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Presentation: Why Latin American perspectives on feminism, gender and sexuality in digital technologies

Horacio Federico Sívori¹

> hfsivori@ims.uerj.br

ORCID: 0000-0003-0103-1127

¹ State University of Rio de Janeiro
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Carolina Parreiras²

> carolparreiras@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-9741-4776

² University of São Paulo
São Paulo, Brazil

Paz Peña³

> pazpena@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-0491-2624

³ Independent consultant
Santiago, Chile

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Abstract: Fruit of a partnership between the Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights (CLAM/IMS/UERJ) and the Association of Progressive Communication's Feminist Internet Research Network (FIRN/APC), this dossier gathers works in the Social Sciences and the Humanities produced by academic and civil society researchers from Brazil, Chile and Mexico. In their original or newly translated contributions, digital technologies meet issues of women's health; violence against women; racist bias in artificial intelligence; Black and migrant women's activism; women's religiosity and self expression; male self-entrepreneurship; and ultra right-wing men's networks. Our aim is not so much to address a singular object or to cover an absence but, rather, to connect thematic interests from diverse theoretical, methodological and disciplinary approaches in an open a dialog about the ways in which we have carried out research in, of, for and about the digital as it relates to gender, sexuality and feminisms in Latin America.

Keywords: gender; sexuality; race; feminism; digital; information and communication technologies; Latin America.

Presentación: Por qué perspectivas latinoamericanas sobre feminismo, género y sexualidad en las tecnologías digitales

Resumen: Fruto de una colaboración entre el Centro Latinoamericano en Sexualidad y Derechos Humanos (CLAM/IMS/UERJ) y la Red Feminista de Investigación de Internet de la Asociación para el Progreso de las Comunicaciones (FIRN/APC), este dossier reúne estudios en Ciencias Sociales y Humanas realizados por investigadores e investigadoras tanto académicas como de la sociedad civil de Brasil, Chile y México. Sus contribuciones originales abordan el encuentro de las tecnologías digitales con cuestiones de salud de la mujer; violencia contra las mujeres; racismo e inteligencia artificial; activismo de mujeres negras y migrantes; religión y autoexpresión femenina; y el rol de las masculinidades con relación al fenómeno contemporáneo del empredorismo de sí y a las redes militantes de ultraderecha. Nuestro objetivo no es tanto abordar un objeto singular o cubrir una ausencia sino, más bien, conectar intereses temáticos desde diversos enfoques teóricos, metodológicos y disciplinarios en un diálogo abierto sobre las formas en que hemos investigado en, de, para y sobre lo digital en relación con el género, la sexualidad y los feminismos en América Latina.

Palabras-clave: género; sexualidad; feminismo; digital; tecnologías de información y comunicación; América Latina.

Apresentação: Por que perspectivas latino-americanas sobre feminismo, gênero e sexualidade em tecnologias digitais

Resumo: Fruto de uma parceria entre o Centro Latino-Americano em Sexualidade e Direitos Humanos (CLAM/IMS/UERJ) e a Rede Feminista de Pesquisas da Internet da Associação para o Progresso das Comunicações (FIRN/APC), este dossiê reúne trabalhos das Ciências Sociais e Humanas produzidos tanto no âmbito acadêmico quanto em instituições da sociedade civil no Brasil, Chile e México, no encontro entre as tecnologias digitais e questões de saúde das mulheres; violência contra as mulheres; viés racista na inteligência artificial; ativismo de mulheres negras e migrantes; religiosidade e auto expressão das mulheres; auto empreendedorismo masculino; e redes de homens da extrema direita. Nosso objetivo não é tanto abordar um objeto singular ou preencher uma ausência, mas, ao contrário, conectar interesses temáticos a partir de diversas abordagens teóricas, metodológicas e disciplinares em um diálogo aberto sobre as maneiras pelas quais realizamos pesquisas no, do, para e sobre o digital no que se refere a gênero, sexualidade e feminismos na América Latina.

Palavras-chave: gênero; sexualidade; raça; feminismo; digital; tecnologias da informação e comunicação; América Latina.

Presentation: Why Latin American perspectives on feminism, gender and sexuality in digital technologies¹

*If you become pregnant,
your phone generally knows
before many of your friends do.*
(Tolentino, 2022)

Gendering the digital²

Since the 1990s, much has been said and studied about digital technologies (or Information and Communication Technologies – ICTs) and, specifically, about the internet. Between utopian and dystopian visions, through the prediction of technologically mediated futures, over the past 30 years, the internet has gained a prominent place in our lives and also in our research. It has (albeit belatedly) been recognized as a thematic field, verified by the existence of the large sub-field of internet studies and the ones of digital anthropology and digital sociology. From online dating, personal communication among family members to access to welfare programs, social security and medical care, digital technologies have been

¹ This article and the organization of the dossier “Feminism, gender and sexuality in digital technologies: Latin American perspectives” are part of the activities of the projects: (1) “Digital networks, backlash and datafication in Brazil”, with support from the Associação for Progressive Communications (APC) and the International Development Research Center (IDRC/Canada) as part of the “FIRN grants for undertaking research on making a feminist internet”, (2) “Digital networks, violence and politics: anti-rights discourse on social media platforms in Brazil” (Prociência UERJ/FAPERJ fellowship 2020-23), both by Horacio Sívori, and (3) “Inequalities and ethnography: internet, its uses, agency and possibilities in *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro” (Fapesp Young Researcher n. 2021/06857-7), by Carolina Parreiras.

² We are thankful to the authors who accepted to take part in this dossier and to the editors of *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad* for accepting our proposal, to our anonymous reviewers for their generosity and instigating comments and to our team of translators for their dedicated work. We would also like to express our thanks to the Association for Progressive Communications’ Women Rights Programme (APC) envisioning and carrying out, at the international level, the project that made this dossier possible and for their generous reception of our proposal. To the International Development Research Center (IDRC-Canada) for providing financial and intellectual support, to the Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights (CLAM/IMS/UERJ) for providing a local institutional home for the project in Brazil and, in particular, to Bruno Zilli, CLAM-FIRN member and journal executive editor. Last but not least, our sincere thanks to all our colleagues in this network of collaborations, specially those who managed the everyday affairs and provided insightful advice along the way: Namita Aavriti, Tigist Hussien, Mariana Fossatti and Srinidhi Raghavan.

embedded (Hine, 2015), in the double meaning of this term: assimilated to social processes, and embodied in the daily experience of individuals and in collective forms of social agency in practically every sphere of society and every aspect of human life.

In this process, despite having expanded access to information and allowed unprecedented forms of expression and contact, creating possibilities for emancipatory projects, the potential of the internet as a vector of democratization has been shadowed by the harsh realities of mass surveillance, the free reign of extremism of different sorts and the spread of neo-fascist movements online. The idea predominant in the initial periods of the internet that it would create more diverse and egalitarian environments was soon replaced by the realization that digital technologies are often configured as violent domains and, above all, where different forms of inequality are produced, reproduced and reiterated. With the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences, these discussions have become even more urgent and central. The health emergency has shown the extent to which the internet has become an everyday cultural artifact (Hine, 2000), experienced in countless ways, as well as a necessary and desired good in contexts of disconnection or poor quality, intermittent, unevenly distributed connections.

Online “platforms” have inaugurated faster and more effective ways of sharing information while creating, at the same time, the illusion that we are always in control of our online activity and digital existence. As part of the process known as “platformization”, integrated architectures, environments and tools belonging to large technology conglomerates—the so-called big techs—have started to mediate practically every aspect of our daily existence. Thus the need to account for those platforms’ technical architecture, as van Dijck, Poell and de Waal (2018) have shown. But what a “platform society” might mean involves more.³ The platformization of life responds to the broader logic that Zuboff (2015) called “surveillance capitalism”, a stage where the margin to escape a data economy driven by algorithms is ever reduced. In addition, the production, collection and administration of massive amounts of data have become the most valuable currency and the central mechanism that keeps the business model of this “platform ecosystem” in operation.

Therefore, far from realizing an ideal of democratization of knowledge and collaborative self-management of communications, the monopoly of the social uses of the internet by large global platforms has allowed private companies to take to

³ It is important to note, as the authors warn, that “platform society” is a contested concept. When they sought to understand the functioning of different platforms in the form of case studies and propose a definition of platform, their main insight was the fact that the study of platforms cannot ignore broader social and political structures.

another dimension the exploitation of labor and their models of wealth extraction and accumulation. The algorithmic economy has deepened existing inequalities and created new ones, in addition to being the basis for modeling a surveillance and control infrastructure. To Morozov (2011) the internet, rather than an ally in the promotion of democracy, has the opposite effect; in his words, of “empowering the strong and disempowering the weak” (p. 19).

Algorithmic surveillance by both states and tech companies has complicated the exercise of rights and citizenship. In this context, the impunity facilitated by private and poorly regulated data management has also permitted the rise of both public and intimate forms of online violence, mainly against women and children. Women, racialized minorities, sexual dissidents and other disenfranchised subjects are reached by digital technologies in ways that are often alienating and beyond their own control, deepening their vulnerabilities and thus renewing their subjection to various forms of patriarchal tutelage. Recent studies—among them those reviewed by Silva and Polo et al. in this dossier—have shown different faces of algorithmic discrimination. From an intersectional perspective, those investigations are interested in the ways in which different categories of difference act as obstacles to accessing and using the internet and digital technologies. As proposed by Noble (2018), we might be facing a “technological redlining” that reinforces oppressions and creates automated algorithmic barriers of both structural and infrastructural nature.

Despite such paradoxes, underprivileged individuals and groups still renew their desire and commitment to modes of using technology in ways that propitiate their resistance. That was the case in the recent “feminist explosion” and in the mobilizations against race discrimination, along with the myriad grassroots networks that made them possible and contributed to their expansion with far-reaching, lasting effects that are tangible in various spheres. Therefore, how do we deal, as engaged researchers, with the varied, ambiguous and, as a rule, unequal effects of the internet in and on people’s lives? To bring this preoccupation home: what is there to know about the gendered, sexed, racialized etc distribution of those effects and how Latin Americans have dealt with this challenge?

In the call for this dossier we choose to speak of gender, sexuality and feminism *in* digital technologies. By adopting a sociotechnical perspective, we understand the digital not only as a context or environment, or its mediation merely as a vehicle. A sociotechnical perspective that grasps the agency of technology integrated into the most diverse spheres and registers of social life is critical to address social difference and inequality, resistance and the pursuit of justice. So is the task of gendering the digital. And addressing those issues as an intellectual pursuit is inextricable from addressing them in action. Feminists—both in civil society and

in academia—stand out as pioneers in studies at the intersection of gender, science and technology and sexual politics (Haraway, 2016, 1988; Fischer et al, 1996; Cockburn, 1994; Wajcman, 1991; 2004; 2015; among others). Likewise, Critical Race Science and Technology Studies have been fundamental in bringing the issue of race to the center of debates on science, technology and the internet. They have moved, as Benjamin (2021) shows, very close to “feminist, postcolonial and critical disability studies approaches” (p. 20).

In Latin America as elsewhere, research on gender, feminism, sexuality and the internet has involved both academics and professionals, as well as activists. Their engagement has unveiled a particular dynamic of production of empirical evidence to advocate for groups whose access to and use of digital technologies is more often than not governed by corporate interest. In terms of disciplinary and thematic approaches, this has included social, cultural, historical, legal, political, linguistic and communications studies, as well data science and the emerging fields of digital methods of social research and digital humanities—despite the underrepresentation of women and non-heteronormative sexualities in their hegemonic centers, forums and vehicles. That means that any thematic search exercise requires exploring both academic channels and the digital version of the so-called “gray literature,” documentation produced by public organs and civil society, traditional and alternative journalistic media and also the great protagonist today: social media. Adding to that dispersion, to their disciplinary hybridity and the rapid evolution of their objects—and therefore the methods used to approach them—, the study of gender, sexuality and feminism in digital technologies is unequally distributed between the Global North and South.

A thorough balance of Latin American perspectives in this field would require a significant effort and adequate resources.⁴ Our aim in this dossier is less ambitious. It is not so much to exhaustively address a singular object or to cover an absence but, rather, to connect thematic interests from diverse theoretical, methodological and disciplinary approaches. In line with that of the periodical *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad: Latin American Journal*, it brings together works carried in and about Latin America, introducing original perspectives from an emerging field. We believe that this diversity will open a dialog about the ways in which we have carried out contextually situated research in, of, for and about the digital in Latin America, questioning concepts and methodologies and concerned with

⁴ Relevant in that respect are the FIRN reports “Mapping gender and digital technology” (Spui; Aavriti, 2018) and “White paper on feminist internet research” (Pereira, 2022). As noted in their sections on methodology and limitations, their Global South focus draws mainly from a wealth of Asian and African, civil society-based sources.

understanding the various specificities of the many internets that are continually shaped by subjects and their interaction with technologies.

Feminist research for a feminist internet

This dossier is sponsored by the Feminist Internet Research Network – FIRN (Association for Progressive Communications, 2022), a multi-disciplinary project involving research partners in several Global South locations: Malaysia, India, Bulgaria, Brazil and a research network involving five countries in Sub-Saharan Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal and South Africa. It was conceived by the Women’s Rights Program of the Association for Progressive Communications – APC, with the support of the International Development Research Center – IDRC/Canada. FIRN aims to promote a feminist approach within the emerging field of internet research by building a multi-sector interdisciplinary network to inform and influence activism and policy-making. At this juncture, FIRN challenges the fictitious separation of knowledge between academia and civil society and understands that knowledge generation occurs in all spaces, by all subjects. It takes on the idea of a feminist internet as a means of transforming existing online and offline gendered power structures. The organizations and individuals that participate in the network conduct studies and research as a way to support processes of political and legislative change and debates on internet rights. More broadly, they seek to guarantee the representation of women and gender and sexual diversity in debates and decision-making on the internet.

The FIRN project draws on a consultative process and literature review that mapped research in gender and digital technology (Aavriti, 2018) and on the Feminist Principles of the Internet, a public instrument collectively crafted by feminists and communications activists and researchers. The latter was drafted at the first Imagine a Feminist Internet meeting in Malaysia, 2014, and subsequently expanded at other workshops and meetings. Intended as a tool for activism, this document provides “a gender and sexual rights lens on critical internet-related rights” as “a framework for women’s movements to articulate and explore issues related to technology” (Feminist Principles of the internet, 2016). The instrument is available in 11 languages and “hackable”, i.e., open to further contributions and creative uses. The Principles are currently 17, divided into five clusters of issues: Access, Movements and public participation, Economy, Expression, and Agency. Along those lines, to FIRN, “the making of a feminist internet [is] critical to bringing about transformation of gendered structures of power that exist online and on-ground” (McLean, 2022).

Besides arguing for the need of a feminist internet, the activities and publications conceived by FIRN (Aavriti; Hussein; Fossatti, 2022) propitiated a collective reflection about existing hierarchies and privilege embedded in the epistemologies, methods, ethics and theories informing research in, on, of and for the internet and how feminist research may challenge those. Also in order to fill gaps on the outlook of a feminist internet in Global South locations, key areas of FIRN research are organized around access (usage and infrastructure); datafication (artificial intelligence); online gender-based violence; and gendered labor in the digital economy. Issues of access include not only infrastructure availability, barriers, digital literacy and inclusion, but also the conditions and norms under which ICTs are used, who controls them and drives their development, as well as a concept of “meaningful substantial access”, including purposes beyond economic or political empowerment, such as sexual expression, to name one of many, as well as the desire for a feminist internet infrastructure. In sum, as FIRN research leaders concluded, this project has meant: “building a nuanced understanding of concerns within feminist internet research located in the Global South”, as well as “deepening our understanding of feminist ethics of care, designing feminist methodology and learning the multi-faceted ways of doing feminist research in varied contexts” (Hussen; Aavriti; Raghavan, 2022).

This dossier was conceived as a dissemination activity for FIRN’s partnership with the Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights at State University of Rio de Janeiro. In part because of the traction of English as *lingua franca* in the Global South and having had the privilege of interacting with a majority of African and Asian colleagues in FIRN’s composition, we felt it was our responsibility to enhance FIRN’s presence in Latin America and vice-versa. That is why, thanks to the language policy of the journal *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad* and FIRN’s support, all contributions to this dossier are published in two languages: either Spanish and English or Portuguese and English. In this fashion, we intend to promote exchanges across and beyond the Latin American Spanish/Portuguese divide. Because of FIRN’s primary interest in promoting research conceived at civil society settings, an effort was also made to include those contributions. Despite the prevalence of research produced at university settings (usually graduate programs in the humanities and social sciences), it must be noted that multiple and hybrid affiliations as well as circulation back and forth between the academic, activist and policy-making spheres are fairly common among feminist and otherwise identified internet researchers. That is the case among our authors.

Thematic composition

In most cases for over a decade, some for longer, the authors of this dossier have conducted field research, on and offline, invested in an ongoing reflection about the critical role of digital technologies in a variety of fields. The works included in this dossier explore situations where the digital meets issues of women's health (Polo et al.); violence against women (Ananías et al.; Lins); racist bias in artificial intelligence (Silva); Black and migrant women's activism (Josiewicz; Pelúcio); women's religiosity and self expression (Mochel); male self-entrepreneurship (Denkin and Balieiro); and ultra right-wing men's networks (Ramos). Their contributions explore the specific meanings that digital technologies adopt in different Latin American and diasporic locations and for different communities, groups and members of categories whose connection is mediated by the internet, for the most part using portable devices and social media platforms.

All authors in this project share the premise that their use of digital technologies, as well as digital technologies themselves, are intrinsically gendered and critically marked by other forms of social classification and difference. Based on a variety of qualitative approaches: ethnographic (Lins; Mochel), netnographic (Ramos; Denkin and Balieiro) or both (Pelúcio), and in some cases aided by digital methods for social media network analysis (Josiewicz), survey (Ananías et al.) and interview (Polo et al.) research, the original articles in this dossier highlight how the digital is political, i.e, how networks, devices, digital environments and their economies shape and are shaped by power relations at different levels.

Lorena Mochel's article brings a relevant and innovative reflection on evangelical groups mobilized via WhatsApp—undoubtedly the most popular platform used in Brazil. In her ethnography, Mochel follows closely the everyday life of a “ministry” of Pentecostal women by means of audio, image and text messages in a “prayer group”. In her ethnography, she seeks to understand how the use of a digital platform works as a means of forming new evangelical communities and affirming non-institutionalized religious practices. In addition to her ethnographic data, the author also proposes a discussion about the challenges and methodological possibilities offered by Whatsapp groups, still an emerging field in the literature.

In Larissa Pelúcio's text, we find an analysis of the podcast “Femigrantes BR”, described as “a conversation space for feminist and immigrant women around the world”, formed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The podcast is a digital product marked by orality, with low production costs and high potential reach. The Femigrantes BR episodes bring life stories of Brazilian women abroad, literally in their own voices. In them, the author seeks to analyze to what extent it is possible

to discern contributions from feminisms to the process of empowerment of these women. In addition, the life stories bring narratives that address gender, nationality, sexuality and race, which allows for a more robust understanding of the ways in which digital media have become important tools in these processes and provide insights about the meanings of those women's "border experiences".

Also about women's networks, Alejandra Josiowicz' article explores algorithmic systems' potential for mediating resistance at the grassroots, by analyzing the practice of naming Latin-American anti-racist feminist intellectuals on Twitter. For that, as a singular methodological contribution to this dossier, aided by a digital methods package, she elicits the citation network among a specially curated tweet dataset. She regards that form of citation as a performative techno-discursive cultural practice whereby, collectively, women in the South generate social meaning by using digital platforms designed and owned by actors based in the Global North. This shift is marked by the appropriation of social media tools by Portuguese and Spanish-speaking counter-audiences from the South to deconstruct hierarchies and create potentially disruptive discursive practices. Those practices recreate and re-experiences meanings related to a history of exclusion, marked by colonialism, racism and sexism.

As summarized by FIRN (Association for Progressive Communications, 2022), data-driven decision-making and the production, collection and administration of massive quantities of data reinforce multiple forms of discrimination. Addressing datafication involves considering the impact of data collection and data surveillance on groups and categories disadvantaged or marginalized based on their gender, sexuality, race, etc. Feminist research on the biases embedded in algorithms for surveillance can surface the experiences of the non-normative body, since the harm and benefits of datafication are embodied and have specific consequences for certain individuals and communities. Some contributions to this dossier delve into how the realities reproduced by algorithms become a domain prone to racial discrimination and to the reinforcement of gender binarisms. At the same time, they may also be appropriated for cultural resistance.

In "Algorithmic Necropolitics,"⁵ Tarzísio Silva begins with a historical overview of how, particularly in the United States and in Brazil, the hypervigilance and the violent control of racialized populations has been normalized. Then he goes on to show the continuity of those forms of control by the contemporary deployment of algorithmic classification systems such as facial recognition, predictive policing,

⁵ Chapter 4 of his book *Racismo Algorítmico* (Silva, 2022). We thank the author and Edições Sesc São Paulo for their generous permission.

and risk scores. With one fundamental difference: aligned with official narratives of racial harmony and the meritocratic justification of color-blind policy, these technological systems are deemed insidiously neutral by their developers, as well as by the private enterprises and public organs that employ them, ignoring their bias. Meanwhile, their operation deepens the automation of racial discrimination and segregation, with lethal consequences worldwide. In sum, it is impossible to dissociate algorithmic technologies from the history of exploitation and the asymmetries that frame the representations embedded in how they collect, process and value data.

In that same vein, the qualitative study of users' perceptions of menstrual cycle tracking applications in Mexico City conducted by Ivanna Martínez Polo, Paola Ricaurte Quijano, Lilly Maldonado Domínguez, Ximena Rangel Zistecatl, and Natalia Farah Doniz unveils the values and social biases associated with app design and deployment. The narratives collected in 32 in-depth interviews with app users reveal how, despite the variety of experiences and the heterogeneity of user's perceptions about them, the gender binary embedded in their design normalizes a biased conception regarding menstruating bodies and persons and disregards their impact on users' privacy. In conclusion, the authors argue for the need for a fair design perspective (Costanza-Chock, 2020) in sociotechnical design.

Since the first decade of the 21st Century, feminists have warned about the proliferation of varied and complex forms of online gender-based violence (GBV). Public exposure and humiliation, sexual harassment, threats and verbal abuse add to the intricate ways in which physical and psychological violence mediated by technology serves the control of men over women. The heightened vulnerability of women with the covid-19 pandemic, as addressed by Ananías et al. in their contribution to this dossier, also underscores the relevance of analytical perspectives about the body, morality and politics to understand the meanings and implications of online and other digitally mediated forms of violence, as also argued by Lins in this dossier.

Contemporary research on gender-based violence in general considers the flow and connection between online and offline experience, as well as forms of victimization with regard to gender, sexuality, race, etc. However, rather than emphasizing punitive approaches, many researchers and activists alike promote a discussion of online gender-based violence (GBV) and hate speech from a human rights perspective. Dealing with GBV involves issues of fundamental rights' protection and corporate accountability, as well as the lived experiences of women and minorities who are the targets of online violence, the strength and potential of feminist responses and the struggle for the recognition of complex forms of harm.

Besides questioning the dichotomy in classification of online vs. offline or

public vs. private as separate realms, current feminist research, community interventions and advocacy promote an intersectional understanding of GBV (Sívori; Mochel, 2022) Furthermore, as Lins demonstrates in her carefully crafted ethnography of the itineraries of nude self portraits popularly known as “nudes”, the ambiguity of digital technology reconfigures “the boundaries between consent and abuse, norm and transgression, legitimate and immoral, healthy and violent”. Informed by long-established projects such as Take Back the Tech (Association for Progressive Communications, Women’s Rights Programme, 2015), activists appeal to decision-makers in both technological systems and public policy to adopt comprehensive and non-conservative visions when preventing, sanctioning, and remedying GBV.

In their article, Cecilia Ananías Soto, Karen Vergara Sánchez, Consuelo Herrera Monsalve and Beatriz Barra Ortiz, members of the Chilean feminist NGO Amaranta, share the results of an online survey on digital GBV conducted early into the covid-19 pandemic. The article begins with a detailed introduction to the subject and the role of feminist organizations in promoting its visibility and a public issue, as well as the limitations of current Chilean State policy and legislation on the matter. The narratives elicited from the self-administered online questionnaire show a correlation between the absence of state-sponsored protection measures and victims’ reliance on networks of friends and family, as well as mental health providers. The authors highlight the link between, on the one hand, existing barriers to access to comprehensive sexual education and digital literacy and, on the other hand, the disproportionately high incidence of digital violence against women and girls. In response to that premise, the survey was also conceived as a pedagogical instrument that included “definitions and descriptions that gave visibility, named and problematized” online GBV.

Beatriz Accioly Lins’ article, based on a chapter of her doctoral thesis in Anthropology (Lins, 2021, Chapter 4) takes the reader on a trip across the kaleidoscopic landscapes, netscapes, *legalscapes* and so on where she sought to make sense of what “nudes”–images deemed erotic or sexual exchanged quickly and simply by using digital platforms–mean, not only as the unwanted, sometimes (figuratively and also literally) deadly “leak” of an intimate secret. Something interesting highlighted by Lins is how much nudes and their exchanges represent a negotiation between pleasure and danger, consent and violence. Lins’ ethnography explores that highwire from an arts museum to an Internet Governance Forum and APC Women’s Rights Programme retreat within it. Against the grain of all-too-common salvationist narratives and interventions, the stories she tells capture how making, sending and sharing nudes may not be only dangerous, but also pleasurable and fulfilling.

Finally, the articles by Jair Ramos and by Bruna Denkin and Fernando Balieiro shed light on techno-discursive performances of “online masculinity” in social media. In dialogue with a long tradition of studies of masculinities in the humanities and social sciences, they explore two different – rather distinct – milieus: while Denkin and Balieiro follow male “influencers” who act as online promoters of a “healthy masculinity”, Ramos observes the verbal battles among far-right supporters of Presidente Jair Bolsonaro who share his anti-feminism. Like Josiowicz’ in this dossier—using a different methodology—these two articles are rich examples of the competence and rigor nowadays required for a qualitative study of integrated platforms. They both carefully describe the nuance of how users appropriate different elements and aspects of social media affordances and tools. An original contribution to discussions on the role of the “Alt-Right” and the “manosphere” (Nagle, 2017) and of digital populism (Cesarino, 2020) national politics, Ramos’ study brings insights into issues of online violence as well; for example on the meaning of trolling as way to construct a (male) reputation in those milieus. In contrast to that, in the search for the self-control of impulses and emotions, the self-entrepreneurs studied by Denkin and Balieiro develop an open dialog with feminist agendas, although for different purposes.

It has not been our intention in this dossier, nor was FIRN’s purpose, to conduct a thorough balance or explore the many windows that a hemispheric approach on feminism, gender and sexuality in digital technologies opens. To start with, few countries are represented, a cis-gender approach is predominant and we have only laterally addressed gendered labor in the digital economy, itself a key area for FIRN. However, those and many other themes well explored in the literature over the past twenty years, such as access and cyber cultures are revisited under a different light and we hope to continue propitiating the rich dialogue that the contributions to this dossier open.

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