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Online Aggression against Women in Iran

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Abstract:
This paper used qualitative methods to explore the depth and breadth of online aggression against women in Iran by studying the explanations of female activists to that aggression. I interviewed 10 women through Smartphone-based discussion groups. Our analysis reveals that two forms of online aggression: unwanted sexual content and unwanted sexual attention; are problematic for Iranian women. These online aggressions were explained by the activists in terms of economic, social, political, or cultural problems with society that made online aggression against women more prevalent. These findings suggest that, despite the cultural and political differences in the position and rights of women in Iran and in western societies, that the perceptions of online aggression by a sample of Iranian women who are active on women's issues, are very similar to those adopted in Western feminist analyses.

Keywords: Online aggression, gender relations in Iran, sexual harassment, activism

1. Introduction

Although information and communication technology can facilitate communications and connections across geographic and cultural boundaries, it has frequently attracted attention for permitting the creation of new environments where women are made to feel unsafe or are threatened. Much of the analysis of online aggression has been in conducted in highly industrialized, Western countries: socio-cultural contexts where aggression against women is a contemporary focus of contestation in offline and online spaces. Understandably due to issues of access and other pressing concerns for women: online aggression against women in non-Western countries has received less academic attention. This paper addresses aggression against women in the online environment in Iran. My starting assumption is that such analysis is valuable of itself but also that it has broader implications. If the phenomena of online aggression against women in (the very different cultural context of Iran) is similar to that observed in Western countries then what does that tell us about the common (perhaps universal) nature of aggression against women or about online phenomena?

1.1. Explaining Online Aggression against Women

Barak (2005) and other feminist researchers distinguish several main forms of online aggression against women. A major form of this is online sexual harassment. According to Fitzgerald, Gelfand, andDrasgow (1995) there are three types of online sexual harassment that parallel the offline forms: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Barak (2005) suggested that most expressions of online sexual harassment take the form of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention, as the lack of physical co-presence in online environments renders sexual coercion less plausible. Online gender harassment involving unwelcome comments that insult individuals because of their gender, or that use the presentation of material (such as pornography) that is known or intended to provoke negative emotions, is very common. Features of the Internet, such as widespread anonymity, make it difficult to restrict problematic behaviors through legislative and other means. Unwanted sexual attention may include propositions or offers of sexual availability.

According to Truong, Williams, Clark, and Couey (1993) women may refrain from reporting perceptions of abuse because of internalized peer pressure, based on observations of the experiences of other women being mocked for speaking out. Another factor that may underlie online aggression against women is that women may not know that harassment has a subjective component, harassment is not defined by the standards of the harasser but of the target and/or the community, and this subjectivity may limit the degree to which women may believe it is legitimate to assert those standards.

Other early research by We (1993) found that 91% of women communicated differently online than off line. However although women were able to communicate readily online there were problems with computer-mediated communication (CMC) that many women did not discuss. "Flaming," a CMC term for the posting of angry messages, is an online phenomenon that tends to be disproportionately prevalent in communication by men (Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, &Barab, 2002) a form of characteristic male aggression that, women believed, was made possible by anonymity (We, 1993).

Where does such aggression stem from? The dominant cultural patterns in patriarchal societies create and reinforce a dominant ideology that condones violence against women. This view highlights the interconnection between male power and

violence against women. In this vein a feminist critical discourse analysis by Bou-Franchand andBlitvitch (2014) reveals three patriarchal strategies of abuse –minimizing the abuse, denying its existence, and blaming women are enacted in online discourse. They investigate their relationship between social identity and gender ideology in violence against women.

According to Douglas, McGarty,Lala, and Bliuc (2005) social identity theory suggests that online violence against women is asocial competition strategy by a high status group rather than a social creativity strategy "Their insecure and threatened position as a self-perceived high-status group makes it likely that they will adopt competitive strategies such as conflict and violence to maintain the status quo and to promote their group as superior to the out-group" (p. 70). In line with this Dill (2016) found that social identity was more important than sharing similar opinions in encouraging hostility towards the out-group under anonymous conditions.

Another factor that may explain online violence against women is the widespread presence of libertarian views. Herring(1999) makes an explicit connection between online harassment and libertarian values in a study of gender harassment, noting that "This 'rhetoric of harassment' crucially invokes libertarian principles of freedom of expression, constructing women's resistance as 'censorship' a strategy that ultimately succeeds because of the ideological dominance of (male-gendered) libertarian norms of interaction on the Internet" (p. 152). This point underscores the importance of examining online aggression against women in contexts where such libertarian norms may be less prevalent.

One of the few studies to investigate online aggression against women in non-Western countries is by Singh (2015).Singh found a wide range of cyber crimes committed against women in India: cyberstalking, defamation, email spoofing, pornography, photo morphing (altering photographs in embarrassing ways and then circulating the images), harassment via email, hacking and virtual rape.

1.2. The Current Study

The wide prevalence of online sexism raises important questions. If online sexism has grown is that because of the social changes that have outlawed offline forms or in spite of these changes? Put another way, have forms of aggression (such as those displayed in the Gamer Gate controversy, or the rape threats against a female campaigner for symbolic reform in the United Kingdom, see Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016) taken hold in online communication because of restrictions on offline communication, or are online sexism and racism a continuation of endemic social conflicts in different contexts?

These are obviously weighty questions that no single paper can hope to answer but the approach taken in this paper is to take a new slant on online aggression against women. Specifically we ask whether online aggression against women takes the same form in Iran, a traditional, patriarchal society where women have specifically regulated roles, as it does in Western liberal democratic contexts where gender equality is widely promoted as a cultural value.

This is also clearly a large and complex task for one paper. It is difficult to study the prevalence and causes of online violence in Iran because the online environment is restricted by culture, religion, and politics. As a first step we instead explore the online experiences of female activists in Iran. Specifically we ask whether female Iranian activists explain online aggression against women in the same way that Western feminists explain the phenomenon.

If there are commonalities in explanations this may point to common factors underpinning those explanations. This commonality may stem from the fact that both Iranian and Western observers are explaining the same form of conduct and that Iranian observers have been influenced by Western traditions of feminism. Given the differences in political contexts either of these possibilities is intriguing. On the other hand, given some aspects of social and communicative context in Iran that we discuss below, any evidence of differences between Iranian observations and Western observations are especially important, and contribute to a wafer thin body of research on the Iranian feminist Internet.

My research also addressed two other issues that seemed particularly pertinent to the Iranian context and that emerged dynamically in the research. The first related to attempts by men to infiltrate or disrupt discussions by women (see Herring et al, 2002) by posing as women. The second was the selection of profile pictures used by women on the Internet. In Iranian society women appearing in public are required by law to have their hair covered by a veil. These laws do not regulate online images so women may choose to have a veiled or unveiled profile picture. I was interested in experiences around that choice.

2. Methodology

I used qualitative methods to explore the depth and breadth of online aggression against women by gauging Iranian women's understanding of the issue. This qualitative study used semi-structured online interviews with women active in discussions of gender issues in Iran. This methodology was chosen because it allowed us to examine their experiences and their perceptions as activists about online aggression against women. I sampledpurposively for women who were prepared to comment on these matters.

Sampling posed two key issues. Although it is not culturally inappropriate or unlawful for Iranian women to report or object to online aggression by men it is nevertheless the case that many women would be reluctant to discuss these issues in a face-to-face interview where they may be identified as a source of a complaint. There are also very few Persian language blogs and web sites that provide commentary on women's issues.

My research started initially with a discussion on blog site that was active on women's issues. I posed some questions on it but received very few replies. I decided to search for other sources.

After an extensive search of possible sources I decided to focus on a modality that is common for online discussion in Iran but does not appear to have been studied extensively in previous research. I recruited interviewees through Viber discussion groups.

Viber is an app that runs on smart phones and other platforms and allows direct voice and video communication as well as text-based communication. Viber allows the formation of social groups (interest, social and cultural) that engage in online discussions.

In the study interviews was conducted with a group of female activists over 7 weeks. I used a semi-structured interview guide. I addressed two major topics: a) what forms of online aggression had the women experienced and b) how did they explain that aggression? These major questions were then followed up with more specific questions.

The qualitative data were collected in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with 10 women (from a total of 39 members of the group). At the beginning I briefly introduced research and assured interviewees that their anonymity would-be preserved. Further, I deleted any data that might identify interviewees. After the interviewee consented to participate, they were asked to explain their experiences about online aggression. Participants also were asked questions from the following schedule: "How do Iranian female activists explain online aggression?" "Why do some men contact with women using disguised identity?", "How do profile picture influence online aggression against women?"

3. Data Analysis

On the basis of work by Barak (2005) and Bou-Franch and Blitvich (2014) I used two broad themes to analyse the interview data: forms of online aggression and reasons for that online aggression. Within each of these broad themes there were clear subthemes. I address the forms of online aggression experienced by Iranian women.

3.1. What are the Forms of Online Aggression Experienced by Iranian Women?

The participants identified two broad forms that map on to two of the categories identified by Barak (2005) namely passive verbal and graphic harassment and unwanted sexual attention.

3.1.1. Passive Verbal and Graphic Sexual Harassment

The women did not report instances where they had received personally targeted harassing messages or pornographic content but instead that they had been exposed to sexualized content that was generally present on the Internet.

- P4:

"In addition a case which has occurred more often, once I was searching for a certain site when suddenly I came across porno pictures".

- P5:

"I had another experience with this issue, once I was searching something in Google and I came across an advertising page before the main page [it was] full of porno images".

- P3:

"It has happened when I was searching on a topic. I unintentionally came across internet sites about sexual issues. And they were very disgusting".

Participants also reported pervasive gender-based humour in Persian language discussion groups.

- P6:

"I have encountered a lot of gender and sexual jokes in Vibe groups. In fact I really hate them. But they were not directly addressing me. They were addressing the general public".

- P5:

"I came across gender jokes in groups on Viber, telegram and Facebook. But they were not directly addressing me".

The offending material therefore was present as a backdrop to online interactions. It was not deliberately sent to individuals, and it certainly was not sought out, but it was also very difficult to avoid. It is also worth noting here that while the pornography seemed to be available in the diffuse international context of the Internet that the sexually harassing humour was widely present in Persian language Viber discussion groups. There are two points to make here. First, while pervasive online pornographic content may be offensive in many cultural contexts that content is also subject to strong legal sanctions in Iran. That is, the pornography is not only offensive but is also clearly illegal (in much the same way that child pornography is illegal in Western countries). Secondly, the Persian language mixed gender discussion groups revealed a substrate of gender-based humour. Participants did not report the content of this humourbut from their comments we can deduce that the gender-based humour tended to be demeaning towards women and can be understood in the pattern described by Barak (2005) as sustaining traditional patterns of patriarchal domination.

3.1.2. Unwanted Sexual Attention

While pornography and sexist humor tended to take a broadcast rather than targeted form several participants did report being sexually harassed in messages received from specific males. These messages tended to involve unsolicited sexual advances.

- P10:

"This violence started with solicitations and offers of sex and I did not answer him. Therefore, it finished with insults and sexual abuse".

- P1:

"I have received impolite and vulgar comments and shameful offers. These were sent directly to me".

- P9:

"I personally encountered sexual harassment from a male friend who claims to be an intellectual in online space years ago".

- P7:

"I had a sexual offer which was sent directly to me".

All the female activists interviewed reported experiencing one or the other form of online aggression. This is consistent with research by Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) that showed that women receive a variety of forms of abuse.

3.2. How Do Iranian Female Activists Explain Online Aggression?

The explanations offered for online aggression generally took the form of blaming the aggression on the defective structure of society. Almost all of the activists expressed that economic, social, political, or culturalproblems with society made online aggression against women more prevalent.

These explanations were divided into further sub-themes: the male-dominated nature of Iranian society, the lack of satisfaction of primary needs of male Internet users, and the education and socialization of male Internet users.

3.2.1. Male Domination of Society

A number of extracts highlighted that female activists explained the aggression in classical feminist terms attributing it to patriarchal, societal constraints on gender roles that resulted in a power inequality that licensed aggression by men against women.

- P2:

"I believe that online aggression is not different from aggression offline in public and family environment, that is, it is just the question of power and domination".

All of the participants expressed similar responses about how the patriarchal system encourages violence against women in all aspects of life so that online aggression is, in effect, the extension of pervasive (offline) aggression to a new context.

- P7:

"Men have even occupied the internet".

Most of the participants believed that the patriarchal system depicts women negatively with their ridiculing them.

- P5:

"Mocking is part of our culture in general. In[a] patriarchal society, teasing women is part of male-dominated culture. To be socially funny you have to make fun of women. In order to be funny sneering at women appears to be inevitable. It seems that by humiliating women men try to prove their social status".

- P3:

"From our childhood we experience gender segregation in all aspects of life, which in effect has led to hate between male and female (sometimes we realize that they believe the other sex is adevil or monster)".

3.2.2. Unsatisfied Male Needs

Some participants suggested that male aggression arose from a lack of adequate facilities for recreation, or was due to a lack of economic and job opportunities. People spent more of their leisure time on the Internet, and due to boredom or other factors, used this medium to misbehave.

- P2:

"In my opinion, it is partly because of not being economically well off and lack of recreational facilities where people can spent their free time".

- P6:

"I also agree completely. Since there are not enough recreational facilities for people so they spend more of their free time in virtual space".

- P8:

"In my opinion, unemployment, lack of sufficient income and a lack of proper recreational space could also be influencing factors".

This analysis is very similar to many lay accounts of criminal conduct by young people in urban environments. That is similar analyses are often seen in relation to street violence, graffiti and substance abuse.

3.2.3. Habits and Education

A third class of explanation blended aspects of the previous two. They suggested that male perpetrators are socialized to enact online aggression without awareness. This form of explanation treated online aggression as an unintended consequence of the way that men were socialized rather than as a strategic effort to oppress women.

- P1:

"The important issue is that people are not aware that their behavior is akin to aggression".

- P3:

"Look, I know people for whom the importance of the issue is not clear for them. Men think that we either make it complicated or exaggerate it or they say it is just for fun. I think that there are important factors such as lacking knowledge and bad habits and lack of education about men's insulting behavior".

- P1:

"Lack of healthy relation models with the opposite sex, as well as problematic education and insufficient communication skills may result in violence".

The other side of this was that education was also seen as a mechanism for reducing online aggression.

- P8:

"I think learning about aggression is important. The media and educational institutions can be effective reducing violence against women".

4. Targeted Questions

To explore specific aspects of the explanations we asked two additional questions that related to the structure of relations between men and women in the offline environment. The first related to the use of profile pictures.

4.1. Effects of Profile Picture

There was general agreement that unveiled profile pictures appeared to trigger online aggression. However the form of online aggression was an increased level of unwanted sexual attention rather than an attempt to create aggression.

- P9:

"Yes, absolutely. Profile picture and women's clothing, unfortunately, has a direct impact on the level of sexual harassment. But this should not be so, that is no one should allow oneself to be aggressive".

- P3:

"Look, rationally it should not be so but the reality of my society is different. In fact, when you behave differently from the norm of society you should expect the consequences of your behavior and then you decide for yourself whether to continue or not... in fact if my clothing is in a way that people can see part my body, in fact I have not done the wrong thing. It is my body but I should foresee the reaction of others in my society".

- P5:

"In fact your answer is yes. Your question reminds me of something. I am a member of a traveling site which it is for cheap travel. What has happened to me there? I have received a lot of messages [requesting] friendship and honor of acquaintance and telephone numbers. I know that the main reason was my profile picture".

- P4:

"I have received a proposal for a relationship because of the picture in my profile, but they were decent, or at least they were not associated with sexual violence".

Barak (2005) and others argue that online sexual harassment is about maintaining power relations rather than sexual gratification. Intriguingly, although unveiled profile pictures could be seen as a clear challenge to the male domination of Iranian society (as an online violation of a strictly enforced offline code) there was little evidence that the unveiled profile pictures were attacked by men explicitly as a violation. On the contrary the unveiled pictures were understood as prompting increased levels of unwanted sexual attention

4.2. Why Do Some Men Contact Women Using Disguised Identity?

The participants were all asked why some men contact women by adopting female online identities. The reflections were detailed and lengthy. I identified two themes: "Abuse involving sexual coercion" and "Abuse involving political disruption". The impact these themes on online violence against women will be demonstrated through evidence from the transcript.

4.2.1. Abuse Involving Sexual Coercion

Participant expressed that the Internet has expanded anonymity and the use of it for abusing women through humiliation and threats.

- P4:

"For example, a man can make friends with a woman usingdisguised identity and when he makes sure of her relationship with the opposite sex. He tries to force her to have an affair with him by blackmailing".

- P5:
"Men through a disguised femaleidentity can get close to a group of women and use extortion to acquire videos, photos or text of their dialogue".
- P9:
"I think the reason is obvious. Well, the man has only an aim: that is having an affair with [a member of the] opposite sex and to achieve his goal he would do whatever he can. It is obvious he can reach his goal easier through a disguised identity".

4.2.2. Abuse Involving Political Disruption

Some activists stated that Internet reinforce status differences between men and women. They believe men strive to keep their status in society in highest level possible by making division among women.
- P10:
"In some cases, with the aim of creating a negative thought against women by women. Suppose a man introduces himself as a woman and leaves anti-women andpro-patriarchal comments in a feminist post. It may have a negative and disappointing effect on women movements. In fact, his action is a kind of reproduction of dominant culture".
- P7:
"Feeling of insecurity and the risk of increasing presence of women and messages which are sent to defend the rights of women make a man by disguising his identity try to keep his status. In fact a man enters a group with women's identity and by leaving comments against women try to disintegrate women's groups and try to ruin them. Therefore, they try to create pessimism among [women] and stabilize his status".
There was, however, one alternative reading that imputed less sinister motives.
- P4:
"Perhaps in this way communication between two genders can be easier to be established and the individual can have easy access to information he needs. Usually communication between same sexes can take place with more confidence".
In other words, the suggestion appeared to be that identity spoofing may be a way for men engage in open information seeking in a regulated society where communication between men and women is specifically restricted.

5. Discussion

The remarkable aspect of these findings is that the broad lay forms of explanation used by female Iranian activists explain online aggression experienced against women is very similar to the explanations found in feminist Western academic analyses. This is despite the seemingly enormous differences in political and cultural contexts and the low dissemination of feminist ideologyin contemporary Iran. It was very difficult to locate discussions of online aggression in Iran but when I did those discussions had a recognizably feminist tone.

The hallmark of this is that online aggression, including unwanted sexual attention and sexual humour, was explained as an expression of interpersonal power exercised by men over women, rather than as an expression of sexual desire. This pattern was by no means universal but it was frequently made and cogently put. In line with this Hardaker and McGlashan (2016) found that women were constructed as recipients of abuse or threats compare with men for whom the construction wasmore contested. Men were also seen tofrequently seen to bethe senders of abuse of abuse.

The responses gave every indication that the women had considered whether the phenomenon was driven by power or sex needs and most had decided clearly in favour of the power explanation referring to the patriarchal organization of Iranian society. This result is consistent with analyses by Sultana (2010) whoaddressedmale domination both in public and private areas in Bangladesh. Also the participants in this study explained that male perpetrators activities are affected by their cultural orientation. Therefore, education and awareness were seen as mechanisms for reducing online aggression. According to United Nations (1996) "Men growing up without a good gender model grow up with an inflated, hyper masculine view of manhood and are therefore more prone to violence".Moreover, some participants suggested that online aggression is affected by lack of adequate facilities for recreation, lack of economic and job opportunities.

The reflections as towhysome men used disguised identities to contact women were detailed and lengthy. Male perpetrators were believed to use anonymity toabuse women through humiliation and threats. Moreover, they use it for keeping their status in society in highest level possible by political disruption. In line with this Douglas and McGarty (2001) found that hostile flaming communication on the Internet was dependent on communicative context and was not simply a uniform feature of computer-mediated communication. Based on their research, men as a high statusgroup can penetrate women's groups by disguised identity for self-enhancement and for the achievement of self-distinctiveness from out groups (women). In fact, social identity strategies represent the positive depiction of the behavior of the in-group vis-à-vis the negative representation of the out-group. The activists expressed that as the relationship between same sexes associated with more confidence, men are able to move freely between feminine groups by women's identity in order to keep down women in their status.

How should we understand the similarities of accounts across cultural contexts? That is certainly a matter for further exploration but there are two broad possibilities. The first is that there may be a wider intrusion of feminist ideology into contemporary Iranian life than is often supposed. Just as the women had surfed through travel sites, Western advertising and

pornography through their online browsing they may also have encountered feminist analyses. It is unlikely, however, that they would encounter much of this content in Persian though. The other alternative that we have to consider very closely therefore is that these Iranian women may have explained the phenomena in the same way as did Western feminists because they were experiencing the same phenomena. That is, power-based sexual harassment is a common feature experienced in western countries and in Iran and the common explanations reflect shared social realities.

That said there were also some aspects of the explanations that suggested differences in the experiences. The level of unwanted sexual attention was reported to be higher when women used unveiled profile pictures. The use of unveiled pictures could be seen to be a challenge to the pattern of regulation of women in public spaces in Iranian society. Women are not allowed to appear in public spaces in Iran with uncovered hair. The Internet, however, is less clearly regulated. When women appear publicly on the Internet the reported response of men was not to insist that the putatively offensive pictures be removed but instead to seek (illicit) sexual relations with women.

Intriguingly this response matches the expectations of the Iranian government. Women are required to cover their hair in public spaces precisely because it is believed that such immodest self-presentation will generate unwanted and illicit sexual attention. It does, however, suggest that the situation is more complex in that there is a sexual component to unwanted sexual attention.

In this respect the sexualized online aggression that the respondents described may be closer to forms of sexual predation experienced by minors and members of other vulnerable groups in Western online contexts. As reported in the interviews Iranian women are vulnerable to blackmail and coercion by sexual predators in ways that do not apply to many women in other jurisdictions, but which may be equivalent to the situation that persons beneath the legal age of consent find themselves in (or imagine themselves to be in).

Another difference between Western and Iranian online settings relates to the regulation of context in terms of feminist norms. That is, in Western contexts attempts to regulate sexist speech may themselves be contested as conflicting with democratic values. This is unlikely to be a feature of Iranian online discussions. That is, while it is possible to seek to position Western feminist as a dominant ideological force that requires politically correct language and adherence to such norms, such a rendering of the situation would hold no currency in Iran. Thus, where in the west intrusion by men into female-only forums would most likely be understood as a form of political disruption it was understood in Iran as a mechanism for illicit sexual recruitment. Again the possible parallels to illegal sexual predation of vulnerable groups are striking.

Despite the seeming clarity of the results, there are limitations of the study that should be acknowledged. The first issue that finding a sample of female activists was very difficult. The Iranian online environment is limited by cultural and political restraints and so while we know the sample is unusual we have no way of knowing how closely it captures the range of views in any segment of Iranian society.

It is also worth noting that the responses were anonymous. Some research suggests that anonymous forms of online communication are more comfortable for and encourage participation by women (Koch et al. 2005; Selfe&Meyer 1991) but it is possible that anonymity or the prospect of identifiability affected the results.

However, as the online interviews in this study was conducted by a female researcher interviewing female activists they may have been confident in expressing unpopular views. It is also possible that the participants responded to me differently than they would have to male researcher.

This study is limited by the lack of a comparison group, which would be comprised of women who are not actively involved in discussions of women's issues. We cannot conclude that all women who use the internet have the same understanding of online violence against women.

Significantly, there is an absence of current research on the community responds to women who experience online aggression, and more generally a lack of information relating to the prevalence and impact of online harassment within Iranian and Western societies. While this article has begun a comparison of Iranian women's experiences of online harassment to Western countries, there is clear scope for further research that: documents the community attitudes to victims; investigates what difference is between Islamic and liberal countries in this phenomenon, considers in what ways women can resist online aggression.

6. Conclusion

Online aggression against women is a global issue but much of the focus has been in Western countries. Studying the matter in a country such as Iran presents enormous methodological challenges. Despite the cultural and political differences in relation to the position and rights of women in Iran and western societies, it is striking that the interpretations of online aggression by a sample of Iranian women who are active on women's issues are very similar to those adopted in Western feminist analyses. They experience online aggression that is similar to that experienced in western countries with some important differences in the experiences. In particular I found differences in the pattern of regulation of Iranian women in public spaces and the regulation of context in terms of feminist norms.

Moreover, the ten women interviewed have made important contributions to a deeper understanding of the nature of online violence. The interviews suggested thatmale perpetrators' unawareness, patriarchal society, and lack of opportunities made online aggression against women more prevalent.

The results also showed evidence of increased tendencies to aggress when sense of anonymity is retained and perpetrators use it for abusing women through humiliation and threats. Finally, anonymity was also believed to reinforce power equality between men and women, perpetrators use it for keeping their status in society in highest level possible by political disruption.

The interviews also do point to a form of online aggression against women that is motivated by a need for sexual gratification rather than domination and control. It is of course entirely possible that this reflects a failure on the part of these women to correctly detect the motives of male aggressors (perhaps through the operation of a false consciousness) but it would be a mistake to dismiss the interpretation of these close observers out of hand, not least because aspects of the reported patterns of aggression seem to be poorly configured for maintaining domination. At the very least it suggests a need for further research on motivations in Iran and elsewhere.

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