

Rape Culture and the Feminist Politics of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Young feminists use social media in order to respond to rape culture and to hold accountable the purveyors of its practices and ways of thinking when mainstream news media, police and school authorities do not. This article analyzes how social networks identified with young feminists take shape via social media responses to sexual violence, and how those networks are organized around the conceptual framework of rape culture. Drawing on the concept of response-ability, the article analyzes how recent social media responses to rape culture evidence the affective and technocultural nature of current feminist network building and the ways this online criticism re-imagines the position of feminist witnesses to rape culture.

KEYWORDS

feminist activism, infrastructure, rape culture, response-ability, social media



Introduction

In recent US and Canadian public discourse on sexual violence, perhaps no other case has achieved an airing as wide and significant as that of the Steubenville, OH rape trial. During the trial in March 2013, the Twitter universe and feminist blogosphere exploded with reports and commentary on the conviction of high school football players Ma'lik Richmond and Tyler Mays for the rape of 16 year-old "Jane Doe" in Steubenville. Judge Thomas Lipps sentenced Richmond to a year of juvenile detention for his role in the assault, and Mays to two years of detention for his role in taking digital photographs and video from the night of the attack, and distributing the recordings by social media.

In a case like the Steubenville rape, social media sites become aggregators of online misogyny. After the arrest of Mays and Richmond, local Steubenville crime blogger Alexandria Goddard compiled screen shots of tweets, and Facebook and Instagram posts to help build the evidentiary case against the young men and women involved in the violence against Jane



Doe (Ahmad 2013). Evidence Goddard collected included twitter feeds from football player Cody Saltsman and former Steubenville High School student Michael Nodionos who tweeted on the night of the assault that “some people deserve to be peed on.” Saltsman posted to Instagram the now infamous photo of Mays and Richmond carrying the unconscious Jane Doe (Harkinson 2013).

Through concerted actions to document and disseminate damning evidence of rape supportive culture, according to one writer, “social media won the Steubenville case” (Cohen 2013).¹ To reporter Josh Harkinson (2013), feminist and rape survivor involvement with Anonymous mobilized an “anti-rape hacker operation,” linking hacker culture to feminist anti-rape activism. Yet unlike the male, geek-identified cultures of coding and hacking that define Anonymous, the inter-generational feminist activism I focus on here draws on another set of traditions based in do-it-yourself activist media-making that includes blogging, digital video making, and amateur digital photography that is shared across social media networks. While other scholars place girl blogging within the traditions of feminist manifestoes and diary writing—that is, as forms of *writing* (see Keller 2012; Gregg 2006)—I analyze feminist social media responses to rape culture as an affective and technological deployment of the testimonial tradition, in which girls and young women digitally record and transcribe personal stories based in their experiences of sexual violence and harassment, and in their roles as witnesses to others’ harassment and experience of sexual violence. They then post and re-distribute them on feminist blogs, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Tumblr sites such as *stfurapeculture* and *Hollaback!* I approach their production of testimonials about rape culture via social media as an activist media practice that extends beyond the representation of rape culture to constitute a capacity to respond to the cultural supports for sexual violence. In another context Gabriella Coleman (2011) describes this as the distinctly “political role of technological actors” (512).

Young women’s social media responses to rape culture seek to interrupt the cultural supports for sexual violence. Rape culture refers to the

complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm (Buchwald et al. 1993: vii).

The term was first articulated in Susan Brownmiller’s *Against our Will* in 1975 as “rape-supportive culture,” the 1975 documentary “Rape Culture,”

and later in the 1993 anthology *Transforming a Rape Culture*. Rather than focusing explicitly on the perpetrator of sexual violence, the term targets the cultural practices that reproduce and justify the perpetration of sexual violence. In the activist context I examine, rape culture is identified through particular communicative acts such as catcalls, scripts of street harassment, and rape jokes that can be interrupted through anti-rape communication. For a recent generation of young activists, rape culture is being defined across a variety of online sites, two examples of which are the Geek Feminism Wiki and the Tumblr *stfurapeculture*, both of which have pages defining the term. In an entry on her blog “I have a Theory,” on 17 October 2013, feminist Jessica Valenti surmises that most young women in the US learn more about rape culture on Tumblr and other places online than they do in school.² Several tweets and reblogs answer back that young women first learn of the term on Facebook and elsewhere, suggesting that online sites can serve as a key source of feminist education and activist terminology beyond the classroom.

Today feminist bloggers utilize social media in order to respond to rape culture, and hold accountable those responsible for its practices when mainstream news media, police and school authorities do not. According to Linda Fairstein, former head of the sex crime division of the Manhattan district attorney’s office, “[S]ocial media connects the dots from Penn State to India to Steubenville.... So what used to be the small grassroots ‘women against rape’ is now catching fire” (cited in Graves 2013: n.p.). If “instances of teenage girls being sexually assaulted and cyberbullied are so common that they rarely make the news” (Harkinson 2013: n.p.), social media are increasingly understood as a key platform of communicative response-ability for anti-rape activists and feminist critics. According to blogger Amanda Marcotte (2013), the Steubenville, OH rape case “has made it much harder to deny that there is such a thing as rape culture” (n.p.), while a commentator in a *Ms.* blog described the tweets surrounding the case as “a snapshot of youth culture,” revealing “a network of teens sharing provocative, explicit, sexual and misogynistic thoughts” that legitimate rape (Fontas 2013: n.p.). Describing the “media coverage of the [Steubenville] case ... a glaring example of rape culture” (n.p.), Canadian feminist blogger Jasmine Peterson, using the cross-generational feminist concept of rape culture, named the source of the problem that the Steubenville case exposed.

This article analyzes how the feminist technocultural networks these blogs represent take shape via social media responses to sexual violence. Twenty years after the 1993 publication of *Transforming a Rape Culture* helped to further codify this activist terminology, feminist Tumblrs such as

stfurapeculture, feminist blogs like those of Marcotte and Peterson, and feminist mobile media responses to sexualized harassment in anti-street harassment groups such as Hollaback! and Toronto's Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children, and their mobile phone application "Not Your Baby" re-deploy rape culture as a key term of feminist anti-rape activism which also gives conceptual form to disparate younger feminists' social media practices. In addition to exposing the cultural, and specifically communicative, supports for rape in cases like Steubenville, social media enable the broad distribution of feminist reporting on rape culture and critiques of slut shaming that constitute current feminist discourse on rape, particularly among younger feminists aged between 15 and 22 years. As I argue, their discursive deployment of social media represents an active "pedagogy of the concept" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 16) occurring in, around and through current feminist activism against rape culture.

This article examines a set of examples that highlight the range of what I term "feminist response-ability" to rape culture via social media that blends testimonial, advice giving, and cultures of support. My analysis traces the representation, movement and meaning of rape culture as a discourse that organizes the social media practices that constitute online feminist networks of response-ability to rape culture. I examine how young feminists conceive of their capacity and that of others to respond, from naming and identifying rape culture, its communicative signals, and its supporters, to building tactics that aim to transform it.

Feminist Response-ability: Interrupting Rape Culture

Response-ability signifies the capacity to collectively respond to sexual violence and its cultures of racial, gendered and sexuality harassment. It is an activist engagement of subjectivity based in networks of media production and distribution. In her book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Kelly Oliver (2001) termed the capacity to respond to others as response-ability. For Oliver, subjectivity is grounded in the capacity to respond and be responded to. It requires the social address of another person, containing both "the condition of possibility of response...and the ethical obligation to respond and enable response-ability from others" (15). Oliver's definition eschews a politics of recognition in favor of a model of witnessing based in the mutual co-constitution of address and response to others—in other words, a politics of communicability.

Drawing on Oliver's definition of witnessing as response-ability, young women's deployment of social media responses to street harassment and sexualized violence constitute a networked activist subjectivity, what Ednie Kaeh Garrison (2000) refers to as the network-enabled tactical subjectivities of current feminisms. Their use of social media produces, organizes, and deploys a capacity to respond to cultures of harassment and sexual violence, building a larger network of response-ability that incorporates others situated in proximity to cultures of harassment, sexualized intimidation, and violence. By young women, I refer to those girls in their mid-teens up to women in their mid-twenties who are some of the most visible responders to rape culture using the tools of social media. For them, the response-able witness is someone positioned proximately to document harassment, catcalls and rape jokes, among other communicative signifiers of rape culture, who then responds by using the tools of mobile phone video, audio recording and Google mapping techniques. Such network-based strategies of documentation "compose a movement culture that is disparate, unlikely, multiple, polymorphous" (Garrison 2000:149)—located not in movement organizations per se, but in the network-ability of feminist online response.

Feminist responses to rape culture transform notions of witnessing, moving from conceptions of witnessing as a sensory-based act of seeing or hearing to the ability to record and distribute audio-visual evidence of rape culture and its interruptability. As Sue Tait (2011) warns, while "seeing does not necessarily compel responsibility" (1226), the act of "speaking" through social media-enabled forms of documentation signals an act of taking responsibility. In addition to the affectively weighted online testimonials of young sexual assault survivors and young women who have been harassed, there has also been a proliferation of online feminist responses to rape culture that use humor to great mobilizing effect, suggesting that social media responses to rape culture are deployed via networks that are both affective and technological. The Tumblr *stfurapeculture*, for instance, publishes young women's testimonials of sexual assault, invasive behaviors by men, and difficult conversations they have had with rape-supportive friends. The moderator of the site offers advice to posters, and asks visitors to the site to do so as well, collectivizing the ability to respond to specific situations of rape supportive behavior. She also includes trigger warnings with testimonials that might catalyze readers' own memories of assault, following a politics of care that suffuses the online culture's support of which *stfurapeculture* is part.

While the testimonial tradition is often noted for its seriousness, *stfurapeculture* and other social media tactics deploy humor alongside testimo-

nials. The Tumblr explicitly tells rape culture to *shut the fuck up*, mobilizing what Susan Douglas (2010) describes as the derisive laughter that energizes current feminisms. In March 2013, several posters hijacked the Twitter site #saftetytipsforwomen, using humor to challenge the site's focus on women's responsibility for sexual violence, rather than perpetrators'. Challenging their victim-blaming rhetoric, hijacked tweets by posters *KAYLA*@fangirl124 and FemArmChairRegime@femarmchairregime joked that women should either wear chain mail or three sweat suits, a ski mask and sleeping bag when going out to avoid being raped, thus pointing out the silliness of the idea that what women wear either protects or prevents them from being assaulted. Bonnie Dean@BonDean suggested that women leave their vaginas at home when going out (echoing a stand-up routine by comedienne Wanda Sykes), while Lesley@jarvgirl jokingly advised women to have a 404 Error code tattooed around their bikini line. These Twitter hijinks suggest that humor mobilizes another kind of feminist political response to rape culture by challenging the ways other women continue to place primary responsibility for sexual assault and harassment on girls and women.

In similar vein, well-known YouTube video maker Franchesca Leigh Ramsey (also known as Chescaleigh), whose funny video, "Shit White Girls Say to Black Girls," garnered over 10 million views and the attention of CNN's Anderson Cooper, made a video testimonial of her experiences of being sexually assaulted and slut-shamed at the age of 18. Ramsey made the first person testimonial video, "How Slut Shaming Becomes Victim Blaming," as a response to YouTube sensation Jenna Marbles' video, "Things I Don't Understand About Women: Sluts Edition." Critiquing Marbles' video for its victim-blaming ideology, in the span of seven minutes Ramsey's video shifts from being a polemical and sarcastic lecture against slut-shaming to offering emotionally wrought testimony to her own assault and shaming by friends and co-workers. The video not only dramatizes the affective dimensions of her response and that of others to rape culture through direct video address and first person narration, it also demonstrates how younger feminists' responses to rape culture become especially mobile via social media networks of distribution. The video has been re-constituted into short gif files that can now be found on Tumblrs like slutever.org, phallogentric, Remember that I Love You, and others, illustrating the movement that emotional and political resonance enables online in digital video testimonials.

Like Franchesca Leigh's video, the testimonial practices on stfurapeculture mobilize the term rape culture in order to place responsibility for sexual violence on those who perpetrate and support it. While stfurapeculture high-

lights the ways in which media representation and social norms and practices replicate rape culture, other sources such as the 2013 film, “Trigger Warning,” deploy the activist conception of sexual violence as an interruptible continuum of behaviors and communicative actions. In the context of a Philadelphia, PA high school, “Trigger Warning” addresses how rape jokes reproduce rape culture. It stages discussions between male and female student respondents; while young women discuss how they experience rape jokes as threatening and belittling, young men appear in rap sessions to model for viewers how to interrupt the culture of telling jokes about rape in the context of their friendship networks. Like other examples of media-making developed in the context of teenage responses to rape culture, “Trigger Warning” draws its definition of rape culture from the book *Transforming a Rape Culture* (1993) as “a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women.... This violence...is neither biologically or divinely ordained. *Much of what we accept as inevitable is in fact the expression of values and attitudes that can change*” (vii emphasis added). The film aims to train others how to intervene.³

Today, young women and men use Internet and cellphone-based systems of distribution and social networking to challenge rape culture, thus building a networked culture of response-ability that aims to hold accountable perpetrators of sexual violence and those who provide support through their participation or silence, while also building community among young women, and among girls and older generations of women. In a joint project between the Philadelphia chapter of the anti-street harassment group Hollaback! and the local black feminist media activist organization, Fostering Activism and Alternatives Now (FAANmail), a group of African-American teen girls made the 2013 YouTube video, “Things People Say to Teen Girls.” The girls reenact the sexist, racist and homophobic verbal slurs they endure on the street to and from school to call attention to the experiences of harassment they negotiate every day, and to offer a collective video testimonial response about it. At the end of the video, they share strategies they used to escape hostile situations they faced on the street, and they point viewers to the Twitter site #EndSH to find further resources for ending street harassment.

Hollaback! and the Politics of Mobile Media Exposure

New mobile phone applications tap directly into the desire many young feminists, including my own undergraduate students, have for moving

beyond the critique of rape culture to directly intervening in and exposing it. The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children promotes the mobile phone app “Not Your Baby” as a “sexual harassment response generator.” “Not Your Baby” enables its app users to blow the whistle on harassment, providing context-specific communication strategies that its users can deploy against sexual harassment they witness. Based on 238 surveys the Metropolitan Action Committee conducted, the app customizes responses to different kinds of harassers in different contexts of harassment. Users identify the specific situation to which they seek a response, then “Not Your Baby” suggests a verbal response that users can express in order to interrupt the harassing situation, thus breaking the scripts of sexual harassment through an activist grammar of response-ability (see Marcus 1992). The app also enables users to suggest their own responses; this transforms the user of the app into a producer of its content. While the app is still too new for us to know exactly how users deploy it, feminist anti-violence groups in Ottawa, Canada and other cities are also developing their own mobile phone apps in response to rape culture.

Other mobile media-based response tools deploy cellphone video and photography to expose and identify harassers to others, and to reveal a collective culture of response to harassers. Hollaback!, the international anti-street harassment group, trains individuals and community organizers in how to use iPhone and android phone apps to document, map and narrate acts of street harassment of which individuals have been targets or that they have directly witnessed happening to others. They model an activist response using mobile phone technologies, teaching girls and young women to take the tools of mobile media documentation and social media dissemination into their own hands in order to expose the culture of street harassment. As Executive Director Emily May stated in her 2012 TedX Talk, “People wanted us to be the Craigslist of street harassment” (n.p.), a political aggregator and mechanism through which harassers could be publicly exposed at the local level. Through Hollaback!, the cellphone becomes a networked video production and documentation tool against street harassment—an activist witnessing technology. To May, “in this social media world where everyone has followers, followers become the new leaders. ...And the leaders with the least access to power are the ones the most attracted to this model of movement building” (n.p.). She estimates that 75 percent of site leaders are under the age of 30, and another 50 percent are under the age of 25.⁴

Hollaback!’s politics are based on exposing the cultures of harassment that otherwise remain hidden in mainstream media and go unpunished by

law enforcement—a so-called soft form of feminist media vigilantism that resonates with earlier 1970s radical feminist tactics. May and others describe the origins of Hollaback! in relation to a 2005 case in which a New York raw foods chef, Dan Hoyt, exposed himself on a subway train to Thao Nguyen, a young female web designer in New York City. Nguyen took a cellphone photo of Hoyt in the act. She then exited the train and located a Metropolitan Transit Authority police officer to whom she reported the incident and to whom showed the cellphone image of Hoyt. The police officer refused to take action, so Nguyen posted the image to the online site Laundromatic.net, after which the New York *Daily News* published the photo and made the story public. According to a story on 27 August 2005 in the online New York publication *Gothamist*, in taking his picture and posting it online, Nguyen sought to shame Hoyt, the “self-touching rider.... He made me feel creepy. I want to embarrass him,” Nguyen reported (Chung, 2005a: n.p.). Hoyt was later identified and charged. Unrepentant of his behavior, he stated to the press that, in his experience, young women enjoy having men expose their genitals to them (cited in Smith 2006: n.p.).

For Hollaback!, Nguyen’s story represents the ability of social media documentation and dissemination to enable more collective avenues for responding to sexual harassment in ways that can achieve collective recognition. In response, Hollaback! developed a mobile phone app that enables users to digitally document situations of street harassment, to map the location of the harassment and, by extension, young women’s responses to it, and to produce textual testimonials of the event for posting online. Its imagination for responding to street harassment is bound up in perceptions of young women’s relationships to their cellphones, which Hollaback! iconically represents on their website and in their publicity materials through a photograph of a young woman of colour aiming a mobile phone at the viewer. In this way, Hollaback! recognizes the ways in which many young women access online communications and larger social media networks via their mobile phones.

Some Hollaback! users post mobile phone photos of their harassers with their textual testimonials, providing photographic information that could be used to identify the harasser(s), modeled on the 2005 case involving Dan Hoyt. On the Montreal Hollaback! site, just one of the seven testimonials posted in English is accompanied by a photograph. Instead of identifying a perpetrator, the photograph shows a crowd of revelers enjoying the live performance of the band The Black Lips during the summer Osheaga music festival while the poster testified that she was being sexually assaulted. She

is barely visible in the photograph and we cannot see her attacker's face. Instead, the photo captures the collective context in which some assaults occur in public in the presence of witnesses. On *stfurapeculture*, where users post testimonials of sexual harassment and assault, digital photos are also rarely used, but when they are, they are used to identify harassers. A digital photo accompanies a post from *littleorphanammo* on 23 May 23 2013 that shows a young man on a New York subway after he took pictures of young women's legs and feet without their consent.⁵ The text accompanying the image asserts "enjoy the internet motherfucker" (n.p.), expressing a form of feminist revenge via media exposure modeled on a conception of the Internet as a space of publicity *and* informal justice.

The targets of Hollaback!'s campaigning are primarily young women armed with mobile phones as ready-made tools of activist documentation and social media networks of dissemination. One recent study found that young women and girls relate to their cellphones as essential devices of personal safety rather than, say, pepper spray dispensers or whistles (Cumiskey and Brewster: 2012). The women in the study perceived that their cellphones connected them to people upon whom they could depend, providing a stronger sense of security than more explicitly self-defensive weapons. For Craig S. Watkins (2009) and other researchers, "teens and young twenty somethings are [also] the most inventive and incessant users of mobile phones" (57). I suggest we need to go another step further to analyze the practices of responding that mobile phones and social networking enable for girls and young women as modeled by organizations like Hollaback! As Leslie Regan Shade (2007) argues, "Feminist interrogations of mobiles must...go beyond mere critical assessments of the consumption of mobiles, and focus on the political economic realities in their production" and use (187).

Hollaback! leverages mobile phone technology to crowd-source testimonials about street harassment within a context in which the problem is rarely reported or covered in the news. "By collecting women and LGBTQ folks' stories and pictures in a safe and share-able way with our very own mobile phone applications, *Hollaback! is creating a crowd-sourced initiative to end street harassment*" (<http://www.ihollaback.org/about/>: n.p. original emphasis). Reflecting on the growth of Hollaback! since 2005, co-founders Emily May and Sam Carter declared, "We thought we'd launch an app, instead we launched a movement" ("State of the Streets Report" 2012: 2). For Hollaback!, mobile phones are not just individual tools of communication; they are networked technologies that signify particularly mobile and ubiquitous tools of activist documentation and dissemination.

Hollaback!'s online presence is site-specific and contextually flexible. Cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Montreal, Winnipeg, Edinburgh, Istanbul and 57 other locales host their own Hollaback! websites, to which young women post local testimonials of harassment, and link them to Google maps. After the Hollaback! mobile phone app asks users to identify which local site is closest to them and what their email address is, it provides them with the option of sharing their story, connecting to the local site's Google map where local stories of harassment are geographically mapped, learning more about Hollaback!, and donating money. To share one's story, the app provides several options to help users classify the event. Users first choose between reporting whether they experienced the event themselves or saw it happen, as a witness, to another person. The user then chooses what kind of event it was from a list of options that include verbal, stalking, homophobic, transphobic, assault, groping, racist, public masturbation or other. After classifying the event, the user has the option of entering her or his name. The user is then prompted to tell her or his story in a text box, after which she or he can upload a digital photo to accompany the testimonial. Finally, the user can use either GPS or manually type in an address in order to locate the harassing situation via Google maps. As Kira Poirier from the Montreal site explains,

We look at the map to see where harassment is happening, or at least where it is being reported. In the long term, we want to allocate resources to the communities most affected, so we try to scope out where the outreach should happen (2012: 14).

Locating the harassment and girls' and young women's responses to it via Google mapping enables site leaders to potentially target resources toward the problem in very localized ways.

Google mapping also enables users to read Hollaback!'s maps as a potential victim, remote witness or responder might. In locating where a poster has identified sexual harassment, users of Hollaback!'s Google map interface see both the magnitude of street harassment and the scale of young women's responses to it. The pink push pin icons on Hollaback!'s Google map interface enable users to link directly to a testimonial of street harassment at that location, situating harassment and the ability to respond to it in the same shared location. While Lisa Parks' (2009) research on social movement uses of Google Earth concerning the crisis in Darfur have shown that Google satellite mapping interfaces often replicate conventionalized images of victimized girls and women from the Global South to make potentially depoliticizing affective appeals to humanitarian intervention, Hollaback!'s map interface makes a different kind of affective and political appeal for the

development of collective response-ability to street harassment, documenting action that has already been taken in order to encourage other girls and young women to respond similarly to street harassment.

Young women's use of Hollaback!'s mobile phone app creates content for others to read and respond to. Such "produsage," as Axel Bruns (2008) argues, "is based on the collaborative engagement of communities of participants in a project" (n.p.), suggesting that young women's use of Hollaback!'s mobile phone app might best be conceived of as a form of collective media production. In light of public failures to see girls' uses of cellphones outside of the morally suspect politics of consumption, Amy Hasinoff (2012) argues that feminist media scholars ought to understand girls' use of cellphones as a form of media production.

The Politics of Care and Feminist Social Media Responses to Rape Culture

Following Rebecca Brown and Melissa Gregg's (2012) call for a "sympathetic online cultural studies" of girls' social media use, I interpret Hollaback! and other social media responses to rape culture as "peer-to-peer models of performance and witnessing" (358) that take shape in feminist "alternative economies of online culture" and "the cultures of care that...emerge to compensate for the sometimes risky spaces of public leisure" (365). While Hollaback! and *stfu*rapeculture enable young women and girls to share their stories of harassment and assault, they also create a culture of support and response that may enhance site visitors' own capacities for responding, and for reporting sexual assaults. As Axel Bruns (2008) argues, the "networked nature of users... also means that responses to content are further amplified" (n.p.). In the wake of social media and mainstream media attention to the Steubenville, OH case, former porn actress Traci Lords ("Traci Lords on Steubenville Rape Case, 2013), and *Globe and Mail* columnist Tabatha Southey (2013) both came out about their experiences with sexual assault as teenagers, suggesting that the online testimonial culture around rape culture encourages others to speak out about their experiences of sexual violence.

As examples like theirs also suggest, "perhaps we truly encounter the political only when we *feel*" (Staiger 2010:4 original emphasis). On *stfu*rapeculture, most posts come with trigger warnings, a way of alerting survivors of abuse and sexual assault that the testimonial they are about to read may trigger traumatic memories of their own experiences of violence. Each

trigger warning identifies for readers the particular discursive trigger that appears in the post, such as sexual assault, rape, victim blaming, and discussions of rape culture. Hollaback! also posts trigger warnings. One post to the Montreal site on 14 August 2012, came with three trigger warnings regarding assault, groping and pedaeophila.⁶

In addition to providing trigger warnings, stfurapeculture and Hollaback! include supportive responses to posters within the online testimonial space. After one post in which a 15 year-old girl discusses her difficulty in coming to terms with being raped, the moderator for stfurapeculture posted:

I'm so sorry. I don't know why people are so resistant to the fact that sex with someone who is intoxicated is rape. If your boyfriend, or any of your friends or loved ones for that matter, does not 100% believe and support you as a survivor, he doesn't deserve to be in your life (2013: n.p.).

Framed in the encouraging and affirming voice of a friend, stfurapeculture provides an affective space of response and support. Many of the responses offer advice to the posters, functioning as a kind of advice column for sexual assault survivors. To one poster from 5 May 2013, who feared telling her friend who had just been raped that she, too, had survived sexual assault, the moderator for stfurapeculture⁷ advised the poster to come out to her friend, urging that "You don't have to tell her a lot of detail unless she asks, but I think it's perfectly okay to tell her that you were raped too...you wanted her to know she's not alone" (n.p.).

Lynn Spigel (2004) argues that advice-giving represents a key discursive formation defining feminist media production across second and third wave feminist practices of communication. And as social movement scholar Deborah Gould (2010) argues, the emotion work of advice-giving and the communication of support constitute important arenas of political activity. Online comments sections reveal the larger networks of support and political affinity that take shape around feminist responses to rape culture online. Stfurapeculture includes a notes section on its site that provides comments and a record of where posts were tweeted and reblogged. While Hollaback! provides a comments section for each post, most posters do not receive feedback via this route. In May 2013, posts made on the website of the New York chapter of Hollaback! garnered only three comments in total. Two were made to one poster—Amanda's expletive-filled response to a male harasser—while the third comment offered support to poster Isabel, who described being followed home at the age of 12 by a man who later appeared in the local news for groping young women. Her 9 May 2013 testimonial describes how she decided to trust her gut instincts and lock the door when the man came to

her house and demanded to be let in. A commenter commended Isabel: “Gee that sounds awful. Kudos for handling it so well” (n.p.). While only one person commented on Isabel’s post, 38 people used the “I’ve Got Your Back” button on Hollaback!’s interface to communicate their support. Amanda’s post also had 26 button responses. The reason why so few comments may appear on iHollaback.org may be because the organization incorporated a response button into their online interface that enables readers to click and anonymously send the poster the message “I’ve Got your Back!” Rather than requiring respondents to draft their own commentary, Hollaback! scripts it for them in ways that signal the existence of a larger community of virtual supporters. And while some may see this as little more than slacktivist responses that “have no impact on real-life political outcomes, but only serve to increase the feel-good factor of the participants” (Morozov 2009, cited in Christensen 2011: n.p.), in a context in which many rape survivors and targets of harassment lack adequate support for what they have experienced, a low-involvement but affectively charged expression of support in the form of an “I’ve Got Your Back” button may be an especially meaningful and also potentially reparative form of communication.

In the context of increasing Internet misogyny, the ability to offer online support to those who have been sexually harassed and assaulted is of particular political importance. As feminist new media scholar Alice Marwick (2013) argues, “[W]hile feminists believe it’s important to call out people for sexist remarks to address structural gender inequality, another group believes calling out sexist remarks is just another example of women exaggerating harm, censoring reasonable behavior, demanding ‘special rights’ beyond what men have” (n.p.). And “when much of the damage done by the spread of slander and gossip on the Internet is damage to women,” as Martha Nussbaum asserts (2012: 68), feminist online responses to rape culture offer some affective solidarity against it.

As I suggest, feminist responses to rape culture are organized as much by affective solidarities as they are by technological networks of online distribution. Stfurapeculture resonates with other recent online expressions of feminist outrage and exhaustion in the face of increasingly hostile examples of rape culture. In a recent *Nation* blog post, Jessica Valenti (2013) describes her battle with feminist burnout and uses a strong dose of irony to advise young feminists to keep up the fight, referencing the video testimonial genre of anti-suicide messaging to queer youth in “It Gets Better.”

I want to be able to tell younger feminists that it gets better, that you don’t mind the emotional exhaustion, anger and sadness that can come from doing this work.

But I can't. So this is what I tell them: Try to feel grateful for the feminist fatigue... and consider how lucky we are to be having this conversation (n.p.).

On the feminist blog *Jezebel*, Lindy West (2013, n.p.) expresses her sexism fatigue after Seth MacFarlane's overtly sexist stand-up routine while he hosted the Oscars in March 2013, posting in caps: "I AM TIRED OF TRYING TO EXPLAIN THIS SHIT TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT!" And in March 2013, after the conviction of Mays and Richmond for their involvement in the rape and kidnapping of Jane Doe in Steubenville, OH, and in the wake of continuing news on the gang rape in Delhi, Rebecca Solnit (2013) compiled an online litany of international rape cases over the past 12 months in which she vehemently expresses her desire to not have to keep critiquing rape culture.

As the examples I analyze here suggest, to transform rape culture and interrupt its practices requires community-based change in which girls, young women and men develop the capacity to respond and see and hear others responding. Using the tools of mobile and social media, young feminists not only expose rape culture, its supporters and perpetrators, they also affectively represent their experiences in online spaces that enable broad distribution and response-ability. Hollaback!, stfurapeculture, "Not Your Baby" and other social media spaces of responding to rape culture online and via mobile telephony evidence the capacity of affectively laden feminist mobilizations, while their spread reveals what have otherwise been largely invisible networks of feminist affinity and young women's collectivity.



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Notes

1. In the Steubenville, OH case, social media documentation and circulation of evidence from the assault not only exposed the violence the young men committed against Jane Doe, it also revealed their blatant misogynistic disregard for her and other young women's well being. Knightsec, an off-shoot of the hacker group Anonymous, released

a 12-minute video taken by Michael Nodianos (“Leaked Steubenville Big Red Rape Video HD” 2013), one of the young men involved in the attack. In it he laughs and jokes about the unconscious victim saying, among other things, that “she is deader than Trayvon Martin,” a reference to the young African-American man gunned down in the suburban enclave of Stanford, Florida. Anonymous also threatened to, and partially did, reveal the identities of the larger community of perpetrators and participants on the football team, whom prosecutors were considering charging as bystander participants as of April 2013.

2. Valenti is a self-identified third wave feminist, founder of the feminist blog *Feministing*, and author of several books on contemporary feminism.
3. The award-winning video is no longer available on YouTube. The trailer can be seen on Vimeo at <http://vimeo.com/56880138>
4. See <http://www.ihollaback.org/about/>
5. See <http://stfurapeculture.tumblr.com/>
6. See <http://montreal.ihollaback.org/category/english/>
7. See <http://stfurapeculture.tumblr.com/>

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