"I can be your Tinder nightmare": Harassment and misogyny in the online sexual marketplace

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Abstract

On Instagram, the accounts *Bye Felipe* and *Tinder Nightmares* feature screen-grabbed messages of sexist abuse and harassment women have received from men on dating apps. This paper presents a discursive analysis of 526 posts from these Instagrams. Utilising a psychosocial and feminist poststructuralist perspective, it examines how harassing messages reproduce certain gendered discourses and (hetero)sexual scripts, and analyses how harassers attempt to position themselves and the feminine subject in interaction. The analysis presents two themes, termed the "not hot enough" discourse and the "missing discourse of consent", which are unpacked to reveal a patriarchal logic in which a woman's constructed "worth" in the online sexual marketplace resides in her beauty and sexual propriety. Occurring in response to women's exercise of choice and to (real or imagined) sexual rejection, it is argued these are disciplinary discourses that attempt to (re)position women and femininity as sexually subordinate to masculinity and men. This paper makes a novel contribution to a growing body of feminist work on online harassment and misogyny. It also considers the implications for feminist theorising on the link between postfeminism and contemporary forms of sexism, and ends with some reflections on strategies of feminist resistance.

Keywords

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Introduction

> Rise of the Feminist Tinder-Creep-Busting Web Vigilante – Olga Khazan (2014), *The Atlantic*
>
> This Woman Set Up an Instagram to Show the Shocking Truth of Being a Woman Online – Jo Barrow (2014), *Buzzfeed UK*
>
> 'Bye Felipe' Is the Best New Instagram Account for Your Gross Online Dating Messages – Lane Moore (2014), *Cosmopolitan.com*

In October 2014, the Instagram account *Bye Felipe* was created with the aim of "calling out dudes who turn hostile when rejected or ignored". Run by Alexandra Tweten, a white American woman in her mid-20s, *Bye Felipe* exposes the harassment and sexism women experience online by posting screenshots women send her of verbal abuse, unwanted graphic pictures ("dick pics") and crude sexual solicitations received from men over online dating platforms, and sometimes other social media sites. Two years later, *Bye* Felipe has amassed over 430,000 followers and expanded into a feminist campaign which includes a website, a podcast, a petition for Facebook to implement anti-harassment policies and comedy events held in Los Angeles (see bye-felipe.com, 2016).

As the headlines above demonstrate, media coverage tends to be highly receptive towards the *Bye Felipe* phenomenon and enthusiastic about the idea of calling out and shaming "Tinder creeps" and their "gross messages". A number of articles frame this practice as part of a broader social trend (e.g. Krueger, 2015; Weiss, 2015), covering it alongside other highly popular Instagram accounts like *Tinder Nightmares*, which has an impressive following of 1.6 million people, and a book of the same name. *Tinder Nightmares* is the creation of Elan Gale, who reportedly started the account because he "hates" online dating and wanted to "make fun of it" (Parkinson, 2015). Although it is not billed as a feminist account and is open to submissions from both sexes, most of the "nightmares" it features are sexist messages women have received from men.

These Instagrams help expose the pressing and otherwise privately experienced issue of harassment and misogyny on online dating services (Hess & Flores, 2016; Shaw, 2016). With the introduction of apps like Tinder, online dating has soared in popularity in recent years and there are concerns that women and sexual minorities are exposed to sexually aggressive behaviour in these spaces, such as "cyber flashing" (Thompson, 2016) and even sexual assault committed with the aid of dating apps (Hopkins, 2016), at an unprecedented scale. Despite the potentially grave consequences and extensive public discussion of this issue, it has attracted surprisingly little academic attention (although see Hess & Flores, 2016; Shaw, 2016). This study provides novel insight into sexist harassment of women on dating apps by analysing screen-grabbed messages posted on *Bye Felipe* and *Tinder Nightmares*. It explores what discursive forms misogyny takes in these exchanges, and how the men attempt to position themselves and the feminine subject in ways that reinforce traditional gender

hierarchies. The analysis presents what I have dubbed the "not hot enough" discourse and the "missing discourse of consent" and unpacks these to reveal a marketised logic in which a woman's "worth" in the online sexual marketplace is rooted in patriarchal ideals of feminine beauty and sexual propriety. Noting that online dating affords women an increased level of choice and control in finding potential dates, I argue that harassment on dating apps may constitute a form of gender discipline, with some men responding to shifting gender politics with overt misogyny.

Online dating: Gender politics in the sexual marketplace

First I explore how the metaphor of the sexual marketplace has become a dominant discursive framework for making sense of – and hence shaping – contemporary heterosexual relations and online dating communities. Academics were among the first to openly theorise (heterosexual) relationships as an economic exchange that follows the laws of supply and demand (for a review, see Ahuvia & Adelman, 1993). The theory posits men and women act strategically and rationally, weighing up what kind of valuable "goods" they can exchange and what they can "afford" in return for desired relationships, amidst a wider market of potential competitors. Proponents of this view extend on evolutionary psychological accounts of sex and gender, contending that "men and women play different roles resembling buyer and seller" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004, p. 339). Female sex is considered to be an exchange for male social resources (e.g. wealth, status) and thus key factors affecting a woman's "currency" in this sexual marketplace are her sexual attractiveness and (imagined or real) number of previous sexual partners.

As recent feminist critiques of evolutionary psychology point out (e.g. Farvid & Braun, 2014; García-Favaro, 2016), this metaphor is predicated on traditional gendered assumptions about the "male sex drive", where men are considered naturally more interested in heterosex (particularly casual sex) than women are, and so will actively pursue heterosexual interactions. Women, on the other hand, are positioned as passive recipients of men's sexual attention and need only to accept or refuse such offers. In other words, women are depicted as the products, men the consumers.

Research suggests people of both genders do often use market metaphors to describe their dating activities, both in "traditional" and online settings (e.g. Ahuvia & Adelman, 1993; Smaill, 2004). For example, studies have found online dating described by participants as "a bit like shopping" (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008, p. 273) and "shopping for the perfect parts" (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010, p. 437). In a study by Frohlick & Migliardi (2011, p. 83) on middle-aged women's experiences of online dating, one participant was quoted as saying: "for men, it's like being in a candy store, a kid in a candy store. They just move from one woman to the next". As the majority of online dating services are structured according to marketing principles, these platforms arguably represent an embodiment, or visualisation, of the sexual marketplace. On a dating site or app, one constructs a profile and then scrolls or swipes through a near continuous stream of other profiles to

"match" with desirable others. Scholars studying the technosocial dynamics of online dating platforms argue this action – along with the application of search terms or preferences to sift through the vast pool of profiles – constructs the dating subject as the one who controls, selects and manipulates potential matches (David & Cambre, 2016; Roscoe & Chillas; 2014). It is argued then that online dating "radicalises the demand that one find for oneself the best bargain" (Illouz, 2007, p. 86).

Illouz (2007, p. 81) further claims that the fixity of the profile picture(s) means "beauty and the body are ever-present" and locked "in a competitive market of similar photographs". Online daters become hyperaware of their physical appearance and its social capital and through the body are made to compete with others. This idea resonates with Foucauldian-inspired theorisations of social media as an "omnopticon": a mode of surveillance where "the many watch the many" (Jurgenson, 2010, p. 376). Gazing at other's dating profiles whilst simultaneously being gazed at may thus produce a particular kind of self-monitoring, where one judges the self against others and so determines one's corresponding market value. As both men and women use these image based interfaces to seek heterosexual relationships one might assume the omnoptic gaze works equally both ways and produces the same power effects. However, according to the tenets of the sexual marketplace, physical attractiveness is considered more central to women's "worth" in the market than it is for men (Baumeister and Vohs, 2004). Recent feminist literature has also highlighted how women's bodies are particularly scrutinised across new media (e.g. Dobson, 2013; Salter, 2016), with Gill (2008a, p. 442) contending that women "are subject to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance which has no historical precedent".

In addition to these traditional scripts, the online sexual marketplace is also animated by an ostensibly gender neutral and permissive orientation towards casual sex. The permissive discourse, a product of the so-called sexual revolution, depicts both men *and* women as having a potential desire for casual sex (Hollway, 1989). This contemporary understanding of casual sex as an "egalitarian, fun and free endeavour" (Farvid & Braun, 2014, p. 124) is enjoined with the postfeminist notion that – presumed to be now liberated – the contemporary (young) woman can and *should* embody a sexually confident and adventurous, "up for it" femininity to demonstrate her empowerment (Gill, 2008b; McRobbie, 2004). Most popular (and free) dating apps like Tinder, OkCupid and PlentyofFish present and are typically perceived as "hookup apps" (e.g. David & Cambre, 2016; Shaw, 2016). Although these platforms are not only used to seek casual sex (see Sumter, Vandenbosch, & Ligtenberg, 2017), they have garnered a reputation as "meat markets" and as the online equivalent of the "seedy nightclub" (Race, 2015). Consequently, having a profile on a dating app may be construed as indicating a desire for casual sex, and there are anecdotal reports of some women using "disclaimers" like "not dtf" ("down to fuck") on their profiles to try to mitigate this perception (see Khazan, 2014).

Online misogyny and gendered violence

In recent years, sexual harassment and abuse of women on social media and other online public spaces has become increasingly visible. A growing body of research has examined misogynistic behaviour in such spaces as video games (Salter & Blodgett, 2012), Twitter (Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016), online communities of Men's Rights Activists and Pick-Up Artists (Banet-Weisner & Miltner, 2016), news comment sections (García-Favaro & Gill, 2016) and ''lad'' social media accounts like UniLad (Phipps & Young, 2015). A number of researchers have detected a patterned quality to the kinds of abuse women receive online. Jane (2014) and Salter and Blodgett (2012) note one recurring theme revolves around verbal attacks on women's appearance (''fat'', ''ugly'', etc.). Sexualised and gendered slurs (slut, whore, bitch) are also ubiquitous (Jane, 2014; Megarry, 2014). Finally, sexual harassment and violence – whether threatened or referred to in ''jest'' (e.g. rape jokes) – may be considered one of the defining features of much online misogyny (see Phipps & Young, 2015). Jane (2012, 2014) has observed that rape and sexual assault are often framed as ''correctives'' to conduct harassers have taken issue with, such as publicly voicing feminist opinions online.

As Banet-Weisner and Miltner (2016) argue, much of the public discussion and debate on this topic centre on technological or legal explanations, including anonymity or inadequate legal and policy frameworks for dealing with ''trolls''. I agree with their assessment that, whilst these may be contributing factors, at the root of these forms of online harassment is a societal problem with sexism alongside racism, homophobia and other marginalising discourses (Citron, 2014). In other words, much online harassment is an extension of oppressive power structures which encourage violence against minorities and provide the social tools for it to flourish.

Of particular relevance to this analysis are those sexual discourses which continue to perpetuate a vision of heterosexuality that positions women as subordinate to men and responsible for servicing male sexual ''needs'' (e.g. Farvid & Braun, 2014; García-Favaro, 2016; Gill, 2009). Through the male sex drive discourse, men are understood to be more interested in heterosex than women – often voraciously so – and thus an insistent, even aggressive, style of male sexual agency is considered normal and desirable (Hollway, 1989). ''Naturally'' more resistant to sex, women are considered to need some persuasion and indeed may even enjoy being overpowered by men. This trope downplays the need for mutual and affirmative consent, providing the ''cultural scaffolding'' (Gavey, 2005; Jackson, 1978) for gendered sexual violence – what some feminists call a ''rape culture'' (Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2016) – wherein violence against women is cast as unremarkable, inevitable and even excusable.

Sexual violence may manifest online, for example, as gender-based hate speech, non-consensual sexting and pornography or online sexual harassment and cyberstalking, and cause physical and psychological harms to the female target just as

"real" as offline violence may (Henry & Powell, 2015). Furthermore, some women may suffer secondary victimisation if the abuse is public, as the sexual double standard ensures (at least some) women's bodies are open to readings of sexual promiscuity. The subject may therefore be depicted as "deserving" of abuse and the capacities of the Internet used to further harass her (Dodge, 2016; Salter, 2016).

Critical feminist perspectives have long posited that sexual harassment and violence are forms of discipline or attempted social control (see Kissling, 1991), and so it is often presumed online harassment has a similar function. For example, some argue that intensified (or at least increasingly visible) outpourings of online misogyny or "toxic masculinity" in recent years may be explained by the emergence of a "popular feminism" over social media and heightened awareness of feminist interventions and women's successes that is understood by some as a threat to masculinity/men (e.g. Banet-Wesiner & Miltner, 2016; García-Favaro & Gill, 2016; Phipps & Young, 2015). Furthermore, Nussbaum (2010) theorises hateful and objectifying speech aimed at female public figures (such as celebrities) operates as "shame punishment": an attempt at "conferring on the object a spoiled or stigmatised identity, a compromised status" (p. 68). The motivation for this punishment, Nussbaum proposes, is "ressentiment", an emotion inspired by feelings of weakness and powerlessness relative to another (often sustained by norms of masculinity), which results in attempts to put down the other and gain power over them.

Butler's (1997) work on hate speech and gender as a form of discipline provides further theoretical grounding to this argument. Developing the Althusserian notion of interpellation, Butler (1997, p. 18) theorises that subjectivity is constituted through language and thus hateful language "enacts its own kind of violence" as it "works to constitute the subject in a subordinate position". Subjects can thus mobilise sexist and other oppressive discourses try to "remind" the Other of their marginalised status and deter them from "overstepping" the boundaries of their social category. Butler's framework is also useful for making sense of resistance, as the concept of interpellation provides the possibility that hateful speech may not be "successful" in producing hurtful effects if it fails to position the subject as intended.

At present, this connection between online harassment and disciplinary discourse is often only implied or assumed, and detailed examinations of the contexts in which it occurs are relatively rare. This paper provides an empirically grounded exploration of how, in response to women's exercise of choice and sexual agency over dating apps, some men may attempt to enforce traditional gender–power relations through sexual harassment. Through a discursive analysis of harassing message exchanges I demonstrate how traditional scripts that equate ideal femininity with passivity and a slender, attractive body and masculinity with aggressiveness and dominance may be reconfigured or reasserted. This work comes from a larger project which is further examining women's experiences of, and responses to, misogyny on dating apps. In the analysis here, I do not explore the women's replies in the messages in depth, although it is clearly vital to theorise women's resistance as well. For those interested in reading further on this point, I point to Shaw's

(2016) work on how posts on *Bye Felipe* are interpreted and discussed by Instagram communities and Hess and Flores (2016), who examine how women counter-discipline men's "toxic masculine performances" through Tinder Nightmares.

Data, methods and approach

The analysis is based on online dating messages between men and women which have been posted on the Instagram accounts *Bye Felipe* and *Tinder Nightmares*. Both accounts crowdsource their material from other social media users who submit screenshots of their message exchanges to a monitored email address. There were several reasons behind choosing these two accounts out of similar Instagrams such as *Feminist Tinder* (which was running at the time of data collection but has since been deleted). First, both the relative popularity and considerable receptive media coverage of both *Bye Felipe* and *Tinder Nightmares* suggest the types of messages they post are clearly recognisable to many online daters and resonate with their experiences. Second, because Tweten and Gale crowdsource their content, their posts are varied and represent a wide spread of experiences compared to accounts like *Feminist Tinder*, which focus only on the administrator's experience of online dating. Lastly, as explained in the introduction, *Bye Felipe* and *Tinder Nightmares* have different stated aims which I felt made for an interesting analysis considering the remarkable similarities in the content they post. Whilst researching these accounts is clearly not the same as researching dating apps themselves, I argue they are still a legitimate and interesting object of academic inquiry as they provide insight into (a subset of) private online dating messages that would otherwise remain hidden and unavailable to researchers. Social media now mediate and make visible much of social life, and so provide unique opportunities for digital social research (Hand, 2014).

The data corpus consists of 526 posts, spanning from when the accounts were first created (both in late 2014) up until 1 April 2016. Posts were collected in image form and transformed to text transcriptions using image-to-text recognition software, which were then uploaded to a qualitative analysis programme. I used an inductive coding process, with initial readings of the corpus used to generate a basic coding framework which took notice of the harassing episode, its antecedent and how women responded. Alongside coding, I used computer-assisted word analysis to identify key words and explore their contextual use. Finally, I organised the data into discursive themes, paying attention to recurring statements, motifs, turns of phrase and characterisations. Turn-taking in the messages is marked with the letters "A" and "B". Spelling and grammar is retained from the original posts, however emojis have been omitted due to limitations in document compatibilities.

I characterise my approach to discourse analysis as a psychosocial one, influenced by critical and feminist poststructuralist theoretical perspectives (e.g. Gill, 2008a, 2008b; Scharff, 2015; Wetherell, 2014), Gill (2008a: 45) that define psychosocial research as the attempt "to understand and intervene in the relationship between individual and society, between subjectivity and culture, between self and ideology".

Feminist poststructuralist scholarship, which draws on Foucauldian theories of power, posits that this link between the "inside" and the "outside" is constituted by discourses which provide different "ways of seeing" and "ways of being" (i.e. subject positions) which individuals can take up and mould their subjectivity in relation to Gavey (1989). Informed by the critical tradition, such work advances a deconstructive approach to discourse and language where sets of statements and social practices are examined for the taken-for-granted, socially shared assumptions they rest upon to explore how power and privilege operates – at the heart of subjective experience (Hall, 2001). From a feminist perspective, my analysis is focussed on the social production of gender and, specifically, how femininity comes to be socially disciplined (see Bartky, 1990; Butler, 1997). In the sections that follow, I unpack the binary, sexist constructions around masculinity, femininity and heterosex which underpin harassing messages on *Bye Felipe* and *Tinder Nightmares*. Furthermore, drawing on Butler's (1997) theorising on injurious interpellation, I explore how harassers (attempt to) socially locate themselves, as men, in a dominant position in online dating interactions and women as inferior and sexually objectified through hateful speech.

"Not hot enough": Female value in the sexual marketplace

The most common type of insult in the data corpus were those that targeted a woman's appearance. Most of these cases appeared after a woman had ignored a message or communicated disinterest, even politely, and hence the majority came from *Bye Felipe* (which focuses on the theme of hostility after rejection). The type of refusal (i.e. ignoring the message or responding with a no) seemed to make little difference to whether the woman was verbally abused or not. Tweten (2015, p. 200) refers to this conundrum as "damned if you do reply, damned if you don't reply".

These insults most often referred to the woman's weight, with the word "fat" appearing repeatedly:

Extract 1

> Yesterday – 1:16PM
> A: You're a cutie...when are you going to give me an eye exam?
> Just now!
> A: Whatever…you're not all that anyways. You can actually afford to drop some weight with that fat upper pussy area.
> B: Cutie to fat? Guess someone DOES need their eyes checked
>
> *(Bye Felipe)*

Extract 2

> A: Wanna fuck
> 6:11PM
> B: No thanks
> 7 mins ago

A: Auto correct messed up.. I meant you're a fat fuck wanna eat at golden corral I'll even be romantic snap chat a pic of you to my friends while you dunk a pork chop in the chocolate fountain while you go into diabetic shock

(Bye Felipe)

The word "fat" carries with it particular gendered connotations when aimed as an insult against women, given the centrality of weight to disciplinary feminine norms. Slenderness is deeply tied to images of desirable femininity and seen also as a hallmark of self-restraint and control (Bartky, 1990). The fat woman is thus the antithesis of appropriate femininity: repulsive, excessive and out of control. In these examples then, the man labels the woman's body or body part/s as 'fat' in an effort to position her as stigmatised, undesirable and unattractive, and take back or refute his sexual interest which she has not reciprocated. Sexual rejection may be particularly threatening to some men's performance of masculinity, as traditional sexual scripts exhort men to establish dominance over women and take control of negotiations of heterosex (Jackson, 1978). Therefore we may read these men's insults as attempts to gain the upper hand in the exchange by countering the suggestion he found the woman desirable and so deny she has any erotic power over him and, potentially, other men (see Denes, 2011; Farvid & Braun, 2014, for a similar discussion on "negging").

The next extracts provide further insight into how "fat" was wielded as an insult against women who did not reply to messages:

Extract 3

A: [text break] myself... Txt me, much easier
Jan 11, 2016, 9:27 AM
A: Babe
Jan 27, 2016, 8:15 AM
A: Babe you're like super chubby.... Fat and playing hard to get with a guy like me? You got to be fucking kidding me lol
Feb 1, 2016, 12:11 AM
A: I'm super horny....

(Bye Felipe)

Extract 4

A: I know a great place near me that sells good pizza late
A::)
A: And I have a beard
Nov 6.2015. 1:29 AM
A: LoI or not
Nov 6. 2015, 7:49 AM
B: I'm not interested. Best of luck!
Nov 6. 2015, 11:48AM

A: Your fat though
A: You should be desperate

(Bye Felipe)

In these extracts, the men construct female appearance as the determinant of how she "should" respond to his advances, drawing on the *body-as-capital* tenet of the online sexual marketplace (Illouz, 2007). The unspoken "truth" behind assertions that a fat woman "should be desperate" is that, because a woman's physical attractiveness (supposedly) dictates her desirability to men, she cannot "afford" to be choosy and should "accept" any form of male sexual attention received. Again, this dynamic is predicated on the assumption that men should initiate sexual interactions and control their development (Hollway, 1989; Jackson, 1978). Female beauty is constructed as a form of currency on a dating app and thus the "super chubby" woman is told she has little to no bargaining power and so is *indebted* to respond favourably to his (or any man's) advances. In the process, the men also attempt to position themselves as having greater "worth" than the woman they message. They point to apparent markers of desirable masculinity such as having "a beard" or claiming a superior masculine status ("a guy like me") to seemingly mitigate against the appearance of emasculation by being turned down.

The following extracts further develop this reading and reveal my inspiration for dubbing this the "not hot enough" discourse.

Extract 5

YOU MATCHED WITH ALEX ON 2/4/16
A: Well hello there. How's life treating u boo?
Feb 14. 2016, 6:13 PM
A: Nothing huh... just so u know, you're not hot enough for that attitude.
A: Happy Valentine!

(Bye Felipe)

Extract 6

YOU MATCHED WITH THOMAS ON 2015.12-19
A: Hey how's it going?
Dec 21. 2015. 6:25 PM
A: You know you're not attractive enough to not respond right?

(Bye Felipe)

Extract 7

A: Lol thanks for the match, you wanna screw??
Jan 18, 2015, 10:03 AM
A: Jahahaaaaaaaa sorry about that! My mate had my phone x
Jan 18, 2015, 6:57 PM

A: You genuinely not gonna reply? You're like a 2 out of 10 lol
B: Hahahahahahahahahahaha

(Bye Felipe)

Again, the men in these extracts attack the women's appearance to position them of being low "value". This strategy is demonstrated to particular and callous effect in extract 7, where he labels the woman "a 2 out of 10". As a form of discipline, the "not hot enough" discourse works to position the feminine subject as less powerful than, and subservient to, men and their sexual desires. In a tone that drips with condescension, the harassers claim the woman should "know" she is "not hot enough" or "attractive enough" to ignore his messages to try and "remind" her of her relative worthlessness and powerlessness in the sexual marketplace as an apparently fat woman. This discourse works to recast the feminine subject's exercise of choice as illegitimate and stepping outside of her place. In other words, the men who used this discourse insult the woman in an effort to (re)position her as merely a visual object to be consumed by him, and reassert his power as the one who gets to choose whether they meet, based on how attractive he finds her (see also Farvid & Braun, 2014).

The last extracts in this section demonstrate some of the most egregious and hateful examples of this discourse:

Extract 8

A: Honestly all I want is sex at this point, I just wanted to use you for a but since you lived close and it was convenient
A: Plus your fugly so I'm not actually interested in you, just your mouth
16 minutes ago
A: You are not a person to me, just an object.

(Bye Felipe)

Extract 9

A: Lol right. So funny how hurt you men get when a girl isn't interested
Mar 04 4:09 AM
B: I'm the most ugly 6′3 run way/hugo buss model you are absolutely right sweetheart
B: Abd I swear to God I had no idea you are fat I only looked at your profile pic I just noticed BBW like a minute ago
B: I however admire your self steam
B: Now buzz off you don't get to speak to me you havnt gained that privilege I hate fat women gross
B: I don't even consider you as a person to begin with so take care

(Bye Felipe)

Extending the "logic" of the not hot enough discourse, in these extracts being "fat" or "fugly" (a neologism for fat and ugly, or fucking ugly) is constructed to make

the woman so valueless that she is "not a person" or merely a body part (a mouth). The abuse is not only aimed to degrade the woman as unacceptably fat (and/or ugly) but to also completely dehumanise her and strip her of human subjectivity (Butler, 1997; Nussbaum, 2010). Indeed, the men's choice of words here (e.g. "just an object") seems to suggest an awareness of feminist discourse on objectification. In this sense, they are directly talking back against feminist calls for men to recognise women's full personhood, antagonistically stating that they *do* see women as objects. Mobilising such backlash rhetoric, it could be argued that "in effect, these men are restoring the patriarchal world before the advent of sex equality, the world in which women were just tools of male purpose" (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 80).

Picking up and the missing discourse of consent

I turn now to the variety of explicitly sexual messages which appear in both *Bye Felipe* and *Tinder Nightmares*. I argue these messages depict a "missing discourse of consent" (inspired by Fine's (1988) "missing discourse of desire") as they included, amongst other things, demands or commands for (casual) sex, as well as threats of sexual violence. The messages below may be read in a variety of ways. They may be seen as (ostensibly) sexual invites, or at least attempts to start a conversation which Hess and Flores (2016) characterise as "toxic masculine performances". They could also be read as sexual acts in themselves for the men, who seek gratification by sending explicit, and unasked for, sexual messages online. I want to prioritise the first reading by assuming the messages share some kind of performative function and so begin with an analysis of the uses of crude or dirty "pickup lines":

Extract 10

> Nov 1, 2015, 9:13 AM
> A: I want to spread some Nutella on that booty
> B: I think you got that off tinder nightmares
> A: I can be your tinder nightmare
> B: I think you already are
>
> *(Tinder Nightmares)*

Extract 11

> A: I want your wet pussy on my beard
> A: Hi*
> A: fuck me now
> A: What's up*
> B: Thanks for the offer, but I think I'll pass
> A: I was going to say the same thing
> A: Damn auto correct
> B: Excellent. Glad we're on the same page. Have a lovely evening!

A: Go fuck yourself.
A: No don't go*

(*Bye Felipe*)

Considered a strategy for "picking up" women, pickup lines follow the typical script of "man as seducer, woman as seduced" (Jackson, 1978, p. 31). These lines, however, convey the sender's sexual interest with humour and as such, I would suggest they are not framed as a wholly serious or sincere attempt at seduction. (In case the humour is not apparent in extract 11, the use of the star symbol is a common texting practice to show a correction when one makes a typing or predictive text mistake. Thus, the joke here is that the phone's predictive text service keeps suggesting sex.) Their unsolicited sexual fantasies/demands convey a sense of sexual entitlement (Shaw, 2016) – framing it solely about what "*I* want", these men show little to no interest in what the woman's desires might be and whether she might even want to engage in such conversations. Yet in being unashamedly crude, the senders also demonstrate a kind of ironic knowingness that their messages are "creepy" or "sleazy" and may be met with reproach. Critical research on lad mags contend that the use of crass, ironic humour may be used to demonstrate awareness of changing gender norms, yet simultaneously reassert an unabashed, entitled and sexually predatory masculinity (Benwell, 2004; Gill, 2007). As the man in extract 10 ominously responds: "I can be your Tinder nightmare".

The next message provides another example of this type of "humour":

Extract 12

Aug 4, 2015, 12:47 PM
A: Hey Devon – glad we matched! Any interest in grabbing some drinks and having some obligatory sex?
A: If you're not into drinks, I totally understand.

(*Tinder Nightmares*)

In this pickup line, the woman's consent to sex is rendered completely irrelevant. Indeed, this is part of the man's joke, that sex is not even a question but a given. It ironically rehashes the stereotypical casual sex scenario where the man buys the woman drinks to "get" sex from her, drawing on traditional heteronormative scripts which position the woman only ever as the gatekeeper, not the instigator (Fine, 1988). Interestingly, his follow-up line in the second message ("if you're not into drinks") does create space for the woman's reciprocal desire for a casual encounter, reflecting a more "modern" permissive discourse, where women as well as men are seen as having the desire for casual sex (Farvid & Braun, 2014; Hollway, 1989). The possibility to refuse the invitation, however, is not catered for, depicting sex as *imperative* to online dating. The faux politeness can also be read as a means for this man to position himself as being simply candid about what all that he (all?) men want from the woman is sex. By sending up a polite, respectful way of speaking to a woman online, he implicitly constructs social niceties as simply a

façade for men to disguise their true intentions and signals that he is just "playing the game" to get what he wants.[1] In this sense, his self-reflexive and ironic reconstruction of this script works to disavow personal responsibility for – whilst still endorsing – problematic assumptions about men's entitlement to "receive" heterosex from women (see Benwell, 2004; Gill, 2007).

The following extracts further illustrate the worrying insinuations of this discourse:

Extract 13

> Oct 5, 2015, 5:07PM
> A: Hope you're prepared to sit on my sweaty face
> A: Hope you're prepared to sit on my sweaty face
> A: I want your ass for dinner
> A: Smother me with your sweet brown pussy
> A: You can ignore me all you want but I will have datass
> B: I just saw these
>
> *(Tinder Nightmares)*

Extract 14

> A: If I flip a coin, what are the chances of me getting head?
> *Apr 9.2015. 11:06 PM*
> B: Hmmmm 0
> *Apr 10.2015.8:51 PM*
> A: That's fine I'll just force you to suck my dick and jab your head against my dick
> B: Isn't that rape?
> A: Rape is frat
>
> *(Bye Felipe)*

Again, the men do not construct the sex acts they propose as optional. The women's refusals are not taken as a sign to stop sending them messages and the men continue with their harassment or threaten the receiver with sexual violence. Their persistence reflects the types of sexual subjectivities made available to men through the male sex drive discourse, which constructs an insistent, sexually aggressive style of male sexuality as healthy, normal and desirable (Hollway, 1989; Jackson, 1978) and thus positions sexual strategies from persuasion to coercion – and sometimes even aggression – as legitimate means of "getting" sex from women (see Wood, Lambert, & Jewkes, 2007). Women, on the other hand, are positioned by this discourse as "naturally" resistant to the idea of casual sex and in need of persuasion, so a "no" may be safely ignored or even considered "token resistance" (see Denes, 2011). In these extracts, the woman's resistance is treated as part of the "game" and her refusals used as fodder for an escalation of the man's tactics into (even more) offensive and racialised sexual messages ("sweet brown pussy") or threats of sexual violence. Indeed, the "if I flip a coin" line appears designed to

"bait" the woman into responding with irritation or disgust – the possible reasons for which I want to draw out by examining the extracts below.

Extract 15

> A: i wanna boink you.
> *Nov 21 3:29 PM*
> B: Just no
> *Nov 21 3:34 PM*
> A: your gonna turn this into a rape
> *Nov 21 3:43 PM*
> B: Learn to respect women you a hole
> *Nov 21 3:47 PM*
> A: its POF „ repect is out the window
>
> *(Bye Felipe)*

Extract 16

> A: Do you like potatoes
> B: Oh god
> B: No. I dont
> A: I'm guna shove a potato up your arse then
> A: Bitch
> B: Jesus Christ what's wrong with you!?
> A: Your on tinder. You arse has a free entry sign
> A: And potatoes are so nutrious
> A: It's a win win. Why ben an ungratefulprude
>
> *(Bye Felipe)*

In response to their sexist "banter" being challenged, the men in these extracts draw on the sexual double standard to position the recipient as "deserving" of harassment, as "respect [for women]" on a dating site/app like Plenty of Fish (POF) or Tinder is "out of the window". The men depict the dating app as a transactional space for sex where women are to be used as a "free" source of sex. Their insults position the women as "cheap" for supposedly using hookup apps to seek casual sex with men and thus they should accept men will not "respect" them for this (see also Tweten, 2015). To request even a modicum of respect is rendered illegitimate because of her apparently compromised moral status (Salter, 2016). Moreover, in extract 16, declining a sexual invite is labelled the action of an "ungrateful prude". This finding resonates with Gill's (2008b) argument about the perniciousness of current "up for it" visions of female sexual subjectivity, where to refuse to be sexually available and adventurous can attract accusations of prudishness, as well as Žižek's (1999) observation of "the obverse paradox of pleasure becoming duty in a 'permissive' society".

Returning to my earlier argument that rude pickup lines are not (necessarily) "genuine" attempts at seduction, the deliberately and shockingly sexist character of

these messages appears designed to make the women respond with anger and disgust (which they do). In fact, we may see these men as engaging in a form of baiting or "trolling" with the aim of provoking feminist ire, which often occurs in the comments section of *Bye Felipe* (Shaw, 2016; Tweten, 2015). The harassers talk back against appeals to decency by repositioning the women as objects for male sexual purposes. In this respect, the "missing discourse of consent" could actually be seen as a *pre-emptively* disciplinary discourse. The men respond to women who occupy a public, sexualised space with harassment and objectifying speech perhaps to try to humiliate women and communicate that, in the online sexual marketplace, women should "know" their place is to be subservient to men's sexual desires.

Conclusion

The overarching aim of this paper is to bring public conversations around the issue of sexual harassment on dating apps – currently playing out over social media and feminist call-out sites – into the feminist academic literature. From a corpus of screen-grabbed messages posted on *Bye Felipe* and *Tinder Nightmares*, I identified two discursive themes which I argue derive their logic from dominant discourses around gender, heterosex and dating. Unpicking "not hot enough" discourse I explored how in the face of rejection, many men used appearance-related insults to construct beauty as a form of currency and thus remind sup-posedly "fat" and "ugly" feminine subjects of their inferior "value" in the online sexual marketplace. In the second section, I analysed how pickup lines marked by aggressive sexual invitations, threats of sexual violence and victim-blaming sentiments formed a "missing discourse of consent" predicated on assumptions that men should have free market access to heterosex on dating apps and be situated in a dominant and more powerful position than (sexualised and objectified) feminine subjects. Considering the interactional context, I argued that both discourses represent a mode of gender discipline, attempting to shame women for their bodies and sexualities and so (re)position women and femininity as subordinate to masculinity and men. The absurdly vitriolic, almost caricatured expressions of anger and hostility may also be read as responses to appearances of emasculation from being sexually rejected by women, and loss of control in the face of shifting gender–power relations.

Although I do not presume to know the thoughts and feelings of the men behind the messages, I suggest such aggression is performative. That is, their venom is an (attempted) display of masculine power and control over women's bodies and sexual capacities in a space that is radicalising the notion of choice in the sexual market, and where woman have an almost unprecedented ability to search for and selectively respond to potential dates (Illouz, 2007; Roscoe & Chillas, 2013).

My analysis also extends on arguments made by other scholars (e.g. García-Favaro & Gill, 2016; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004) that, infused with postfeminist logics, contemporary modes of sexism are taking on a particularly sinister quality.

Engaging in casual sex is often depicted as an expression of sexual liberation for (young, attractive and single) women, and yet sexual double standards stubbornly persist. Women who appear in public, sexualised spaces (i.e. "hookup" apps) may thus face abuse for not living up to impossible demands to be sexually available (and not prudish) but not "slutty". I also demonstrated how misogynistic discourse talks back against feminist ideas like objectification, supporting previous arguments that the proliferation of a "popular" misogyny or toxic masculinity online may be a response to perceived increases in women's agency and power relative to men (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016). Marked by overtly hateful speech and crude irony, the discourses identified in the analysis both *recognise* and *dismiss* calls for sexual equality and respect for women.

Finally, I want to end on some reflections on feminist resistance and activism on this issue. In arguing sexist harassment on dating apps has a disciplinary function, I have tried not to imply anything about how "successful" it may be. Women can – and many clearly do – discursively refute a marginalised position. As other research on *Bye Felipe* (Shaw, 2016) and *Tinder Nightmares* (Hess & Flores, 2016) has demonstrated, the Instagrams provide women with a resource to draw attention to sexism on dating apps and, indeed, counter-discipline "creepy" men through witty takedowns and derisive laughter. According to Tweten (2015, p.206), "Bye Felipe exposes absurd attempts and uses humour to take away some of the power the men's insults may carry". No doubt there is some comfort and even power to be drawn from such satirical laughter, as others have argued (e.g. Keller et al., 2016). However, perhaps it is time for feminist scholarship to further critically analyse this practice of calling out as a kind of shame politics. For example, which narratives are silenced and which emphasised when one names and shames a "Tinder creep" online? What happens politically when such men are held up as abject figures of scorn on social media? As this paper has argued, sexism and harassment are ideological in nature and so feminist strategies of resistance must not inadvertently individualise or depoliticise the issue. Hopefully, it is the structural and sexual injustices women face in their dating lives and beyond that are the ultimate targets of ridicule.

Note

1. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this particular use of ironic humour.

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