

## User-generated reality enforcement: framing violence against black trans women on a video sharing site

While some scholars have tackled the common cultural tropes about trans people (Serano 2007; Bettcher 2007), the way media sometimes legitimates violence against trans people, and even takes part in forms of violence, has not been analysed. This is what this article sets out to do, with an examination of a case of real violence against trans feminine people, videotaped and uploaded online on a site for user generated entertainment. This article examines how a verbal and physical attack against black trans women, videotaped and uploaded on a platform for user-generated entertainment, was framed in a way which repeated the symbolic violence (reality enforcement) already at play in the physical (face to face) encounter. I address the way this depiction of real violence, framed as entertainment, and coupled with identity invalidation both legitimizes physical violence and de-legitimizes black trans feminine people as victims of violence.

symbolic violence, transgender, trans women, digital media, figure, femininity, race, violence

On the evening of 20 May 2014, two men attacked two black trans women on an Atlanta train (Atlanta Marta). The men later claimed that the women were ‘coming on’ to them, while the women stated that the men had been verbally harassing them. Fellow travellers shot the encounter with their mobile cameras. When the men started kicking and beating the women, the women defended themselves. During the fight, one of the women’s clothes came off (possibly she took them off to improve her movement). Nobody called for help, and nobody seemed physically hurt, at least not severely. The physical violence was over in a few minutes. Later, one of the bystanders uploaded a video on the video sharing site Flyvidz.com, titled ‘2 T\*\*\*\*\*S GET INTO A FIGHT WITH 2 GUYS ON ATL MARTA!’ (2014). The video clip quickly went viral and, two weeks after the attack, it had received a reported 2.5 million views (Pink News 2014).<sup>1</sup> As one of the attacked women commented in an interview, ‘It’s all over the internet and like, I’m naked.’ (Pink News 2014).

Violence against trans feminine people of colour<sup>2</sup> has garnered media attention in recent years, especially in “black and gay media” (Williams 2016, 924), and in social media

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<sup>1</sup> On Flyvidz.com, the video was reported to have 3.37 million views, 937 comments and 135 ‘hearts’ (likes) as of 25 July 2014 (Flyvidz.com 2014).

<sup>2</sup> According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs’ (2017) report on what it calls hate-based violence against LGBT people, homicides of trans women of colour were the majority of all the hate-based homicides. NCAVP stated already in its report on the year 2014 (NCAVP 2015), that trans

through the hashtag #SayHerName (Williams 2016, 923). The murders of trans feminine people are sometimes reported in mainstream media (Williams 2016, 924), but the people who have lost their lives are often deadnamed (i.e. mentioning of the birth name of somebody who has changed their name) and misgendered in the media. While scholars within trans studies have discussed this violence against trans feminine people of colour, the role of mobile technologies and user generated media in relation to violence against trans women and trans feminine people has not been adequately addressed. While scholars have paid attention the common cultural tropes about trans people (Serano 2007; Bettcher 2007), the way digital media sometime legitimates violence against trans people, and even takes part in forms of violence, has not been carefully assessed.<sup>3</sup> This is what this article sets out to do, with an examination of a case of real violence against trans feminine people, videotaped and uploaded online on a site for user generated entertainment. This article considers how a verbal and physical attack against black trans women, videotaped and uploaded on a platform for user-generated entertainment, was framed in in a way which repeated the symbolic violence already at play in the physical (face to face) encounter. I discuss the way this depiction of real violence, framed as entertainment both legitimates physical violence and de-legitimizes black trans feminine people as victims of violence.

The structure of this article is as follows. I first introduce the concept of reality enforcement by Talia Mae Bettcher (2007; 2014), and argue that reality enforcement can be seen as symbolic violence. After this, I go on to an analysis of this case as user generated symbolic violence. I do this in two sections. First, I focus on how intersectional power relations were at play in the *de-legitimation of the trans women as victims of violence* through the framing of the video as entertainment and through the specifically feminine and sexualized figure of the tranny. I address the ways in which the symbolic violence at play worked through citing sticky and affectively charged signs and the figure of the tranny (cf. McRobbie 2004; Tyler 2006; Ahmed 2004; Haraway 1997); a figure of under-class, sexualized and racialized femininity.

Second, I turn to what is specific about violence against trans feminine people as trans people, as illuminated in this case of violence gone viral, i.e., the way trans people are conceived as norm breakers. In these cases, the specific anti-trans aspect is *the legitimation of violence as a justified response to the perceived breaking of gender*

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women of colour were disproportionately affected by serious hate violence. People of colour were disproportionately affected by anti-LGBT violence in general (NCAVP 2017).

<sup>3</sup> A report by WITNESS Media Lab (Stevenson & Broadus 2016) does, however, give data on the alarming prevalence of user generated videos of violence against trans people, and the way these bystander videos are framed as entertainment.

*norms*, according to the binary and linear gender. Reality enforcement is the anti-trans violence based on the culturally prevailing idea that ‘gender presentation represents genital status’ (Bettcher 2007, 53), which leads to presenting trans people as unreal pretenders and as people breaking the gendered norms of their assigned gender. This is the core of what philosopher and trans theorist Talia Mae Bettcher (2014) calls reality enforcement. Even while Bettcher (2014) discusses cases of severe physical violence as reality enforcement, she also sees reality enforcement as the very base of this violence. Inspired by her theorization, I contend that this anti-trans view on trans bodies is in itself already a form of symbolic violence (McRobbie 2004; Lumsden & Morgan 2017)<sup>4</sup>. I consider the ways in which reality enforcement was at play in the practices of sharing (uploading), framing and commenting of the video. I argue that this is a case of user generated symbolic violence, more specifically, user generated reality enforcement. I show how symbolic violence here works in an intersectional way.

Through the analysis of the de-legitimation of trans women as victims of violence, and legitimation of violence against them, I argue that the symbolic violence against trans feminine people is in part a product of, and a form of sustaining prevailing norms of femininity, which in turn are entangled with cisnormativity, in addition to being classed and racialized. These ‘cis norms of femininity’ cannot be separated from class, race and the culturally prevailing practices of simultaneous sexualization and devaluation of trans feminine bodies.

### Reality enforcement as symbolic violence

Philosopher and trans studies scholar Talia Mae Bettcher has argued that violence against trans people takes different forms than the violence faced by cisgendered people. These specific forms of violence are a result of the norm of linear gender (Bremer 2013, 336) and the way people who are perceived to break it are punished for this. One specific form of violence discussed by Bettcher (2014, 392), is reality enforcement. Reality enforcement is anti-trans violence based on the idea that the presented (or perceived) gender of a person is a sign pointing to the form of their genitals (Bettcher 2014; 2012). This sort of view on gender constructs trans people as deceivers. This view is ‘moral’ in that even trans people who have altered their genitals to ‘match’ their gender presentation are considered deceivers, since the genitals one was born with are considered the right ones. Trans people frequently face violence based on this idea on gender. Bettcher (2014, 392; 395-396) discusses severe physical acts of

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<sup>4</sup> The work on epistemic injustice/violence is also relevant to my thought here (Amy-Chinn 2011; Pohlhaus 2012; McKinnon 2016, McKinnon 2017).

anti-trans violence as reality enforcement, but she also discusses reality enforcement as the very base of such violence, and in fact the very base of specific (violent) tropes culturally attached to trans people ‘the basic type of transphobia grounding the deceiver representation’ (ibid., 392).

I share Bettcher’s view that prevailing ‘moral’ view on gender and trans bodies – which leads to misgendering and ‘undoing’ trans people’s gender – is violent. I also want to elaborate the point Bettcher makes about the tropes reproducing trans people as unworthy, as legitimizing violence and in fact violent in themselves. These are two forms of what I call symbolic violence against trans people, which I probe in this article. Inspired by Bettcher’s theorizing, I analyse reality enforcement as at its core symbolic/epistemic violence. I combine Bettcher’s ideas on reality enforcement as (symbolic) violence, with feminist sociologist Angela McRobbie’s (2004) view on media tropes and mediated abuse as symbolic violence, and the theorization on figures and affect (Ahmed 2004; Tyler 2006; Puar 2007).

I find the concept of symbolic violence derived from Pierre Bourdieu, utilized in theorizations of the way media reproduces social power relations, by feminist sociologists Angela McRobbie (2004) and Karen Lumsden and Heather Morgan (2017), a useful one. Symbolic violence is a process of social reproduction (McRobbie 2004; Lumsden & Morgan 2017, 5). Compliance – both the production of compliance and the manifestations of compliance – is essential to the concept of symbolic power or violence (Lumsden & Morgan 2017, 5; McRobbie 2004). Taking Bettcher’s theorization of anti-trans violence as reality enforcement into a conversation with theorizations of symbolic violence and the media (McRobbie 2004; Lumsden & Morgan 2017), I argue that physical anti-trans violence is (partly) grounded in and legitimized by symbolic violence. Moreover, the symbolic violence which is fundamental to reality enforcement as physical violence, is carried on in depictions of this anti-trans violence in the media.

Even though reality enforcement is a specific anti-trans form of violence, Bettcher (2014, 395) has also asserted that reality enforcement is ‘paradigmatic’ when the violence targets the trans people who face many oppressions, such as racism, class, anti-sex worker oppression, and (trans)misogyny. I would add, that this ‘paradigmatic’ violence *as symbolic violence* works through ‘paradigmatic’ tropes and signs, such as the figure of the tranny (cf. McRobbie 2004; Tyler 2006), a complex and affectively charged figure of classed, sexualized and racialized femininity. Taking on the cultural studies task to study the current culture in its mundane everyday forms, I examine a case of reality enforcement through (viral) user generated media.

## Affective media and symbolic violence

I will now assess the ways in which the framing of the video of the attack in the train worked to de-legitimize the trans women as victims and to legitimize the violence against them. First instance of this framing was the choice to upload the video online, on a specific platform. The choice to upload the video non-consensually can be seen as a violent action and as such a form of violence. The video of the attack on the two black trans women was uploaded on a site, Flyvidz.com, which specializes in videos uploaded by users, and meant for entertainment. Typically, the site features short videos with regular people doing something out of the ordinary, or engaging in something arousing, such as sex, fights/attacks or other bodily acts. This site caters to ‘body genres’ (Williams 1991; Paasonen 2011), or genres that aim to create strong bodily reactions in their users. In addition, sites such as Flyvidz.com aim to engender virality, which is achieved if the content is ‘sticky’, that is, if it draws enough users, shares and clicks to the site quickly enough (Nahon and Hemsley 2013, 16). Virality is contingent on the level of affect that the videos and their circulation manage to create. In the case of the video examined in this article, affect is contingent on how bodies are valued and disvalued along the axes of race, gender, class and sexuality. Social reproduction through the public abuse and denigration of those who are low in the cultural hierarchies can take the form of entertainment (cf. McRobbie 2004). In fact, the platform shaped the depicted events in the train in a way which legitimated the violence through framing it as entertainment.

I continue the analysis of this case as social reproduction through addressing the framing of the video on the website. I will first consider the way the video was framed through its title. The video’s title, ‘2 T\*\*\*\*\*S GET INTO A FIGHT WITH 2 GUYS ON ATL MARTA!’ (2014) evokes the signifier ‘tranny’. A slang word often used by cis people to describe trans women in a derogatory way, ‘tranny’ is also used by some trans people in an effort to reclaim the term, similar to the way in which ‘queer’ was turned from a derogatory term into a defiant self-identification. The connotations and affective histories of ‘tranny’ have been much debated in transgender publics.<sup>5</sup> While there is no consensus on its potential for self-determination, there is little doubt as to its

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<sup>5</sup> The discussion around the term within transgender publics was sparked by RuPaul’s use of the term in the television show *Drag Race* in March 2014. Since then, the possibility of reclaiming the term—as well as its role in some people’s history as either a community term or a slur intended to shame—has been the subject of much debate within trans publics. Under debate have been the divisions within the trans community that the term seems to bring forth – variously understood as splits between generations, genders, classes or stances toward sex work. Some say that only trans women can use ‘tranny’, as they have been both the targets of shaming via the term, and the people whose communities have sometimes used the term between themselves. For a discussion of many aspects of this debate, see Serano (2014).

frequent derogatory uses by non-trans people, especially in the context of trans women. Online searches for the term ‘tranny’ result in ample hits on porn sites due to the visibility of the well-established category of so-called ‘tranny porn’. In other words, the term ‘tranny’ evokes pornographic connotations. The video’s title does not spell out ‘tranny’, but replaces some of the letters with asterisks, as if to cover an obscene word in order to bypass content filters. Regardless of whether the asterisks were added by the person uploading the video to the site or by a moderator, the asterisks intensify the connotations and affective intensities attached to the word. In addition, the site warns that one ‘must be 18 years or older to view’ the video, which similarly intensifies the promise of the forbidden fruit, or the entertainment considered ‘bad or ‘adult content’.

I contend that the figure of the ‘tranny’ is a classed and racialized figure, which does the work of symbolic violence. ‘Tranny’ is product of a particular cultural figuration (Castañeda 2002; Haraway 1997), a process of affective and economic circulation and coagulation involving both material and semiotic bodies through which affects stick to bodies. The ‘tranny’ as a figure allows some acts and some movement while delimiting others within the mainstream by and large cis-sexist and transmisogynistic culture. One axis of mobility that the figure of the “tranny does not enable or encourage involves class mobility. Figures become stronger through repetition and circulation (Ahmed 2004). In the online economy of clicks, the figure of the ‘tranny’ adds affective value (cf. Karppi 2014; 2015) and increases the circulation of content. As the figure ‘tranny’ is attached time and again to trans women of colour, they are also attached to the informal, stigmatised and sometimes criminalised economies of sex work as well as the low class, or even underclass, status of these forms of labour. In a culture where ‘bad sex’ is mapped against the narrow norm of ‘good sex’ (Rubin 1984), these forms of labour are affectively charged with fascination and disgust. The figure of the ‘tranny’ works to frame trans women’s bodies as fascinatingly and disgustingly underclass (cf. Tyler 2006). ‘Tranny’ is a class-related cultural figure, a caricature-like, exaggerated figure that signifies the ‘failure’ to be middle-class or comply with (white) middle-class standards of femininity (cf. Tyler 2006). The failure to be perceived as ‘real’ in line with the dominant understanding of gender (cf. Bettcher 2014) is a part of the figuration of the ‘tranny’, adding to the perceived excess.

Angela McRobbie (2004) theorizes symbolic violence through norms of middle class/ upper class white femininity, and the production of compliance in lower class women through abusing and demeaning them for not fulfilling these embodied norms. I argue that ‘tranny’ works as a demeaning figure of ‘lower’, excessive femininity, constructed as failing in relation to the norms of white middle class cisgendered femininity. For McRobbie (2004), symbolic violence is both about producing compliance to abuse by figures and tropes which demean the subordinated groups and make them appear less worthy, *and* the way subordinated people, feeling or acknowledging their subordination

act compliant to their own abuse. This particular case is not about compliance. However, this case can be productively analysed through the concept of symbolic violence. The justification of the poor social status of a non-dominant group through demeaning tropes and figures is essential for the analysis of this case. Moreover, the concept of symbolic violence is useful for addressing ambivalences in cultural visibility of trans people, especially the visibility of violence against trans people. In this case, the figure of the tranny works both to link the video of the violent event to entertainment, and to make the trans women seem unworthy of sympathy. Symbolic violence makes abuse and violence against oppressed groups seem legitimate, individualizing the failures to comply to norms favouring the dominant groups (McRobbie 2004, 103). For example, here, the failure to comply to the norms of linear gender and the perceived norm breaking of ‘excessive’ femininity on bodies deemed ‘male’ within the linear view on gender.

In online porn, black and brown women are more often represented as ‘trannies’ than are white women. Needless to say, class and racialisation are often linked. Moreover, the normative standards of femininity and masculinity are upheld by representations of aberrant others. Riley C. Snorton (2014) has argued that black gender and sexuality have historically been represented as always already queer; associated with suspicion, failure and excess. The effect of the history of slavery on black family formations has been represented as pure failure on the part of black families and gender. Black gender and sexuality have also been represented as *entertainingly* failing, in ways which have to do with failure to be or appear respectably middle-class (Snorton 2014, 72-76). This perceived failure and excess support the affective intensification of the figure of the ‘tranny’ as one connoting a sexualised underclass. Thus, the *value* attached to both the figure of the ‘tranny’ and the bodies attached to it is related to failure to comply with white middle-class gender norms.

The construction of trans women as entertaining failures through the figure of the ‘tranny’ involves the fixing of genitalia as that which the performed or perceived gender points to and which is signified by bodily morphology and appearance (cf. Bettcher 2014, 392). Within the dominant cultural understanding of gender, ‘tranny’ signals genitalia that are represented as ‘verification’ (cf. Bettcher 2014, 392) of the ‘wrong’ gender or the ‘failure’ to verify the perceived gender. Through its histories of porn and sex work, ‘tranny’ signifies a sexualised ‘truth’ and a sexualized ‘failure’ or excess (of the ‘wrong’ genitals). Along with these connotations, ‘tranny’ simultaneously signals the affectively intensified failure to be middle class, a failure which in turn increases its entertainment value.

## User-generated symbolic violence

I will now analyse the framing of the video through its most liked comment, and argue, that the most liked comment performs an act of symbolic violence, which gains force through the likes it has gathered, enabled by the logic of Flyvidz.com's platform. On Flyvidz.com the platform highlights the most-liked comment as a default instead of presenting the comments in chronological order. The comment function on Flyvidz.com does not encourage rational Habermasian discussion (cf. Papacharizzi 2002; Paasonen 2015). People quickly type their responses to the video or the most popular (and most visible) comment without reading most of the preceding discussion. The platform's popularity principle (van Dijk 2013) enables affective intensity to be gathered around both the videos and the most popular comments, which frame the videos (cf. Paasonen 2015). This may encourage further comments, shares and views.

The "featured comment" shown right under the video that has received the most likes (1289 likes as of 30 June 2014) could have been made by one of the attackers or by someone expressing a kind of identification, or alignment, with the attackers. Regardless of who the commenter is, the comment is important due to its visibility. The comment therefore works as a sort of framing for the video, similarly to the video's title. The comment states, 'The fight was funny but when he she took his clothes off it went nasty and to be honest I cannot fight a naked man'. The comment frames the events depicted in the video as a fight that is both 'funny' and 'nasty', inviting the viewer to enjoy the clip as entertainment. By mentioning a 'naked man', it promises nudity, and by presenting it as a 'funny' fight, the comment frames the violence as light entertainment. Since trans women are frequently represented in mainstream media as inherently funny or humorous, it is not surprising for the commentator to identify the fight as 'funny'. There is certainly aggression entangled in this 'fun' in the sense that violence identified as 'funny' is often linked to bodies that are deemed unworthy.

What is most striking about the comment is the insistent misgendering of the trans woman; she is first referred to with the slur 'he she', then as a 'he' and finally as 'a naked man'. This misgendering is an act of aggression and continues the humiliation that the women suffered on the train. This public misgendering is a form of symbolic/epistemic violence, conducted through media (cf. Amy-Chinn 2011). The phrase 'when he she took his clothes off it went nasty' marks a turning point in the comment. In principle, this sort of statement could be used to signal moral condemnation, of things having gone 'too far'. However, the comment continues: 'and to be honest I cannot fight a naked man'. This could be interpreted as a condemnation of the continuation of the fight after the trans woman had lost her clothes, if we assume that the commenter is merely reacting to the video. Such an explanation is nevertheless questionable, given the intentional misgendering of the woman. What is at work here is

a common cis-sexist obsession with (unveiling) trans people's genitals in order to uncover the 'truth' of their 'real' gender through what Bettcher (2014, 392) calls 'genital verification'. The practice of genital verification builds on the prevailing idea that the form of one's genitals is what gendered appearance, gender-coded behaviour and bodily morphology should communicate (Bettcher 2014, 392). Genital verification, which can take the form of forced unveiling or discursive acts, functions as a form of 'identity invalidation', that is, invalidation of trans people's identities, which in itself is a form of violence (Bettcher 2014, 392, 394). Genital status is usually assumed within the dominant culture, and most cis-gendered people do not have to undergo genital verification. However, as Bettcher (2014, 394; 2007, 53) points out, for many trans people, genital verification is a daily threat. It is a specific form of violence targeted mainly at trans people (2014, 394). Many of the comments, including the most-liked comment, can be seen as a form of genital verification and thus reality enforcement. I argue that the uploading and sharing of the video at the video sharing site are forms of mediated reality enforcement for the purpose of entertainment, and this is made worse by the framing by the title and the featured comment 'liked' most by the users.

The most liked comment can further be analysed as a culturally normalized reaction to trans femininity. The exclamation 'it went nasty' is a reaction to an encounter with a body that 'feels like nothing I could ever feel like', a body that seems strange but simultaneously comes too close as it is felt as 'contagious' through affective intensity in the encounter (Puar 2007, 187).<sup>6</sup> The phrase 'it went nasty' in the most-liked comment can be interpreted as a reaction to the excessiveness attached to specifically *trans women* and *trans femininities* to how trans femininities are perceived as both excessive and artificial (Serano 2007, 5). I interpret 'nasty' here as a way to repel whatever is getting close (in the physical encounter on the train or through a screen) and what is deemed unlike oneself or taboo-breaking in its crossing of the borders between genders or morphologies (Serano 2007, 56-57). Synonyms for 'nasty' include 'disgusting, offensive, awful, dirty, fierce, horrible, icky, murderous, noxious, obnoxious, ornery, outrageous, rough, tough, unpleasant, vile [and] vulgar' (Thesaurus.com). The nakedness of the trans woman is framed as disgusting, offensive, dirty and vulgar. The titillation of seeing something regarded as disgusting, offensive, vulgar and dirty can in fact be seen as a key motivation for viewing the video or similar videos on Flyvidz.com. Considering the cultural figure of the 'tranny' evoked in the circulation of the video, I argue that 'vulgar', 'disgusting' and 'offensive' are connotations of the figure of the

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<sup>6</sup> This insight about the distancing involved in the comment and the stickiness of shame and devaluation attached to the moving image of the trans women's bodies aligns with Ringrose, Harvey, Gill and Livingstone's (2013, 317) discussion of the simultaneous valuing and devaluing of sexualised images of teen girls bodies. Even the boys for whom the possession of these teen girls images bring social value, risk being contaminated by the shame by association to girls that are seen as sexually active.

‘tranny’. Trans femininity that is represented as entertainingly vulgar as well as ‘contagious’ (cf. Puar 2007, 187) is a complex figure of ‘unrealness’, a co-articulation of class, racialization and identity invalidation.

The logic of the platform of the video sharing site is essential to the viral spreading of this video. The value produced by users of online platforms for users is derived from the affective reactions, clicks and shares accumulated during the circulation of content. It is therefore easy to see why platforms are designed to evoke affective reactions, to make ‘signalling’ affect easy and to make methods of user engagement, such as sharing and commenting, as quick and easy as possible. Forcing users to reflect for a moment before commenting or to make them read all the previous comments before submitting a comment would not increase affective engagement in and traffic to the site. The pace of circulation, or rather, the spread of content, has become so fast that whatever gathers affect, gathers it quickly, as Jenkins, Ford & Green (2013, 1) note, ‘if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead’. Mediated violence against trans women of colour has the potential to spread, as evidenced by the virality of the video discussed in this article. As the medium in question encourages fast, affective reactions and enables quick sharing and liking, bodies become stuck with figures in predictable ways, but faster.

Racialization is part of the way violence becomes ordinary entertainment within this viral video. Many of the videos uploaded on Flyvidz.com involve attacks or fights, and many commenters on the videos normalise such events as ‘hood fights’, events that are not out of the ordinary. In ‘hood fight’ videos, people racialized as black are associated with violence as entertainment and naturalised as both victims and perpetrators of violence: as bodies valuable only as entertainment when they are being kicked, beaten or otherwise devalued. The fact that both the attackers and the women in the video are people of colour seems to enable viewers to interpret the encounter as merely ‘another fight in the hood’. This framing misses the different ways in which black trans women and black cis men face violence.<sup>7</sup> It is as if an equality of agency would be presumed by these comments. Trans feminine people of colour do not seem to figure close enough to white middle-class femininity norms to be constructed as vulnerable in comparison to men, like white cis women are often constructed within culture at large. As commenters question their ‘real gender’, the trans women are rendered suspect in a way which would not happen to cis women within the dominant culture. Thus, trans women are articulated here as a racialised and classed figuration of entertaining ‘trannies’ ‘fighting’.

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<sup>7</sup> The aggression towards trans women as trans women is made worse by regular neglect and harassment by the police towards trans women of colour, many of whom experience added stigma due to sex work (Saffin 2011, 152) and might have experienced incarceration, often including violence by prison staff (Dillon 2011, 178; Goring/Sweet 2011, 186; Witherspoon 2011, 211).

## The temporality of videos and figures

Almost two years from the violent encounter in the train was shot and uploaded online, and since I started writing this essay, I returned to the video clip, opening the old link, and notice, that the title of the video has been changed; the URL is still the same, but the word 'T\*\*\*\*\*S' has been changed to 'transgender women' (Flyvidz.com 2016). The name of the site has also changed slightly, from Flyvidz to Flyheight. Additionally, the most popular comment has changed. It is slightly more popular than the one discussed earlier, and states, 'DONT GIVE A FUCK ABOUT CLOTHES COMING OFF OR NOT....' ' and states that the attackers 'GOT MOPPED BY THEM TRANNIES' and that they 'LOOK LIKE CLOWNS...' (Flyvidz.com 2016).

This comment seems to be celebrating the fighting skills of the women and saying that the nudity of the woman did not make a difference when compared to the skills. On the other hand, 'looking like a clown' implies that losing in a fight against 'trannies' is embarrassing. The latest comments still present a desire to discover the 'real' gender of the trans women through genital verification. The women are still called 'trannies' in the comments, and their identities are still invalidated. The new featured comment is according to the sites own statistical function "two years old, and there are very few new comments'. Although the video clip has gathered 6,568,622 views, it has been replaced by other featured videos on the website's home page. The stickiness of online content does not last forever (cf. Paasonen 2015). However, the stickiness of figures does not seize as easily, and everyday violent practices, such as identity invalidation and reality enforcement, which uphold trans oppression, still persist.

## Different framings of violence

The trans women are not "defendable' as "proper' feminine victims in a similar manner that white middle class cis women might be. The claim to feminine victimhood is exclusionary, as trans women do not seem to have a claim to it. However, class and race are intertwined in this exclusion from feminine victimhood. Black women have not historically had similar claim to feminine victimhood as white women (Williams 2016, 923; Davis 1981). According to Williams (2016, 923), this history still continues in the lack of attention to the violence against black women, both trans and cisgendered. The silence over this violence is something which #Sayhername and Black Trans Lives Matters campaigns have tried to call attention to, and even change (Williams 2016). When the violence against trans women is uplifted by media, it is often not contextualized in any serious way, and is sometimes reported in a sensationalistic way.

All visibility for trans people, or even all visibility of the violence against trans feminine people of colour, does not work towards emancipation.

In relation to the particular case of violence against trans women discussed in this article, Solutions not Punishments (SNaP, ‘a diverse Coalition led by trans\* people of color’) commented on the attack shortly after it took place. In their statement, the grassroots coalition demanded the city and the police to change their practices towards trans women and called for a process of ‘restorative or transformative justice’ (SNaP 2014). The statement mentioned police and prison violence against trans people of colour, the inhumanity of the prison system, and the lack of “jobs, housing, health care’ for trans people (SNaP 2014). This interpretation took the crime seriously, while laying the responsibility for – and the solution to – the continued violence on (changing) structures.

Another example of violence against trans women of colour being framed quite differently is the way the anti-trans and racist violence against Cece McDonald (and her prison sentence after the judge ignored self-defence) sparked both activism and media attention. In this case, the renowned actor and trans advocate Laverne Cox helped to make the case public and produce the documentary *FreeCece!* on McDonalds story. Through the documentary, trans women of colour do the framing of the violence themselves . In this case of violence which sparked activism, Cece McDonald has spoken against the prison system within USA. (Anderson 2016.) In this example, the trans women of colour are taken seriously as victims of violent crimes, but the wider context of state supported violence, racism and trans exclusion is targeted, instead of focusing on the liberal framework of hate crimes and victims.<sup>8</sup> Visibility of a trans woman of colour actor, brought by celebrity status, has been turned into a political vehicle of intersectional activism.

Reflecting on these other framings brings me to a question over ethics of trans feminist scholarship. As there are other, clearly more productive ways of framing this violence, such as the above mentioned campaigns, why do I write on framings which are so obviously harmful? Could it be the case that this article simply functions as a repetition of these harmful practices? I would never have analysed this case, if the video would not have been non-consensually uploaded. What I aim to do is an interruption of sorts of something which is already out there. There is a need to critically interrupt wider ways of looking, framing and using/consuming images of violence against trans women and trans feminine people. This means that we need to name and put a limelight on these practices.

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<sup>8</sup> For a critique of the psychologising and individualising rhetoric of ‘hate’ regarding anti-LGBTQ and racist violence, see Smith (2007) and Haritaworn (2013).

## Conclusions

It is important to address the specific forms of violence which face trans people, and to ask how these are carried on in and through the now ubiquitous mobile devices and user generated media. ‘Low brow’ media are powerful fields of social production (cf. McRobbie 2004, 108). The practices of reality enforcement through media (through for example deadnaming in reports of the murders of trans people) are widespread, as is the figure of the tranny. For many people media is the main source of knowledge and attitudes towards trans feminine people. As I have shown, media depictions of violence against trans people sometimes repeat the symbolic violence of reality enforcement, even sometimes making it into a viral form of entertainment. The trans women of colour do not seem to have a claim to ‘proper’ femininity and thus to feminine victimhood. They are constructed as failing the norms of white respectable femininity. These norms are simultaneously ‘cis norms’ of alignment between genitals ‘the nature intended’ and perceived gender, entangled with norms of behaviour, sexuality and attire. Instead of just celebrating ‘visibility’ it is necessary to look closely into the *ways* in which ‘visibility’ of trans people works, and to complicate the widespread notion of ‘visibility’ or ‘social media’ as only and simply liberatory for trans people. This means carefully assessing what various depictions and framings of violence do, or do not do. It means paying attention to the continued violence on various levels: symbolic, structural and concrete.<sup>9</sup> Visibility which repeats the very cisnormativity behind the anti-transgender violence does nothing to repair violence on any of these levels.

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<sup>9</sup> Without consideration of the wider context, highlighting individual acts of violence can make it harder to see the structural violence that affects who has a chance at getting ‘justice’ through the police or justice system (cf. Smith 2007).



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