs, became a battleground for who gets to call themselves a woman and a mother. As Alison Phipps (2020) has noted, in such discourses, trans women are positioned as the enemy of privileged women through a politics 'that does not challenge how neoliberal capitalism has created massive inequalities of distribution' (p. 107). In the case of Minio-Paluello, as we will show, transfeminism and intersectional feminism can provide spaces for solidarity and for anti-capitalist challenges to the status quo (Ahmed, 2017; Faye, 2022), which stand in opposition to anti-trans harassment and its function as a distraction from the material issues women, and people of other genders, experience during a cost-of-living crisis. Shon Faye (2022) speaks with great insight on the need for solidarity in the context of right-wing austerity and bitter debates around trans inclusion, which inhibit collective organising. Although the focus was drawn away from intersecting oppressions of class, wealth, gender, and parenthood with the attacks on Minio-Paluello drawing attention to her being trans instead, the feminist organisation Level Up put solidarity back on the agenda with their statement of support for Minio-Paluello and 'every mother who is doing their best in this cost-of-living scandal' (Level Up, 2023). The possibility of trans-inclusive feminist organising thus holds the potential for a more positive contribution of social media, as a means of developing, sustaining and promoting trans networks of care within subaltern counterpublics.

Transfeminist counterpublics as networks of care

The above example demonstrates how the gender binary is weaponised through discursive – and material – violence directed at trans people that, as Alyosxa Tudor (2023) suggests, is doing the 'labour of misogyny' (p. 295). Fraser (1990) had argued that there is 'emancipatory' potential in the public sphere despite its exclusionary mechanisms (p. 62). For Fraser (1990), in unequal societies, alternative discourses may be formed in 'subaltern counterpublics' that 'help expand discursive space' (p. 67) and bring feminist counter-discourses into the mainstream. Social media has created revolutionary new opportunities for trans people to share information, form communities, and mobilise for their rights; as Shon Faye observes, 'suddenly, platforms like Twitter allowed trans people access and an unfettered right of reply' (Faye, 2022: 11–12). For Akane Kanai and Caitlin McGrane (2022), feminists intentionally create online filter bubbles that exclude sexist and misogynistic discourse to allow 'focused feminist content and discussions' (p. 2). Black feminists have, likewise, observed social media's important role in facilitating practices of resistance for Black women that also traverse national borders to facilitate transnational community-building and political action (Bailey, 2021; Sobande, 2020: 106).

Counterpublics can, however, also produce different forms of exclusion for multiply marginalised people, for example, through the dominance of white/cis feminism (see e.g. Emejulu, 2018; Kanai and McGrane, 2020; Phipps, 2021; Priya and Kumar, 2020). The

role that the online parenting forum *Mumsnet* plays in UK anti-trans feminism highlights the need for greater theoretical clarity on subaltern counterpublics. Mumsnet, Katie Baker (2021) argues, is populated primarily by white, cis, straight and middle-class women who proudly proclaim they have been 'radicalised by Mumsnet' into their anti-trans views. Baker likens Mumsnet to the online 'manosphere' in which men with genuine anxieties are radicalised to blame their suffering on marginalised groups. Sarah Pedersen (2020) argues that Mumsnet should be considered a subaltern counterpublic 'central' to the women's rights movement, as a 'safe space for gender-critical voices'. Yet, as Baker points out, prominent British journalists are 'directly influenced' by Mumsnet, which also regularly hosts Question & Answer sessions with leading politicians. Counterpublic perhaps, but, in its alignment with the right-wing UK press and political parties, and considering the dominance of white, middle-class women on the forum, Mumsnet's self-proclamation as 'subaltern' reproduces the problems of representation that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010) raised in her influential text 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. In their 'speaking for' women, 'gender critical' spaces such as Mumsnet exert a kind of epistemic violence that silences the experiences of Black and Brown, trans, queer, working-class women.

What, then, from a transfeminist perspective, constitutes a subaltern counterpublic? For Priya and Kumar (2020), a trans counterpublic helps trans people to render visible the realities of trans lives while also providing a space for resistance and mobilisation against the heteronormative public sphere (p. 39). A recurring theme in transfeminism is also the need for networks of care (Malatino, 2020). This is not an additional or augmentative form of support: frequently it is the only form of support that mitigates the absence of sympathy for and knowledge about trans people in social, political, and medical institutions. Trans networks of care, accordingly, extend beyond the online 'filter bubbles' described by Kanai and McGrane (2020). In the UK-based zine 'Radical Transfeminism', the writer, Chryssy (2017), describes attending a 'restorative justice circle' at a Trans and Non-Binary Conference in Brighton, where to those around her she describes being stalked and being beaten up by a gang of men (pp. 14–15). In other awareness-raising forums, the activist Charlie Craggs (2019) and the writer/actor Travis Alabanza (2018) share similar experiences to their audiences, in the case of Travis, the processing of trauma via the dynamics of Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (see, Boal, 2004). The violence and harassment experienced by trans people in public spaces – online and off – are omitted from and by a legacy media whose narrative appears systematically to represent trans people as abusive virtual people (Gwenffrewi, 2022a). This underscores the need for networks and forums that allow trans people to share what they are experiencing, not only regarding online anti-trans abuse, but offline in public spaces too.

Recent far-right protests and counter-protests around Drag Queen Story Hours at UK public libraries can helpfully illuminate the ways in which a trans-inclusive counterpublic of care can arise in response to mobilisation arising from other, this time international far-right, counterpublics. The proceedings serve to highlight the value of trans counterpublics both online and offline when contending with far-right violence on the streets, as well as expose the absence of legacy media covering such violence. This includes groups with connections to US-based far-right groups such as 'Turning

Point UK' (TPUK) whose US equivalent has been criticised for its association with the 'alt-right' and 'white nationalists' (Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2018). TPUK, meanwhile, utilise anti-LGBTQ+ 'groomer' narratives to justify violence and shut down events (O'Thomson, 2023a; Walker, 2023). They were identified by a Trans Safety Network (TSN) journalist, Jess O'Thomson (2023b), as being the major organisers of the protests that would lead to several LGBTQ+ supporters being assaulted. In resistance to such groups and consistent with the 'ethos of mutual aid and solidarity with coalitional struggles' that underpins many trans activist networks (Radical Transfeminism zine, 2017: 3), counter-protests organised in support of Drag Queen Story Hour include trans activists. Following one incident in Lewisham, southeast London, on 24th June 2023, TSN reported that pro-LGBTQ+ counter protestors had gathered outside the venue of the Drag Queen Story Hour.

Two elements are particularly notable in this case. First, trans people were subjected to intimidation, harassment, and physical violence from far-right activists, with little apparent intervention from the police. Second, the framing by the national press, specifically the Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph, either vilified those supporting the event while portraying the far-right protesters as victims, or by distancing the significant organising role of TPUK from far-right associations. The former is encapsulated in the Mail's coverage and its headline 'Chaos at drag queen children's event: Trans activist smashes woman on the head with a wooden pole during clashes with conservative protestors who claim a concerned parent was 'stabbed in the hand' (Anderson, 2023). The opening paragraphs consolidate this broader legacy media trend of portraying advocates of trans rights as abusive, in contrast with anti-trans activists who are portrayed as people with 'concerns' (Gwenffrewi, 2022a, 2022b). The Telegraph's article is less hostile, with its headline 'Trans activists attacked' at children's drag queen story time event' (Sawer, 2023), although it later distinguishes TPUK, which it describes as a 'conservative youth organisation', from other far-right groups, including by characterising it as seeking 'to challenge the view that young people are inherently left-leaning and anti-free markets'. Furthermore, neither paper references the far-right violence aimed at the TSN reporter O'Thomson. With the Mail and Telegraph renowned for a general pattern of hostile anti-trans coverage and, therefore, avoided by trans networks, O'Thomson's (2023b, 2023c) reporting, as relayed onto the TSN network as well as on the website QueerAF, appears to have been the only news source informing trans networks via the TSN Twitter feed of what was taking place.

TSN's coverage also revealed the networks of care available to trans people and LGBTQ+ activists. This gathering included a group called South East London Love, which, according to O'Thomson, had organised 'in order to protect and care for the local queer community' and was 'supported by many in the local community, including the local church' (27 June 2023). The report also consolidates the importance of coalitional solidarity and networks of care in the trans community, as O'Thomson wrote:

> It's important that we learn from these events and understand that we are strongest as a community when we come together to look after each other and defend ourselves. I have never been as frightened as I was reporting on Saturday morning – and I am someone who has previously survived significant violence. However, even though I was just a journalist

who had travelled from halfway across the country to report, the queer community of Lewisham stood in front of me to keep me safe. I am grateful to them all, and I hope that their courage inspires the queer community across the country to come together, and to keep us all safe. (27 June 2023)

When systems of power occlude or negatively reframe trans experiences, transfeminist counterpublics of care can provide insight into these experiences, as in the case of O'Thomson's reporting. Similarly, that Lewisham's queer community supported queer and trans counter-protestors in the face of police and far-right violence reminds us that these counterpublics of care provide necessary support to groups that the police have historically failed to protect.

Towards transfeminist social media studies, towards transfeminist solidarity

This essay has demonstrated the value of a transfeminist lens for analyses of social media and its role as a digital public sphere. As an intersectional feminist approach, a transfeminist lens can build on the invaluable body of feminist work about social media and the (digital) public sphere. It allows theorists to critically unpack issues such as transmisogyny (Serano, 2012) and its impact both on individuals and on community organising, which are addressed less frequently or substantively in existing scholarship. This essay has pointed towards transfeminism's capacity to deconstruct binaries such as offline/online – as seen in our analysis of the interaction of online harassment and physical violence and harassment in the attacks at the Drag Queen Story Hour event–and public/private sphere – as demonstrated by our analysis of how online abuse around trans women breastfeeding, which would traditionally be seen as part of the private sphere was placed at the centre of the public sphere. The essay has equally indicated the capacity of a transfeminist lens to critically examine transphobic harassment and its discursive relationship to patriarchal constructions of appropriate bodily configurations, embodiments, and relationships, and to highlight the existence, and importance, of networks of care. As Galpin (2022) and Bailey (2021) have demonstrated, harassment on social media is often sexist, racist, transphobic, and ableist, and people who experience multiple forms of oppression tend to receive increased harassment targeting them on multiple axes. Intersectional frameworks therefore allow us to analyse the interplay of oppressive discourses online and possibilities for political engagement on social media. We extend these frameworks to emphasise the tools that transfeminism can provide for critical analysis of the digital public sphere.

In addition to its aim of expanding the theoretical tools available to scholars of social media, this essay has had a normative aim – to highlight, and call for, solidarity between feminist and transfeminist theorists, practitioners, and activists. As seen in Level Up's (2023) strong statement of solidarity with Mika Minio-Paluello, feminist and transfeminist solidarities allow us to refuse a politics of division and distraction, which obscures the necessary focus on how class, dis/ability, ethnicity, gender, race, and wealth shape people's everyday lives. Indeed, solidarity is a reoccurring theme found in much transfeminist work (Ahmed, 2017; Faye, 2022; Tudor, 2023): intersectional transfeminism encourages us to critically examine systems of power as they affect marginalised groups,

and to learn from other marginalised people. As transfeminists, we stand in solidarity with multiply marginalised people, and especially with multiply marginalised women, and we aim to use the tools that transfeminism supplies to critically examine intersecting forms of oppression as they manifest online and beyond. We would like to extend the invitation to all feminist theorists, activists, and practitioners to employ these tools in, and beyond, their analyses of social media.

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Notes

1. The term 'legacy media' refers to established news organisations, which use print or broadcast (TV or radio) formats. For more detail on the legacy media and its separation from and intersection with Internet news and social media, see, for example, *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media* (Jacobs and Shapiro, 2013).
2. Trans-exclusionary feminists, including feminists who identify as Trans Exclusionary Radical feminists, following the tradition of theorists like Janice Raymond (see, Hines, 2020: 705) and feminists who position themselves as gender critical feminists, are feminists who do not believe that trans women are women, that trans men are men, or that non-binary identities are legitimate (Pearce et al., 2020). For these feminists, trans people and their allies subscribe to a gender ideology that overlooks the significance and material reality of sex (Pearce et al., 2020: 681).
3. Gender critical feminists see womanhood and femaleness as 'biologically defined' and reject understandings of womanhood and femaleness that are based on social constructivist approaches to gender (Pearce et al., 2020). While trans people and allies sometimes refer to these approaches as trans exclusionary, some campaigners prefer the term 'gender critical' due to a perception of the term TERF as a slur and/or due to a desire to oppose what they term 'gender ideology'–the recognition of trans people as their lived genders (Pearce et al., 2020).

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