MISOGYNY ONLINE

A SHORT (AND BRUTISH) HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION:
THE WARNING
IS YOU WILL RECEIVE
NO WARNING

Men have turned on women online. As a result, the place that was supposed to be radically inclusive – a gender-, race-, and class-free zone – is now delivering female users a blunt message: GTFO. It stands for 'Get The Fuck Out' and is what increasing numbers of women hear when they turn up online. Sometimes the directive is delivered via these four letters alone. More often, however, the messages are embellished:

> You need a good smashing up the arse[1]
>
> sit on a butchers[2] knife so that you may never be able to reproduce[3]
>
> put a toothpick in your vagina, then thrust a wall as hard as you can[4]
>
> fuck off you boring slut … i hope someone slits your throat and cums down your gob[5]
>
> Back to the kitchen, cunt[6]

Perhaps you think the above should have been prefaced with a strong language warning. This, however, is not how it happens for women online. The Australian writer Clementine Ford doesn't receive an official heads-up before the flood of Facebook messages telling her she's a 'feral slut' and 'disgusting hairy lard whale' who should go kill herself, or wither and die from cancer (Ford, 2015). The British activist Caroline Criado-Perez had no forewarning her 2013 campaign to have the Bank of England review its decision to have an all-male line-up on bank notes would provoke tweets such as 'KISS YOUR PUSSY GOODBYE AS WE BREAK IT IRREPARABLY', and 'If your friends survived rape they weren't

raped properly' (cited in Criado-Perez, 2013; cited in Philipson, 2013). As for the American gamer and media critic Anita Sarkeesian, she's lost count of the number of times men have used social media to send photos or videos of themselves ejaculating onto her image (Sarkeesian, 2015a). Presumably none of these images contained strategically placed fig leaves or were preceded by 'Not Safe for Work' alerts.

It is, of course, ridiculous to imagine online attackers sending female targets warnings before calling them a 'filthy fucking whore' (cited in Doyle, 2011b) or 'dumb bitch ass cum dumpster' (cited in Jane, 2014b: 566). That would defeat the purpose. To a certain extent it would also be tautology in that many of these messages *are* types of warnings in that they put women on explicit notice that something worse than the message itself is about to happen. When the British Labour MP Stella Creasy supported Criado-Perez, for example, she received a tweet from someone threatening to hack off and eat her breasts (cited in 'If someone walked up and said, "I'm going to rape you", you'd ring 999: Stella Creasy fights the Twitter trolls', 2013). Another read: 'YOU BETTER WATCH YOUR BACK … IM GONNA RAPE YOUR ASS AT 8PM AND PUT THE VIDEO ALL OVER THE INTERNET' (cited in Creasy, 2013). Consider, too, the backlash to journalist Sady Doyle's (2011c) suggestion that gendered harassment has become an inevitable consequence of blogging while female. '**Simply put**,' the men's rights activist Paul Elam responded on his website *A Voice for Men*, '**we are coming for you. *All* of you**. And by the time we are done you will wax nostalgic over the days when all you had to deal with was someone expressing a desire to fuck you up your shopworn ass' (2011, emphasis in original). Warning? Threat? Either way, these are fighting words.

At this point, a natural question arises: are these graphic articulations of misogynist vitriol an internet phenomenon, or are they the types of things men have always said or thought about women in private? Without a skill set which includes the ability to retrospectively eavesdrop on private conversations, this query is impossible to answer. Many waves of feminist activism and theory do, however, support the contention that while the cyber medium may be new, the 'fuck you up your shopworn ass' message has ample historical precedent. It belongs to a far older tradition of gendered abuse and oppression: one that reduces women to their sexual – or lack of sexual – value and then punishes them for this self-same characterisation. Hot women are just asking for coerced sex because they are hot and leading men on. Women who are not hot enough are just asking for

coerced sex because they must be taught a lesson for lacking the obligatory requirement of hotness. As I will show over the course of this book, threats to rape women because of their supposed 'unrapeability' are circulating with astonishing frequency. At the same time men enthuse about wanting to rape certain women as if this is a high compliment.

Given that language offers us endless options for terrorising each other, it is extremely revealing that the rhetoric of sexualised, gendered violence has become so common online. Yet while the internet did not invent sexism, it *is* amplifying it in unprecedented ways. The self-publishing, participatory, and 'share' cultures that are hallmarks of contemporary digital domains mean that men who derogate women have the potential to reach vast audiences of like-minded allies. Under the right conditions, these coalesce into cyber lynch mobs, firing off near identical messages with the relentlessness of profanity-powered machine guns. At the height of the attack against her, Criado-Perez was receiving about 50 rape threats an hour (Battersby, 2013). Over the course of a single weekend, police gathered enough rape and death threats against her to fill 300 A4 pages (Blunden, 2015). In June 2012, Sarkeesian logged more than 100 screen shots of abusive comments over two hours. The latter represented only a fraction of the misogynist harassment she received in response to her attempt to crowd-source funds for a video series about sexism in video games (Sarkeesian, 2012a). During the vicious mob attacks on women in 2014 dubbed 'GamerGate',[7] the games developer Zoë Quinn accumulated 16 gigabytes of abuse (Jason, 2015). In 2016, Jess Phillips – the British Labour MP who helped launch a campaign against misogynist bullying – reported receiving more than 5000 Twitter notifications of people discussing whether or not they would sexually assault her. This included 600 rape threats over the course of a single evening (cited in Oppenheim, 2016).

In many sectors of the internet, graphic rape threats have become a lingua franca – the 'go-to' response for men who disagree with what a woman says, who dislike the way a woman looks, who are unhappy with the response to the unsolicited 'dick pics' they keep sending, or who simply believe, as one commentator recently put it on Facebook, that all women are 'cunts' who deserve to be 'face fucked' until they turn blue (cited in Chalmers, 2015).

Misogyny, in short, has gone viral.[8]

When women speak up about being attacked online, they are frequently instructed to stop complaining and toughen up. 'It's just words,' they are told. 'It's just the internet.' This book, however, shows that gendered hate speech

online has significant offline consequences. Female targets suffer socially, psychologically, professionally, financially, and politically. Gendered cyber-hate is having a chilling effect in that some women are self-censoring, writing anonymously or under pseudonyms, or withdrawing partly or completely from the internet. Further, more and more attacks which begin exclusively online are spilling into offline domains. This occurs via practices such as doxing (the publishing of personally identifying information, sometimes to incite internet antagonists to hunt targets in 'real' life), revenge porn (the uploading of sexually explicit material – usually of a former female partner – without the consent of the pictured subject), and – less commonly – swatting (the act of convincing emergency services to storm a target's home by lying about an ongoing critical incident).

When women go to police, the standard response from officers in many jurisdictions is to suggest they simply take a little break from the internet. Women are also being told to use less attractive profile photographs and to engage in less provocative politics online. Such advice is a form of victim blaming and shifts the responsibility for solving the problem of gendered cyberhate to targets. It is also a form of victim punishing, in that women are being told to withdraw from or significantly change their engage-ment within a domain that is widely acknowledged as being an integral and increasingly essential aspect of contemporary life and citizenship (see Mossberger, 2009; Wheeler, 2011; Braman, 2011). The technology writer Nilay Patel (2014) is spot on when he points out that we no longer do things on the internet, we just do things. As such, suggesting that women opt out of the public cybersphere or visit only while wearing the electronic equivalent of propriety-protecting, head-to-toe garments is disenfranchis-ing and entirely unacceptable.

From the infobahn to GamerGate

Much international media coverage is currently being given to the brutality directed at women online, and to the various roles society, law, politics, and corporations (like Facebook and Twitter) should play in formulating responses. Little attention has been paid, however, to the way gendered cyberhate has emerged and evolved over time. This book looks back to the earliest days of the internet to track the history of this new form of old misogyny. Based on nearly two decades of original research, its genealogical

approach reveals the unexpected connections and continuities between the counter-cultural idealists whose 'invention' of the internet was underlined by a commitment to egalitarianism, and 'GamerGaters' – members of contemporary gaming communities whose misogyny is so violent, it has been compared to terrorism.[9]

While it is impossible to pinpoint with precision the first time a man made a rape threat against a woman using the internet, in Chapter 1 of this book I show that incidences of gendered cyberhate grew slowly from the late 1990s before spiking around 2010, and then again in 2014 during GamerGate. I offer some insights into the origins of this discourse by outlining my experiences as an early target – and researcher – of such material, as well as showing the way online hostility has morphed and become more prevalent, vitriolic, directly threatening, and gendered over time.

The etiological dimensions of gendered cyberhate are discussed in Chapter 2. While taking care to foreground structural misogyny as the primary explanation for this discourse, this section of the book does examine those aspects of the web's history, design, characteristics, usage patterns, and subcultures which make this medium so conducive to the misogynist message.

The ramifications and consequences of misogyny on the internet are explored in detail in Chapter 3. This chapter outlines the impact of gendered cyberhate on individual targets, larger publics, and broad ideals such as digital inclusivity and gender equity. Philosophical literature on coercion is used to argue that while women who withdraw from the internet to avoid threats and harassment are making a *rational* choice, it is not a *free* choice because they are being coerced into making these changes.

Chapter 4 exposes the way women are consistently blamed for the attacks against them online, while men are routinely excused. The latter often occurs via appeals to motivation, in that it is claimed men are just joking around and do not intend to cause 'real' harm. It is also common for male antagonists to be absented from cyberhate narratives, in that the internet is framed as a place that is inherently dangerous – like Mount Everest during a blizzard – rather than a place that is inhabited by some harm-causing human agents.

Chapter 5 shows that this blame women/excuse men dynamic is also evident in the manifest failures of various institutions to assist targets, bring perpetrators to account, and address the broader problem of gendered

violence online. Specifically, it looks at the problematic responses/lack of responses from police, policy-makers, platform operators and corporations, and scholars. With regard to the latter, my argument is that, to a certain extent, some sectors of the academy have been caught off guard by the contemporary epidemic of misogyny online even though this is a phenomenon whose precursory forms have been evident for many years.

In the Conclusion, I discuss potential solutions to gendered cyberhate, and argue that an ethos rooted in the principles of gender equity must guide regulatory – and other – responses going forwards. Specifically, I make the case that while the minutiae of legal and technological changes will vary between jurisdictions and venues, all interventions must involve two commonalities: a willingness to stop blaming female targets, and to start holding male perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Desperately seeking a definition

The phenomenon represented by gendered cyberhate examples such as those furnished at the start of this introduction seems quite stark. It is, however, one that continues to prove difficult to name and define. As I will explain in Chapter 5, heated arguments about what to call heated arguments on the internet have sometimes pulled scholarly focus at the expense of more pressing aspects of the discourse. To cut a long literature review very short, my observations are that when vitriolic or disruptive discourse on the internet has not been coded as being either: a) racist hate speech; or b) cyberbullying affecting children and young people, it has generally been coded as 'flaming' or 'trolling'. When discourse has been coded via either of these terms, it has (at least up until recently) tended to be categorised as some combination of rare, harmless, creative, humorous, important for identity formation, laudably transgressive, aesthetically rich, and so on.

Both 'flaming' and 'trolling' are ambiguous and contested descriptors. The former is somewhat antiquated and usually refers only to heated cyber communications involving invective, insults, negative affect, and so on. 'Trolling', however, is sometimes used to refer to flame-type comments, but is also deployed more specifically to describe the posting of deliberately inflammatory or off-topic material with the aim of provoking responses and emotional reactions in targets. The digital ethnographer Whitney Phillips, meanwhile, strongly rejects the use of 'trolling' as a vague, behavioural

catch-all on the internet and uses this term only to describe very specific types of subcultural trolling communities such as those on and around the /b/board in the web forum 4chan (Phillips, 2013, 2015a, 2015c).

Recent scholarly interest in misogyny online has led to the emergence of a range of other expressions used to refer to gendered online hostility, harassment, and abuse. Examples include 'technology violence' (Ostini and Hopkins, 2015), 'technology-facilitated sexual violence' (Henry and Powell, 2015), 'gendertrolling' (Mantilla, 2015), and – from the United Nations (UN) Broadband Commission – 'cyber violence against women and girls' or 'cyber VAWG' ('Cyber violence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call', 2015). In this book, I use the terms 'gendered cyberhate', 'gendered e-bile', and 'cyber VAWG' interchangeably to refer to material that is directed at girls or women; that involves abuse, death threats, rape threats, and/or sexually violent rhetoric; and that involves the internet, social media platforms, or communications technology such as mobile telephony (though it may also have offline dimensions). I also use the more colloquial expression 'Rapeglish' to capture the tenor of sexual violence accenting much of this discourse. This book will not attempt to formulate a univocal definition of gendered cyberhate. Rather than engaging in yet another search for a set of objective message characteristics, this book adopts a casuistic approach by providing a multitude of exemplars of gendered cyberhate. A conception of the phenomenon can then be built up by extrapolating from these particulars.[10]

On methods, approaches, and inside information

This book is deliberately personal. The origins of my research are autoethnographic in that I received a great deal of gendered vitriol via the internet while I was working as a journalist and commentator in the Australian print and electronic media. As I will explain over the course of this book, my current scholarly work into misogyny online also means I am targeted for ongoing abuse.

There are advantages to being a researcher who has had first-hand experience of being called ugly, fat, and slutty online. One is that I have been tracking, archiving, and analysing examples of such material since 1998 – well before gendered cyberhate registered on the mainstream media radar or received much attention from scholars. These personal experiences were influential in my choice of PhD topic, and also led to

my commencement of a formal study into gendered cyberhate in January 2011. The latter informs this book, and is an ongoing project devoted to mapping and analysing the nature, manifestations, prevalence, etiology, and ramifications of misogyny online, as well as investigating potential remedies. This research is qualitative rather than quantitative, and does not involve representative survey techniques. It is designed, at least in part, to put human faces to the valuable statistical data being collected by other researchers and organisations.

With regard to method, my large archive of gendered cyberhate examples has been assembled using screen shots and web captures, and deploying methodological approaches from the emerging field of inter-net historiography. Theoretically, my hermeneutic is interdisciplinary and works across feminist and gender theory, legal theory, philosophy, literary studies, and cultural and media studies. Since 2015, a specific aspect of my research – that is, my investigations into the impact of cyberhate on the way women use the internet – has received funding from the Australian government.[11] This book uses the preliminary findings from approximately 50 qualitative interviews conducted as part of this government-funded project. These women – aged between 19 to 52 – were interviewed over the course of 2015 and 2016.[12]

This book has a number of limitations. One is that it utilises emerging findings from research that is ongoing, and which involves terrain in a con-stant state of flux. My aim, however, is to sketch a genealogy of gendered cyberhate in a manner which remains useful even as its manifestations alter over time. To put it in Foucauldian terms, I hope to offer a 'treatise of intelligibility' which makes various aspects of the current situation intelli-gible and, therefore, able to be critiqued (Foucault cited in Kritzman, 1988: 101). 'Speaking directly to the present' (Koopman, 2013: 26), in this way, reveals – among other things – the conditions of possibility for the lacklus-tre institutional responses to the contemporary proliferation of gendered cyberhate in a manner which hopefully paves the way for future action. On a less theoretical note, there is little reason to suppose that the story of gendered cyberhate is likely to ever have a final moment of 'closure'. Given the pressing nature of the problem, therefore, there is good reason to tackle this as an open-ended narrative rather than waiting endlessly for a neat conclusion.

Another limitation of this book is that it focuses on the gendered dimensions of cyberhate as opposed to those aspects of online hate speech which are homophobic, transphobic, racist, culturally intolerant, and so on. This is not to deny or downplay these issues, or the political intersectionality of gender with other social identities. It is simply beyond the scope of this book to explore in any depth the nuances of cyberhate as it relates to race, class, and sexual orientation. On the topic of cultural limitations, I note, too, that while this book does incorporate international statistics, at a qualitative level, its focus is almost entirely anglophone.

Three other potential and probably more provocative limitations of this book are: (1) it does not examine the experiences of women whose internet experiences have been cyberhate free; (2) it does not provide an in-depth examination of men's individual motivations for abusing women online; and (3) it focuses almost exclusively on female targets and male perpetrators. It is not my intention to suggest that all female internet users receive cyberhate, that men's intentions and rationales are of no interest or relevance, or that there exist no female attackers or male targets in the gendered cyberhate scene. That said, my decision-making around these three points is not solely related to project parameters and the tyranny of word-length restrictions.

Firstly, my view is that the clamour for 'balance' in studies of male-perpetrated violence against women (for example, the insistence that such research gives equal space to the voices of women who have *not* experienced gendered violence and of men who are *not* perpetrators) is primarily a diversionary tactic deployed by men's rights activists. Such arguments are on par with the suggestion that research about pedestrian-crossing injuries is incomplete or biased unless equal space is offered to examining the experiences of people who have crossed roads safely, and to airing the views of drivers who have never collided with pedestrians in such circumstances. Unless a project is designed to be explicitly comparative, there is no good reason to acquiesce to these particular demands.

My reasoning in relation to the second of the above points is that, as I will show throughout this book, there has been a focus on the putative motivations of male attackers in a manner which tends to excuse men and to elide the larger problem of gendered cyberhate. Resting this aspect of the phenomenon is a deliberate counter to these trends.

With regards to the third point, that is, the gender of online attackers, I note that several of my interviewees have been attacked savagely by other women and one, a doula and home-birthing activist, has been attacked almost exclusively by other women. While my analysis of this particular manifestation of cyberhate is in its early stages, the data from my interviews suggest that when large groups of women attack other women online, it is often around issues such as pregnancy, parenting, and children's health debates (such as vaccination), as well as debates around, for example, transgender politics, and whether individuals and groups are performing feminism in the 'right' way. While these types of cyberhate do involve gender stereotypes, they are palpably different from the phenomenon addressed in this book and will not be addressed further here.

Focusing primarily on gendered cyberhate involving male attackers and female targets is necessary because of the overwhelming anecdotal and empirical evidence that women are being attacked online more often, more severely, and in far more violently sexualised ways than men. Female targets of cyberhate often receive extremely specific communications about how, where, and even what time they will be violated. Also included may be explicit details about which orifices will be desecrated via which instruments, as well as the names of the family members and children who will be forced to watch. These are not the types of tweets, Facebook messages, and emails typically received by men. Further, the misogyny, sexualised vitriol, slut shaming, and threats women encounter on the internet sit squarely within a much broader problem: namely the grossly high levels of violence that continue to be perpetrated against women and girls around the world ('Cyber violence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call', 2015: 13).

With regard to cyberhate directed at men, I note that while the 'ugly, fat, and slutty' trifecta is hurled at women with monotonous regularity, I have yet to witness any men being attacked via this particular combination of insults. While there is an abundance of homophobic slurs and accusations relating to a condition we could call micro-penis syndrome, the low-level argy-bargy experienced by men (or at least by straight, cisgendered, white men) is very different to the abuse experienced by women. Norms do exist around physical appearance for men, but there is no corresponding fixation with men's 'fuckability' or 'rapeability'. This reflects the broader fact that men are not traditionally shamed for promiscuity or

sexualised self-representation. There is still no male version of the word 'slut' – or at least not one with derogatory connotations.

When the rhetoric of sexual violence *is* used to abuse men online, it is often delivered via attacks on their female partners and family members (Jane, 2014b: 565). In 2011, for instance, an attack on the former US television talk show host Jon Stewart included the posting of photographs of his wife alongside disparaging comments about her size and attractiveness. These included: 'Most lib's chicks are pigs', 'She a liberal. They only come in ugly', and 'Looks like a trip to Auschwitz might do her some good' (comments beneath 'Jon Stewart's wife Tracey is overweight, unattractive', 2011). Another example is the case of the Australian footballer Robbie Farah who, following the death of his mother, received a tweet reading: 'I'd still fuck your mum, I will have to wear a gas mask to help with the smell of decomposing flesh, but I'd fuck her hard' (@maxpower118 cited in Thomson, 2012). In 2016, Ken Kratz, the widely disliked American prosecutor from the Netflix docu-series *Making a Murderer*, reported receiving messages from people saying they hoped his daughter would be raped in front of him (cited in Bacchiocchi, 2016). In the same year, explicitly worded rape threats were tweeted about the one-year-old daughter of the English footballer Jamie Vardy (Oliphant, 2016). These examples show that violent misogyny can still be present in cyberhate attacks in which men are the primary targets.

Before moving away from the topic of this book's potential limitations and towards the more pleasant (at least from my perspective) subject of its potential merits, I wish to return to the issue of my first-hand experience of and personal involvement with its subject matter. My current cyberhate study has resulted in some criticism from people identifying as pro-GamerGate that my research should not be trusted because I am biased.[13] I am happy to own those definitional aspects of bias relating to an 'inclination, a propensity, [and] a predisposition' (Brown, 1993: 2333). My study of misogyny online is undoubtedly driven by pre-existing curiosity arising from my own experience. I suspect this is not unusual in academia. Research programs are often long and gruelling to the point where a degree of personal investment may well be required in order to bring even modest projects to completion. (And even then, it is not uncommon to hear the scholarly equivalent of 'are we there yet?' as per the back seat lament from children during long car trips.) My first-hand

experience of gendered cyberhate has indeed sustained my interest in the subject over many years. Without this personal experience, I would not have assembled such a large archive, obtained so many valuable prototypical examples, or spent nearly two decades looking out for, collecting, and thinking about such material. Yet does this personal connection mean my work is inevitably tainted by selection and confirmation bias? After much agitation about this question, my considered answer is, 'it depends'.

Accusations of bias raise a plethora of interesting issues, including some perennial questions concerning the relationship between certain kinds of distance and knowledge.[14] Imagine I ask you a question about your partner, and then, after you answer (perhaps in a way I do not like), I tell you I've decided my query was ill-conceived because you are in an intimate relationship with this person and are therefore partisan. On one hand, I am correct. You cannot possibly be objective. On the other hand, your intimate acquaintance with the subject gives you access to a wealth of inside information which makes you perfectly placed to answer such questions. This demonstrates the way 'insider' and 'outsider' forms of knowledge both have advantages and liabilities. Certainly, those who are involved and/or invested in a topic may understand the 'grammar' of an issue in a deeper way than those who are unengaged or uninvolved. Consider the philosopher René Girard whose work is predicated on what could be called 'the epistemology of the victim' (C. Fleming, personal communication, 2015). That is, the victim – or the perspective of the victim – can tell us things about our culture that the victimiser cannot.

This view will obviously be unsatisfactory to those who subscribe to an epistemology of realism which maintains that a sufficiently rigorous researcher is able to occupy an Archimedean vantage point offering unmediated and absolutely objective access to the world. For me, however, the issue at stake is not whether a scholar's experience of an object of analysis endangers their objectivity (because my view is that this is epistemically unavoidable); it is whether a researcher owns up to their inevitable lack of objectivity and offers as much information as possible about how their subjectivism might manifest. Indeed, critics who accuse others of a lack of objectivity may well be failing to acknowledge their own standpoints.

When I think back to the first rapey emails I received in the late 1990s, to the best of my recollection, my thought processes went something along the lines of: 'Huh. How very weird, interesting, and creepy. I wonder what all this is about?' This is opposed to, say, a thought process more along

the lines of: 'Ah ha! Finally, some proof of a view I happened to have held before I had any actual proof!' Once I developed a modest working thesis ('there seems to be a bit of misogyny on the internet'), I endeavoured to seek out, examine, and give adequate consideration to material which contradicted or was otherwise a poor fit for this thesis. Over the years, however, I have found an abundance of evidence to support my early thesis and very little data suggesting it requires diluting or reversing. As it happens, my current thesis is even more strongly worded than my first. It is: 'there seems to be a *lot* of misogyny on the internet and a great deal of it involves sexually explicit threats of violence.'

These claims I am making about the virtues of my research approaches are unlikely to surprise. *Obviously* I would say I have conducted my inquiries in as fair-minded a fashion as possible. It would be most peculiar to start a book warning that one's work ought not to be trusted because one is a prejudiced polemicist. What I will endeavour to do, however, is to be as transparent as possible about the way I have conducted my research and reached my conclusions, and leave it to you, the reader, to make your own decisions about the rigour of my methods and the validity of my claims. To a certain extent, the inclusion of first-person material in this book is to assist you in deciding whether my personal experiences are likely to constitute a help or a hindrance to my research. Mostly, however, I cite my own email in-box because I suspect that you, like me, will be gob smacked to observe that the rape-a-rific emails sent to a rowdy, sex-positive newspaper columnist in the late 1990s are all but identical to those sent to a devout Catholic blogger on the other side of the world more than a decade later.

'holy shit you dumb bitch I'm unloading my whole nutsack on your face'

This book began with a warning about lack of warnings. I wanted readers unfamiliar with gendered cyberhate to get a sense of what it's like to be suddenly yelled at in Rapeglish. In the meantime, I note that while female cyberhate targets may not receive official warnings before the arrival of graphic and garishly punctuated threats to dismember and penetrate their bodies, gendered cyberhate has become normalised to the extent that many have come to expect it. Especially if they speak out about how they have come to expect it. For years now, Sarkeesian has been attacked so relentlessly she has had to cancel speaking engagements and use private security

(Marcetic, 2014; Goddard, 2015: 6). At the height of GamerGate in 2014, she also had to leave her home. Yet the feminist games commentator doggedly continues to detail the deluge of abuse she receives despite knowing full well that talking about online harassment invariably generates more of it. In late 2015, for instance, she posted a series of tweets describing the aforementioned ejaculation images as some of the most disturbing and vile sexual harassment she had ever received (Sarkeesian, 2015a). The ugly truth, she wrote, is that male harassers are weaponising their genitalia and sexuality 'as a way of trying to disempower and keep women in line' (2015a). Many men disagreed. They prosecuted their case that there is no misogyny on the internet via tweets such as:

> This fucking account makes me want to bash women and I consider myself pretty level headed (Ciroc Obama);
>
> I've never came on a girls avi[15] before but holy shit you dumb bitch I'm unloading my whole nutsack on your face ($LATER); and
>
> STOP COMPLAINING YEEEE BLOODY CUNT. (william)

The self-performative contradiction (a polite, academic term for 'rampant hypocrisy') is truly astounding. As is the gendered violence of the rhetoric. To adequately convey the nature and force of contemporary misogyny online, I believe it is necessary not only to cite a multitude of examples, but to cite a multitude of *unexpurgated* examples.[16] Indeed, as I will argue in Chapter 5, the metaphorical unspeakability of gendered cyberhate may be one of the reasons it has become as prevalent as it has. In scholarship, especially, it has tended to be referred to via generic descriptors such as 'hostile', 'graphic', 'in bad taste', and so on. Yet these euphemisms fail to capture the toxic misogyny in play. Compare the difference between the following:

1. Women are receiving sexually explicit rape threats online.
2. Women are receiving sexually explicit rape threats online such as, 'I will fuck your ass to death you filthy fucking whore. Your only worth on this planet is as a warm hole to stick my cock in'.[17]

To fully grasp the nature and extent of the problem, we must bring it into the daylight and look at it directly, no matter how unsettling or unpleasant the experience might be.

So, let us steel ourselves and begin.

Notes

1 This was sent as a tweet to Criado-Perez in 2013 (cited in Criado-Perez, 2013).
2 I will not be writing 'sic' after presentation errors in material cited from the internet in recognition of the informality of these contexts. I will also be spelling expletives out in full in those situations where I am aware that media outlets have replaced certain letters with hyphens, asterisks, and so on.
3 This was part of a Facebook message sent to Ford in 2015 (cited in Harris, 2015).
4 This was tweeted at the Australian activist Coralie Alison in 2015 (cited in Hernandez, 2015).
5 This was sent to the US tech expert Kathy Sierra in 2007 (cited in Walsh, 2007).
6 This was sent to Sarkeesian in 2012 (TheDaveKD cited in Sarkeesian, 2012a).
7 As with my use of terms such as 'feminism', my use of 'GamerGate' in this book is not to imply that this is a homogenous movement.
8 I first used this phrase in a media interview on 30 July 2015 http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/why-do-men-threaten-women-with-rape-to-shut-them-up-on-the-web/news-story/0abd8403e59747a51717f54b81a21b46). At the same time a book by Karla Mantilla was published with the phrase in its subtitle, *Gender Trolling: How Misogyny Went Viral*.
9 See Marcetic, 2014; Cooper, 2014; Lee, 2014; Thériault, 2015.
10 For a more detailed discussion of this approach see Jane, 2014a, 2014b.
11 This is in the form of a Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) which is funding a three-year project called 'Cyberhate: The new digital divide?'.
12 Two groups of interviewees were recruited via a number of methods, including: advertising on online and offline fora; direct personal approaches; and chain-referral sampling. The first group comprise Australian women with a public profile who have experienced hostility or threats online, and who have spoken about this previously in a public forum. These women had the option of being identified using their real names in research outputs, and most made use of this option. The second group comprise women who are not in public life and who have experienced hostility or threats online but have not spoken about this previously in a public forum. These interviewees all used pseudonyms and all identifying details were removed from their transcripts. While my recruitment techniques were not designed to obtain a representative population sample, I did ensure that my interview cohort included women of colour, queer women, and Muslim women, as well as women from a range of ages and socio-economic circumstances. Throughout this book I will indicate which subjects were interviewed by me as part of my research project, and also when pseudonyms are being used.
13 See Rahman, 2015; Ankucic, 2015.
14 Many thanks to Chris Fleming for input into this section.
15 My understanding of 'avi' here is that it refers to 'avatar', that is, a symbol, figure, or image used to represent a human player in a game or other computer-mediated environment.
16 For a more detailed version of this argument see Jane, 2014b.
17 This was tweeted at the feminist writer Sady Doyle (cited in Doyle, 2011b).