More than a sex crime: a feminist political economy of the 2014 iCloud hack

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Abstract

This article examines the media framing of and relations to the 2014 iCloud hack, wherein hundreds of female celebrities' private photos were stolen and distributed online. In particular, I problematize the reading of this event as merely signalling the misogyny of 'toxic' online cultures and contextualize it as part of a larger political economy of female celebrity. I argue that, while the growth in feminist discourses emanating from both the mainstream media and celebrity women is encouraging, it perhaps occludes the broader power relations that extend across both new and traditional media, ensuring maintenance of the status quo. This event exemplifies problems with a popular form of feminism that seeks inclusion into these systems, rather than wider systemic change. Therefore, in addition to examining the celebrity and/or her audience as the site of political (feminist) work, I call for an excavation of the systems in which she is embedded and her relations to the means of media production and profit.

Introduction

The Apple iCloud hack remains one of the most infamous examples of celebrity violation and online misogyny to date. In late August of 2014 nearly 200 private nude photographs of female celebrities stolen from Apple's iCloud service began making the rounds on the Internet, first posted to underground websites AnonIB and 4chan and then picked

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up and circulated much more broadly through the Reddit messaging boards. As the celebrities were identified, numerous companies, lawyers and criminal investigators scrambled to trace the privacy breach and remove the photos. A few weeks later another two 'troves' of nude photos of female celebrities were released. The event was commonly referred to as 'The Fappening' in reference to the slang term 'fap', meaning masturbation, and 'Celebgate' after one of the websites that hosted the photos.

Of the targeted celebrities, perhaps none was more famous at that time than 24-year-old actress Jennifer Lawrence, who, in 2014, was named Forbes' highest-grossing actor (Washington, 2014). Embodying the hegemonically ideal form of beauty (able-bodied, thin, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, white femininity), Lawrence has successfully built a multi-genre career alternating between independent productions and multi-million-dollar, Hollywood action franchises. Her success in this industry – she became the top-earning actress in Hollywood at the age of 25 and has grossed over $2 billion at the box office (Jennifer Lawrence Movie Box Office Results, n.d.), while also being one of the youngest women ever to win an Academy Award for acting – legitimizes her status as a celebrity and classifies her into what Rojek (2001) would call 'achieved celebrity'. Her emergence as the face and name of the iCloud hack underlines the power of her star image in attracting newspaper audiences (and advertisers). Lawrence was one of the few victims that wanted, and/or was given the platform to address the situation at length, which she did in a *Vanity Fair* cover interview released a month after the initial hack. In the interview Lawrence re-framed the discussion of this celebrity violation using a powerful feminist soundbite: 'It's not a scandal, it's a sex crime' (Vanity Fair, 2014).

Drawing from a larger research project, in which I analysed over 200 articles about the iCloud hack that ran in American and Canadian newspapers at the end of 2014 (Patrick, 2019), this article examines two angles of this event: how it was framed in the news media and the economic interests obscured in the reporting. In particular, I problematize the framing of this event as merely signalling the misogyny of 'toxic' online cultures and contextualize it as part of the larger political economy of female celebrity – an economy that relies upon the sexual exploitation of female celebrities. This analysis, in turn, attempts to illuminate the growing conglomeration of media sites (including new media platforms) and consider the effects that such conglomeration has on both progressive and reactionary discourses that circulate through the news and other media. My analysis supports recent work such as that of Banet-Weiser (2018) suggesting that the apparent proliferation of feminist discourses in the media does not reflect political progress so much as the ability of the capitalist machinations of the industry to recuperate and profit from both misogyny and feminism. Furthermore, I argue that the 'feminism' of celebrity is not and cannot only be located in the celebrity herself: feminist researchers ought to expand our subject(s) of inquiry vis-à-vis celebrity feminism. In other words, in addition to examining the celebrity and/or her audience as the site of political (feminist) work, we must also consider the systems in which she is embedded and her relations to the means of media production and profit. This is more crucial than ever, as celebrities become more politically engaged and outspoken, yet still support and rely upon the structures that ensure ongoing systemic inequality in the U.S. and beyond.

Tech utopias, capitalist inequality and popular feminism

Over two decades ago, Barbrook and Cameron (1996) described 'Californian Ideology' as a utopian, liberal idealism surrounding the proliferation of new technologies. This term highlights in relation to technology both the cultural importance of California – with its connotations of surfing, Hollywood, hippies – and the geographical importance of Silicon Valley as a site of technological production (and, notably, California is a site that is equally important to celebrity culture). Barbrook and Cameron noted the contradictory forces at work in discourses that simultaneously celebrated the possibilities of technology to 'level the playing field' within the capitalist free market economy – allowing the most savvy and skilled to rise within a new technological meritocracy – and a belief in the equalizing potential, socio-economically speaking, of a technology that was supposedly available to anyone willing to learn. To that idealism, other cultural commentators such as Hudson (2018) have added the supposed liberating potential of post-human technologies: 'to some, the Internet meant leaving the baggage of their imperfect bodies behind – existing purely as intellect'. Hudson also notes that this ideology was often internalized and circulated by the very demographic that had been promised or told of its privilege (white males), but often felt denied that status (because of their 'nerd' identities).

However, gendered and racialized bodies are necessary in capitalist systems. Not only has capitalism, since its inception, required the colonization and slavery of racialized peoples, but it has also appropriated domestic labour by both white and racialized women. The work of feminist materialists has demonstrated that capitalism is dependent upon women's unpaid domestic labour to sustain that of the exploited worker as well as her reproductive labour in order to reproduce the workers necessary for capitalism (Delphy, 1980; Guillaumin, 1995). In the early days of capitalism, women – unlike white men – could not simply improve their skills to be more adequately compensated for their appropriated labour: white women's status on the socio-economic ladder could only be improved through a sexual (domestic) partnership (i.e. marrying up) (Delphy, 1980: 34– 35). In other words, white women's *value* was directly tied, not to an employable skill set, but to their sexuality and femininity (their ability to seduce and to keep a husband).

Even as economic relations began to change in the 20th century, and privileged white women began to sell their labour in the capitalist market, sexual labour still delimited women's status in the economy. For instance, the cult of true womanhood positioned a white woman's value as directly tied to her chastity (Collins, 2000: 72; Crenshaw, 2015: 157), as she was seen as the property of, first a father and then, after marriage, a husband who provided for her but also held exclusive right to her sexuality. On the other end of the spectrum, or the continuum of 'economic-sexual exchange' as Tabet (2016) calls it, are the promiscuous woman and the prostitute who sells her sexual labour on the capitalist market, both of whom are 'whores'. Women's sexuality, therefore, is often understood as providing them with a kind of *sexual capital* that can be exchanged for economic capital (money), social capital (legitimacy, a desirable 'name' or status), and – I would add – cultural/symbolic capital (visibility, renown) (Tabet, 2016). This form of capital is often mis-recognized as power because, as is noted by Cottom (2019, 2020), it is supposed to exist in service of (i.e. appropriated/exploited by) power, and, when it does not, it poses an existential threat to it.

In his work on Reddit and 4chan, Milner (2013: 82) notes that these communities similarly view feminine identity – and the sexual capital that accompanies it – as a privilege rather than a marginalized identity. Female users must hide or invisibilize their non-male (and non-white) status so as not to be accused of wielding what these sites call their 'girl advantage': the assumption that pretty girls who make themselves known as such 'get whatever they want' (see also Brooke, 2019). Further, this same user quoted by Milner (2013) remarks that claims to female embodiment on these sites are, and *should* be, 'degrading'; an 'admission that the only interesting thing about you is your naked body' (p. 82). This reduction to physical embodiment – as a sexual object – is also how women's presence is policed on such sites: when one is revealed to be a woman, the command to show 'tits or GTFO' reminds her that, as a woman, her most interesting offering to such spaces is her naked body, thus neutralizing her supposed 'girl advantage' (Brooke, 2019).

This apparent 'girl advantage' is, indeed, one of the central threats posed by new media technologies. While the Internet may not have liberated us from our embodied identities, it has significantly altered the relationships between women's bodies, their sexual capital, media ownership and gatekeeping, such that (certain) women now can – and do – post provocative pictures of themselves and directly reap economic benefits in an entrepreneurial manner, rather than being waged workers posing for magazines, promo shoots, fashion labels, or 'action' films wherein they are scantily clad. Furthermore, the introduction of smartphone, selfie technology has merged subject and object so that women can now – both publicly and/or privately – construct themselves as object of the gaze and destabilize centuries' worth of visual power relations that have contained and disciplined the naked female body.

Of course, this is not to suggest that such mediated interactions are necessarily empowering, nor that this kind of success can be accessed by all women, yet it does pose a challenge to the gendered gatekeeping that ensures women rely on powerful men, rather than platforms and followers, to attain public visibility. As Jenkins' (2006) classic text on convergence culture argues, new media developments have changed the rules of engagement: despite there still being wide power disparities, users have more agency and visibility than ever. The negative/panicked discourses about women's uses of new media (i.e. selfies, influencers, sexting, 'tits or GTFO') reveal that a woman taking pleasure in her body – again, whether that pleasure is private and an expression of sexual subjectivity or public and a route to money and visibility – disrupts the ways in which it can be systemically exploited. In other words, patriarchal capitalism ensures that women's sexuality is either channelled into domestic, reproductive services or public exploitation. Technology, which can both liberate women from their embodied identities and allow them a more direct material relationship with it, destabilizes (but does not end) that exploitation.

The iCloud hack reflected the anxieties around much of these shifting relations. While numerous kinds of celebrities were victims of this violation – including new media and reality stars – the consistent targeting of celebrity *women*, and the repercussions felt by them, demonstrate how women's bodies, no matter the origin or level of their fame, are consistently debased and exploited by a media industry that now includes, rather than is challenged by new media platforms such as 4chan, Reddit and Apple. As

new media sites grow in popularity because they provide 'alternative', accessible platforms (again, though, this access is not necessarily more equitable nor democratic), they are often bought out by larger corporate media – a categorization that now applies to the Internet companies themselves just as much as it does to Disney, Comcast, the Fox Corporation, etc.

Further, the iCloud hack occurred at a cultural moment wherein feminism was (re-)emerging as a palatable and marketable form of celebrity culture. In 2013 numerous female celebrities 'came out' as feminists, including singers Miley Cyrus and Beyoncé, as well as actress Emma Watson (see Brady, 2016; Keller and Ringrose, 2015). As asserted by Banet-Weiser (2018), drawing on the work of Wiegman (1995), the growth in this marketable and commodified version of feminism during late-stage capitalism underlines a broader neoliberal-inflected shift from a politics of visibility to an economics of visibility, wherein being visible, as a particularly racialized and gendered body, signifies a sense of empowerment or equality attained (rather than being a step toward politically entrenched rights). The female celebrity body, in other words, becomes the terrain over which feminist politics is articulated, debated and, in its violation, repudiated. By re-situating this body into the political economic structures of media, this article aims to supplement Banet-Weiser's argument that visibility itself is now the end goal of neoliberal, popular feminism and, further, how this prioritization of visibility allows for the female (celebrity) body to be wielded against her in a misogynist pushback and containment of both feminism and female symbolic/economic power more broadly.

Methodology

This article examines the news media framing of the iCloud hack, with a particular focus on the structural framing of the event (in relation to profit and ownership). The iCloud hack is an important event in the history of new media technology for several reasons. It signalled a public shift in consciousness around the websites 4chan and Reddit, which comprise what Ging (2019) describes as the 'manosphere', an online space/place that celebrates anti-feminist rhetoric. It also happened at a time when feminism was entering back into the mainstream of celebrity culture, and the reporting on the hack, as is illustrated by both Lawson (2018) and Marwick (2017), often took an explicitly feminist stance against victim-blaming and shifted responsibility to the perpetrators as well as the platforms that willingly hosted the images. However, the emergence of such 'feminist' understandings of and pushback to this event has not significantly altered how women's violated bodies are viewed/circulated (U.S. Congresswoman Katie Hill and actress Bella Thorne being more recent examples), nor slowed the spread of misogynist and anti-feminist sentiment online. The ongoing connections between (privileged) women's sexual objectification, their violation and their ambitions and successes are complex and deserve scrutiny in conversations about celebrities and celebrity feminism.

Drawing from a larger research project about the violation of female celebrities, this article examines news reporting on the iCloud hack from August 31st to December 31st, 2014. The articles were sourced from the Factiva database (accessed via my institution), using various keywords and names for the hack, such as 'Celebgate', 'iCloud hack' and 'Celebrity' + 'Photo hack'. The searches contained articles from across the United States

and Canada, from both mainstream newspapers (such as the *New York Times, Washington Post, Globe and Mail, Calgary Herald*) as well as college newspapers. Across all searches, 407 articles were returned, however, many of these were duplicate articles and television show transcripts, and thus were eliminated, leaving me with 333 articles. I then read through all of the articles, eliminating those that were not about the hack (i.e. it was mentioned in very brief context, such as a non-victimized celebrity's offhand remarks during an interview), as well as duplicates that I had missed the first time around, leaving me with a final sample size of 236 articles. From there, I re-read each article and categorized it according to three emergent themes: (1) cultural examinations of the iCloud hack (this included two sub-themes of feminism, which mostly centred on the theme of victim-blaming versus anti-victim-blaming, as well as our changing relationships to technology); (2) technology companies (which included two subthemes: discussions about the implications for Apple as well as discussions of 4Chan and Reddit); (3) celebrity analysis (which included the subthemes of celebrity quotes/writing, intersectional analyses which accounted for the racial and classed dimensions of the hack, as well as reporter discussions of celebrity culture).

I then used Critical Discourse Analysis, as outlined by Machin and Mayr (2012), to analyse each article, with a focus on lexical choices (vocabulary), framing (which echoes my themes and sub-themes outlined above), and actors/agency (who is made responsible for the hack). For example, in news reporting, the term 'leaked' was used many times, which both connotes female sexuality as being wet, loose and hard to contain, while also disappearing the perpetrators who steal and post images without consent. I also focused on other discursive modes that erase the agency of the perpetrators, blamed or defended victims and absolved tech companies of responsibility. These modes included descriptions of people (e.g. whether the celebrities are even described as victims); use of metaphor and rhetoric (of which 'leaking' is an important example); nominalization (wherein the hacking by somebody becomes a 'hack' that happened); modality/authority ('naughty photos' versus 'private photos'; use of 'you' versus 'them' versus 'us'); and ambiguity, which was a notable trend in discussions of cloud technology and privacy rights (see Machin and Mayr, 2012: 12–13).

At the same time, I drew upon feminist materialist theory to extend my discourse analysis to examine if and how capital, profit and success are framed in the news media. Using similar practices as outlined above, including the examination of lexicon, framing and agency (Machin and Mayr, 2012), I re-examined each article with a focus on whether or not the author discussed money and on what terms. For the most part, this discussion was absent and so I turned to the publicly available facts about each company (i.e. their corporate websites) to define and trace those relations myself.

As with other news coverage, journalists often have to choose one angle or topic to report on, due to the limit of space and time allotted to each story. It is perhaps not surprising that many would choose to focus on the more accessible and flashy elements of this story, including the celebrity angle (who the victims were and why they might have been targeted), the feminist angle (why we should or should not blame the victims), as well as the technological angle (how do and ought we to use our technological devices; what kinds of protection and privacy can we expect from tech companies). But perhaps there are other reasons that journalists do not want to or are discouraged from 'following

the money' in their reporting: including the fact that many of them work for media conglomerates who have overlapping and competing interests in these debates. Although, as noted earlier, other scholars have examined the iCloud hack in important ways (Lawson, 2017; Marwick, 2017; Massanari, 2017; Moloney and Love, 2018), this article contributes to this discussion by situating the discussion of celebrity, misogyny and feminism within a larger corporate economic structure, comprising both new and 'old' media, that produces, exploits and humiliates female celebrity for profit.

Consuming female celebrities

Despite there being over 100 victims of the hack, actress Jennifer Lawrence emerged as the preferred face of the violation in the media. This development was not surprising, as both her physical traits (her beauty, her white femininity) and her career trajectory (as an Academy-Award winning actress who also happened to head up a blockbuster action series in the *Hunger Games* movies) mark her out as a 'legitimate' celebrity whose success is rooted in traditional and recognizable forms of talent for women. It is worth noting, however, that Lawrence was not the only actress who spoke out publicly about the violation (for instance, Mary Elizabeth Winstead released a public statement decrying the violation while Gabrielle Union penned a powerful essay for *Cosmopolitan* magazine (Union and Pesta, 2014)), nor was she the only victim who had a traditionally 'celebrated' form of talent (as opposed to, for instance, Kim Kardashian, who was also victimized). Yet it was Lawrence who received the most news coverage, allowing her the platform to address the issue at length, receive empathetic treatment by the media, and re-frame the conversation toward a feminist understanding of gendered violence, rather than a celebrity scandal.

However, in connecting this violation to widespread gender violence – which numerous reporters did as well in their efforts to humanize the victims – Lawrence obscures the fact that her celebrity status was one of the key reasons that she was targeted. In her analysis of the iCloud hack, Massanari (2017) notes that, on Reddit, Jennifer Lawrence was a celebrated 'cool girl' whose 'self-effacing [. . .] authenticity and candor' marked her out as a desirable, but unthreatening, object of interest, evidenced by her popularity and ubiquity on the site (pp. 335–336). The targeting of Lawrence in this case demonstrates somewhat of Reddit's double-bind for women, as outlined by scholars like Milner (2013) and Brooke (2019): Lawrence was loved enough by the site to mark her as 'celebrated', 'cool' and 'authentic' – traits that are prioritized on Reddit (Massanari, 2015) – yet she is also, at the end of the day, still a 'girl' who can be reduced to her 'tits' [or GTFO], no matter how many Academy Awards she has or billions of dollars her films earn.

This online treatment of celebrity women, however, is an extension, rather than a transformation of how mainstream media view and treat them. In an article for Sun Media's *Lloydminster Meridian Booster*, Myers (2014) points out that violations of celebrity women's bodies pre-date selfie and cloud technologies (and, I would add, social media platforms), contextualizing the event as part of a broader pattern of how famous women are treated in U.S. and Canadian culture:

> [T]en years ago, a paparazzo could make a small fortune for some photos of accidental celebrity nudity, and that was no less a violation of Britney Spears or Paris Hilton's privacy. Perhaps, this

is where things started to go sideways. When we took ownership of the image as more important than ownership of the body.

Myers connects the nude photos circulating online via 4chan and Reddit to paparazzi images of a panty-less Spears that circulated – as highly valuable commodities – through news and gossip sites just a few years earlier. The online circulation of private images of Lawrence represents, perhaps, a 'democratization' of this entitlement to women's bodies, but does not signal a shift in how they are treated or valued by this system: women's bodies are a commodity to be bought and sold, no matter how much symbolic or economic capital those bodies wield.

Indeed, their symbolic and economic capital can further mark women's bodies as needing or deserving containment via patriarchal violence and humiliation. Despite reporters' intentions to humanize them and contextualize their violation within a broader system of gendered violence, celebrities are not 'just like us' and the circulation (authorized or not) of their image online has different implications. Female celebrities have 'risen' through neoliberal capitalist society – a society that bills itself as a meritocracy and often uses celebrity culture to do so (see Littler, 2004, 2013) – to be highly visible models of female success. They have symbolic, cultural and economic capital, often built through some form of exploitation of their bodies and images by media companies and producers. The supposed trade-off for this status is a loss of bodily autonomy; their body and image 'belong' to the public just as much as it does to them or to the media companies they work for.

Reporter Zoratti (2014) breaks down these relations in her feature-length article for the *Winnipeg Free Press*. In her discussion of celebrities and their bodily autonomy, Zoratti notes that there are different rules for different genders:

> [Famous women] live in bodies that are publicly—and constantly—critiqued, ranked, shamed, scrutinized, objectified, policed, sexualized and so on. When a celebrity chooses to keep something about her body to herself – be it a pregnancy or a surgery or an illness or a change in weight—it's tellingly referred to in headlines as a 'secret.' The entitlement on display is breathtaking. And it's easy to dehumanize a famous woman because, for many people, she represents an ideal. A fantasy. A hypothetical. A sex object.

Notably, some of Jennifer Lawrence's own down-to-earth, 'cool girl' persona was built on speaking out against such treatment of women by the media. Since at least 2013, Lawrence has been criticizing the media's entitlement towards famous women's bodies (BBC News, 2013; Lamour, 2013), and, as noted by Kanai (2015), has been a subject of fans' 'remixing culture' due to her ability to navigate the 'post-feminist contradictions' of contemporary stardom, authenticity and femininity.

In speaking out about such treatment, however, Lawrence exercises a power that most women do not have and thus marks herself as a target for misogynist pushback. Feminist writer and academic Gay (2014) interprets the violations of female celebrities as a way to 'remind women of their place', as discussed in her piece for *The Guardian*. Gay argues that the photos are meant to set an example for women more broadly:

> Don't get too high and mighty, ladies. Don't step out of line. Don't do anything to upset or disappoint men who feel entitled to your time, bodies, affection or attention. Your bared body

can always be used as a weapon against you. Your bared body can always be used to shame and humiliate you. Your bared body is at once *desired* and *loathed*. This is what we must remember. Women cannot be sexual in certain ways without consequence. Women cannot pose nude or provocatively, whether for a lover or themselves, without consequence. (my emphasis)

This quote particularly well summarizes the complex and contradictory relations that patriarchal capitalism has with women's bodies: the desire for them propels billion-dollar industries, as does the loathing of them (both in the form of self-loathing through the beauty industry and the loathing of women's bodies as displayed by 'gossip' and other celebrity reporting). That such companies as Google and Apple were willing to abandon them in this moment (Google, by allowing the photos to be easily searched and Apple by blaming the victims for their violation) demonstrates how disposable they are. While the reactions of Google and Apple were notable – but are beyond the scope of this article – in the next section I turn my attention to Reddit more specifically, particularly as a site that signifies the 'open' and 'democratic' possibilities of online social media, yet is much more aligned with the corporate capitalist media system than it might at first appear to be.

Feminism, misogyny and Reddit's bottom line

While several commentators were interested in how and why celebrities were targeted, another angle emerged (although considerably less often) in the news reporting: what are these new media sites and how might we understand this event in relation to them? In particular, the reporting on Reddit seemed to pick up on the site's own framing of itself at the expense of, what I view as, a more important angle. In this section I look first at how reporters discussed 4chan and Reddit and then turn my attention to the elision of structural relationships that have larger implications for celebrity feminism (and misogyny) in mediated spaces, new and old.

Reddit, as discussed by Massanari (2015, 2017), is a site comprised of multiple communities, with diverse viewpoints and users. However, there is often a 'dominant' viewpoint that exists and is legitimized on the site (that of the young, white, cis-gendered, heterosexual male) and the central ethos of the site – it's prioritization of 'free speech' – underlines that dominant perspective (Massanari 2015, 2017; see also Reagle, 2013). Much of the news reporting on the hack, rather than challenge this ethos (for whom is speech free? Does freedom of speech operate differently in privately run platforms than it does vis-à-vis public spaces? etc.), embraced this framing in their reporting (and this could be because several reporters admitted to being Reddit users). Instead of delving into who gets to define and access these 'freedoms', reporters often mimicked the binary framing on Reddit that pit 'freedom of speech' against censorship while celebrating an individualistic approach to ethics and privacy issues. Although they might not have agreed with how the websites handled the hack – Reddit and 4chan were described by reporters as anarchic and 'dark' places on the web – they did accept the communities' framing of the issue on these terms.

Before being shared to Reddit, the photos were circulating on the 4chan message boards (after first being posted on the even more obscure site AnonIB), which arguably has even less of an 'ethos' than Reddit. In her extensive report for the *Washington Post*,

Caitlin Dewey describes 4chan as the 'Internet's bogeyman' and argues that founder Christopher Poole's identity, as a 15 year-old white male teenager at the time (in 2003; he went on to work for Google until early 2021), underpins the site's no-rules, anything-goes philosophy where a large user group (22 million users per month in 2014) of mostly young, college-educated white men go to 'shake off any and all social rules' (Dewey, 2014a). While, according to Dewey, 'technically' the site's rules state that 'trolling, racism and grotesque imagery' are off limits, they are allowed in certain threads or subforums. Additionally, the total anonymity granted by the site – unlike most websites, participants do not have to create an account or username – allows for users' racism, misogyny, paedophilia, etcetera to be unleashed and go unchecked (with little information available on what or how moderation takes place on the site and much offensive, violent content easily accessible).

The discussions of 4chan, however, were rare in comparison to Reddit – perhaps because, as noted in a few stories, journalists often source the latter for content (Elliott, 2014; McCoy, 2014). After the celebrity photos started circulating on 4chan, a link to the files was shared onto Reddit by user John Meneses (Dewey, 2014b). Reddit had a much larger audience than 4chan, with, at that time, over 100 million visitors a month, yet is governed by similar (non-)rules. Reddit is pseudonymous rather than anonymous like 4chan, which seemingly has resulted in a difference in reputation amongst reporters, reflected both in their probing of the site for news content and in the number of articles dedicated to explaining Reddit to readers in the aftermath of the iCloud hack (as opposed to only a handful about 4chan).

Again, the debate of free speech versus censorship was centred in the news reporting, echoing, rather than interrogating, the debates that were happening on the site itself. As the event grew in prominence, numerous statements were issued by Reddit, including one from CEO Yishan Wong (2014):

> We uphold the ideal of free speech on reddit as much as possible not because we are legally bound to, but because we believe that you – the user – has the right to choose between right and wrong, good and evil, and that it is your responsibility to do so. When you know something is right, you should choose to do it. But as much as possible, we will not force you to do it. You choose what to post. You choose what to read. You choose what kind of subreddit to create and what kind of rules you will enforce.

Furthermore, this same post – tellingly called 'Every man is responsible for his own soul' – justified not removing the celebrity photos: 'We understand the harm that misusing our site does to the victims of this theft, and we deeply sympathize. Having said that, we are unlikely to make changes to our existing site' (Wong, 2014). Reddit's statement both admonishes those who would look at the photos while refusing to remove them from its site: its philosophy of users self-policing taking priority over other ethical concerns. While many reporters expressed a critical view on this stance (e.g. Dalenberg, 2014; McCoy, 2014), there was little discussion of the ways in which such philosophies discourage others (i.e. marginalized groups) from entering those spaces and altering the discourses/interactions circulating there, and/or how these ideologies are able to fester and spill out into other online spaces such as Twitter and Facebook where we are now

seeing 'real world' effects of the free circulation of unmoderated hate speech and false content.

Certainly, there was a public debate among Reddit's users and administrators as to whether or not people should be viewing the photos. *Washington Post* reporter McCoy (2014) quotes an unnamed Reddit user who chastised the Reddit community in the aftermath of the 'leak':

> We're all [jerks] for going crazy over these leaks, there's no denying that. These are private moments for these girls, and they've been exposed for the world to see. However, most of us at least have the slight shred of decency to only discuss the leaks in a place like this.

The user's caveat at the end, suggesting that Reddit is a safe space for misogyny, even if it is bad/shameful, points again to the ways that certain online spaces are not only unwelcoming to women, but also normalize their violation. What kinds of self-policing are possible when people know that they are doing the wrong thing, but will do it anyway? For whom are such spaces 'democratic' and accessible? Another Reddit user lamented publicly: 'You can't let inmates run the asylum and then get shocked when someone smears s**t on the walls. Stand up for standards for a change' (Dewey, 2014c). Indeed, that user was responding to Reddit's own systems administrator Jason Harvey who admitted that, after the iCloud photos were posted, '[w]e hit new traffic milestones, ones which I'd be ashamed to share publicly' (Dalenberg, 2014).

Of course, traffic drives interest – and capital – to the site. Although at the time Reddit was not heavily reliant upon advertising (unlike Google, which had its own incentives not to quickly remove the photos), the site does use its large traffic to attract investors: shortly after the iCloud breach, Reddit managed to raise a reported $50 million in investor funding at a company valuation of $500 million (Dalenberg, 2014; see also Massanari, 2017). However, when there are possible legal ramifications (thus threatening such investments), Reddit is quicker to act. On September 3rd, just a few days after the initial postings, it was reported that American gymnast McKayla Maroney was underage at the time when her nude photo was taken and thus the site was in violation of their own child pornography rules as well as U.S. criminal law. Reddit immediately shut down the thread and removed the photos (Legal Monitor Worldwide, 2014) and they continued to remove celebrity nudes that were placed there in the weeks following (Yahr, 2014).

Reddit's employees have more of a vested interest in the company's actions (and their legal ramifications) than most media companies, including most news organizations. Reddit's employees are the second-largest shareholders in the company (Reddit myth busters, n.d.), thus hinting at why some of the battles over removing the photos played out so publicly. However, this was not an angle of the story that reporters chose (or were allowed) to develop. Having numerous articles devoted to Reddit – explaining the site, its ethos and its debates about freedom of speech – made more obvious, in comparison, the lack of reporting on Reddit's profits and ownership structure. Beyond the employee holdings, the largest shareholder of Reddit is a company called Advance Publications (Reddit myth busters, n.d.). Advance Publications own and operate numerous ventures, including a number of newspapers across the U.S., as well as Turnitin, a software used by colleges and instructors worldwide to detect plagiarism (Advance.com, n.d.). Advance

Publications is also the owner of Condé Nast, a media company which, in turn, publishes some of the most popular magazines in America, including *GQ, Wired, The New Yorker, Vogue* and the increasingly feminist *Teen Vogue* (Condenast.com, n.d.). It also publishes *Vanity Fair*, the magazine in which Jennifer Lawrence spoke out against the hackers, calling what happened to her (and many others) a 'sex crime'. The same company that profits from the site that refused to remove Lawrence's naked photos also profited from a highly publicized interview with the star about the incident.

Incidentally, Advance Publications is also a large shareholder in Discovery Inc. (formerly Discovery Communications) which, in 2015, bought a 3.4% stake in Lions Gate Entertainment, the company that produces and distributes the multi-billion-dollar franchise film series *The Hunger Games*, starring Jennifer Lawrence (de la Merced, 2015). In other words, one man (Advance Publications CEO Donald Newhouse) owns stakes in almost every media company that profited from Jennifer Lawrence and this so-called 'scandal'. The incestuous relationships across these multi-national media conglomerates (specifically Condé Nast and Reddit, at the time) and the underlying structural power dynamics at work was apparently not an angle of interest in the articles I collected, despite the fact that the relationship between Condé Nast and Reddit is a significant and longstanding one.

It is perhaps not surprising that reporters, working for mainstream media companies, might not want to (or be allowed) to discuss chains of ownership in their reporting on the iCloud hack. In terms of research, and particularly critical feminist research, however, such relations need to be brought to the forefront. Making these individuals, companies and investment ties more visible is crucial in not only understanding how the media functions and profits from competing ideologies such as misogyny and feminism but is also key to undoing the neoliberal feminist logic that seeks inclusion into these male-dominated spaces. As the case of Lawrence shows, being idolized in these spaces, or earning their owners millions (or even billions) of dollars in revenue will not save even the most privileged of women from violation by this system.

The politics of inclusion allows for 'progressive' discourses to emerge and for more diverse faces to attain media success and is thus a seductive force. The recent growth in celebrity feminism (see Banet-Weiser, 2018; Brady, 2016; Keller and Ringrose, 2015) as well as feminism in news reporting (see Lawson, 2018; Marwick, 2017; Projansky, 2018) is important for many reasons and ought to be celebrated. Despite being owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos, for instance, the *Washington Post* ran some of the most left-leaning, feminist critiques of this event, including intersectional analyses of race, discussions of toxic masculinity, as well as the steady work of journalist Caitlin Dewey (2014a, 2014b, 2014c) in standing up for the victims (see also McCoy, 2014; McDonald, 2014a, 2014b). As such discourses have grown in the mainstream media, however, so too have misogynist discourses pushing back against feminism, equality and social justice (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

While researchers are considering the importance of these changes, an insidious picture emerges below the surface. Most media owners are still white men (Associated Press, 2015; Business Insider, 2013). The media industries are consolidating ownership, even as they increase 'diversity' initiatives and amplify new perspectives. The amassing of wealth in the hands of the few is being both perpetuated and mirrored by

the conglomeration of media companies of properties across the ideological spectrum: feminist, anti-feminist, far right, far left, etc. If it is all the same to them, what effects can there be of a growth in diversity and social equality? Does Jennifer Lawrence's body – which she bared willingly in her 2018 film *Red Sparrow* as a way of taking it back after the hack (Juzwiak, 2018) – belong to her any more now than it did before? While she continues to make millions of dollars per film, Donald Newhouse continues to profit from feminism, sexual violence, misogyny and even academia, making him worth an estimated $15 billion as of 2020 (Donald Newhouse Forbes.com, n.d.). Newhouse, and numerous other billionaire media CEOs, escape any visibility in the public retellings of this event and instead the debates circulate around the actions and responses of individual celebrity feminists. While that continues to be an important discussion – and women's and girls' investments in celebrity culture as a way of grappling with 'real world' power relations should not be dismissed – it can be supplemented with more analyses of the structures of media production that determine who and what get to dominate these public conversations unfolding on multi-million/billion dollar platforms.

Conclusion

In September of 2020, Marvel actor Chris Evans accidentally posted his own nude photo on Instagram. Although he quickly deleted it, the photo had already been shared and his name started trending online. However, almost just as quickly, fans of Evans flooded the hashtag with other positive images and clips of the actor in order to 'hide' the original photo. Further, those who were sharing the photo were chastised for doing so, as it is a non-consensual photo, even if its public circulation was the result of carelessness rather than intentional violation. The positive mobilization of fans and the prioritization of consent in this circumstance were remarkable compared to what happened 6 years earlier with the iCloud hack. Of course, Evans' gender inflects images of his nude body in different ways, as he is always more than just his male parts; so much so that jokes objectifying him, such as the one about him having 'America's ass' in Avengers: Endgame (2019), can be read as subversive and ironic, rather than true and therefore offensive.

On the other hand, the objectification of the female body is still pervasive in Hollywood and beyond. Using the example of the 2014 iCloud hack, I discussed the ways in which the female celebrity is a particularly violable target, across both 'old' and new media. Her success makes visible her so-called 'girl advantage', but this advantage is never fully realized; her 'girl-ness' can always be wielded against her in a system that views her body as titillating, profitable and, of course, degrading. I tied this female body to a broader discussion of the economics and media profit structures in order to think through the ways in which capitalism recuperates transgressive subjects – both in the form of those who speak out against sexual violence and those who initiate and perpetuate said violence. While the growth in feminist discourses emanating from both in the mainstream media and celebrity women is encouraging, it perhaps occludes the broader power structures that are in place to ensure maintenance of the status quo. I called for more inquiry into – and therefore more illumination of – the invisible sites of power in the media industry: moguls such as Donald Newhouse who profit from both ends of the ideological spectrum (and nearly everything between). As important as it is to

understand this event as a sex crime, it also needs to be contextualized as part of the political economy of female celebrity that benefits from an ongoing exploitation of women's bodies and sexuality for profit – no matter what or how those women embody and perform (palatable) feminisms.

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