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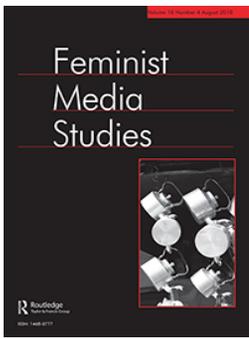
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Shameless hags and tolerance whores: feminist resistance and the affective circuits of online hate

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ABSTRACT

This article explores shamelessness as a feminist tactic of resistance to online misogyny, hate and shaming within a Nordic context. In our Swedish examples, this involves affective reclaiming of the term “hagga” (hag), which has come to embody shameless femininity and feminist solidarity, as well as the Facebook event “Skamlös utsläckning” (shameless extinction), which extends the solidarity or the hag to a collective of non-men. Our Finnish examples revolve around appropriating derisive terms used of women defending multiculturalism and countering the current rise of nationalist anti-immigration policy and activism across Web platforms, such as “kukkahattutäti” (aunt with a flower hat) and “suvakkihuora” (“overtly tolerant whore”). Drawing on Facebook posts, blogs and discussion forums, the article conceptualizes the affective dynamics and intersectional nature of online hate against women and other others. More specifically, we examine the dynamics of shaming and the possibilities of shamelessness as a feminist tactic of resistance. Since online humor often targets women, racial others and queers, the models of resistance that this article uncovers add a new stitch to its memetic logics. We propose that a networked politics of reclaiming is taking shape, one using collective imagination and wit to refuel feminist communities.

KEYWORDS

Affect; digital media; feminist resistance, reclaiming, online hate; shamelessness; shaming

This article explores shamelessness as a feminist tactic of resistance to online misogyny, hate and shaming within a Nordic context during, but also preceding the European migrant crisis since 2015. In our Swedish examples, this involves affective reclaiming of the term “hagga” (hag), which has come to embody shameless femininity and feminist solidarity, as well as the Facebook event “Skamlös utsläckning” (shameless extinction), which uses the hag as a source of collective imagination and humorous inspiration for a feminist social media movement of non-men. Our Finnish examples revolve around the appropriation of derisive terms used of women defending multiculturalism and countering the rise of nationalist anti-immigration activism across Web platforms.

In what follows, we examine the affective dynamics of shaming and shamelessness connected to linguistic appropriation and its possible uses in feminist acts of resistance. We ask

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how verbal denominators contribute to affective intensities on online platforms, how they stick and fail to stick onto bodies, and what spaces of critical intervention they may allow (cf. Sara Ahmed 2004). Our point of departure is that online misogyny is both steeped in, and intensely entangled with racism, homophobia and transphobia in ways that require intersectional feminist analyses zooming in on the interaction and interconnectedness between power hierarchies (Patricia Hill Collins 1990; Kimberle Crenshaw 1991; Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge 2016). Drawing on Facebook posts, blogs and online discussion forums, we then explore how shamelessness, as a tactic of resistance, operates by cutting short the affective dynamics of online hate targeted against women and other others.

Despite the current visibility of national populist politics, Islamophobic discourses, and the collaboration of anti-immigration and white supremacist activists across the Nordic countries, Swedish and Finnish contexts also come with notable differences: contra to Sweden's more lenient immigration policy (even if it has become less so during the past couple of years), Finland follows the principles of "Fortress Europe" in its strict patrolling of borders. Furthermore, while both countries have long track records in gender equality, Swedish public discourse involves much broader positive identifications with feminism than Finnish ones. While our Finnish examples of shaming and resistance focus on anti-immigration and multiculturalism, our Swedish ones are more concerned with expanding the unruly agency of those deviating from white, straight, cis-male norms. In doing so, we argue that the interlaced dynamics of gender and whiteness remain key to understanding the forms that these instances of online hate, shaming, and the resistant tactic of shamelessness may take.

Naïve and risky tolerance

The gendered category of "kukkahattutäti"—literally, aunt with a flower hat, also translated as "lady in a flower/flowery hat" (Suvi Keskinen 2013; Katarina Petterson 2017) and "flowerhat-auntie" (Kaarina Nikunen 2015)—emerged on Finnish-language anti-immigration discussion forums in the 2000s as a figure of simultaneous naivety and moralistic disapproval. Flowerhat-aunties can be engaged in battle against violent media entertainment or asking for tighter safety regulations, yet they are predominantly associated with supporting cultural diversity, gender equality, and social justice. Like the more gender-neutral "social justice warrior" (SJW) used on English-speaking platforms, the flowerhat-auntie stands in opposition to the rise of populist nationalist anti-immigration policies, wants to protect the cultural and educational sectors from governmental budget cuts, welcomes refugees, and waves the rainbow flag during Pride week (see Nikunen 2015). As such, aunties belong to a long transnational lineage of figures such as "antiracist busybodies" and "loony leftists" seen as eroding the cohesive, standard fabrics of a given society (Teun A. van Dijk 1993, 1, 262).

Flowerhat-auntie connotes well-educated, liberal, middle-aged women engaged in humanitarian efforts who are no longer quite so young or conventionally sexy. At the same time, the term has been appropriated and embraced by people of diverse ages and genders as a flexible, resistant, and positive point of self-identification. Flowerhat-auntie is very close kin to "suvakki," a derogatory term combining tolerant ("suvaitsevainen") with the schoolyard variation ("vajakki") of the retrograde term for the mentally impaired ("vajaamielinen"). The term was first introduced in 2012 in an anti-immigration blog detailing sexual crimes committed by foreign men and the ways in which "pathologically tolerant" women actively censor news of such incidents and accuse those who do circulate them of racism (Xeima 2012).

These women are, in other words, seen to shame and silence people disagreeing with their own liberal stances. Anti-immigration politician James Hirvisaari, one-term member of the Finnish Parliament fined for hate speech and expelled from the populist Finns Party after hosting a guest doing Nazi salutes in the house of parliament, coined the term “suvakkihuora” combining suvakki (pathologically tolerant) with “huora” (whore) in his widely read blog. According to Hirvisaari’s own clarification, the term is not gender-specific but refers to “infidelity towards one’s own people” and is to be applied to people labelling anti-immigration activists as racists.

“Tolerance whore” nevertheless comes with aggressively gendered overtones differing from those of the de-sexualized flowerhat-auntie. The slur builds on perennial anti-immigration fantasies of foreign men “taking our women” but also, in convoluted ways, on a figure of the Muslim rapist that has resurfaced with gusto during the refugee crisis (Karina Horsti 2017). Tolerance whores fail to understand the aggressive misogynistic edge of foreign men for, like flowerhat-aunties, they are too naïve to accept the activities of those protecting them, such as the vigilante group “Soldiers of Odin” patrolling city streets in order to keep them safe for women. “Infidel” to their own people, tolerance whores and flowerhat-aunties fail to see white Finnish men as their true allies and protectors but rather accuse them of racism. Writing of the Swedish context, Karina Horsti (2017, 1440–41) argues that anti-Islamic bloggers operate with, and create an imaginary, unified trans-national whiteness that is seen as threatened both by liberal feminism and Islam. While the Nordic woman remains an object to be protected, her independent tendencies are also seen as a risk to white masculinity. It then follows that hate speech targeted against women “polluted by multiculturalism” regularly takes the shape of rape fantasies: since these women fail to understand the risks involved and to protect innocent others, it would only serve them right to be raped by immigrants (Horsti 2017, 1451).

Flowerhat-aunties and tolerance whores are explicitly gendered figures implying liberal association that may bleed into one another but that also come with different connotations. Flowerhat-aunties are middle-aged, middle-classed, and well educated whereas tolerance whores can be younger or older, and need not occupy any specific position within the social strata. Given their positioning as “race traitors” infidel to their own people, both categories are nevertheless seen as white by default, despite the diversity among people resistant to anti-immigration activism. In these figures, misogynistic notions of female naïvety and simple-mindedness grow a dangerous edge in their desire to open up national borders. “Tyrannical,” “pathologically tolerant” women driven by “narcissistic desire” for improving the world are also dangerous in censoring open debate and, ultimately, set out to oppress the majority of population: consequently, the term “suvakki” has been, ever since its first introductions, associated with a disease that spreads through liberal media outlets and threatens the well-being of the nation (Xeima 2012).

These examples speak of how racist online hate encompasses and sticks to both bodies marked as “non-us” and the bodies of white anti-racist women guilty of letting their own kind down. Online hate sticks to bodies marked as others circulates and becomes amplified through them in ways that both efface and highlight their mutual differences (Sara Ahmed 2001; Imogen Tyler 2006). While the specific targets of online “webs of hate” (Adi Kuntsman 2010) vary from women to refugees, members of sexual minorities, people of non-binary gender identifications, and beyond, they are also deeply entwined with a widespread cultural contempt for feminine and racialized bodies. These webs assemble individuals and groups

in temporary and more lingering alliances, distinctions, and conflicts where the intersecting categories of bodily difference and differentiation meet political stances and activist agendas. They are thread together and driven by affective intensities and investments, the articulations of which stick to bodies representative of both “us” and “them,” as well as fuel occasionally ambivalent movement between the seemingly opposed identity positions. As Adrienne Shaw (2014, 273) points out, violent sexism and misogyny online are “compounded with racism, homophobia, ableism, and all other forms of hate.” This also means that intersectional forms of hate feed on, and amplify, one another (see Tuuli Lähdesmäki and Tuija Saresma 2014).

Like the gentler notion of the flowerhat-auntie, tolerance whore has become appropriated as a point of self-identification from a feminist newspaper columnist (Eveliina Talvitie 2016) to the female artist duo, Tärhtäneet ämmät / Nutty Tarts designing tolerance whore t-shirts for Amnesty Finland. Nutty Tarts have contextualized the design process by explaining that “Hate speech has increased in different media. We have also been called tolerance whores. There are many ways to approach hate speech – ours has been to bravely take into our own use the labels of both tarts and whores” (Amnesty Finland n.d.). For their part, Soldiers of Odin has been linguistically and symbolically appropriated by the “Loldiers of Odin” who, dressed in clown gear, followed the vigilantes around during their street patrols in 2015–2016 with the explicit aim to mock and ridicule. Through the display of t-shirts and in-your-face clownery, linguistic appropriation enters public space as forms of performative, embodied resistance. At the same time, the force and impact of such resistance is drastically expanded and amplified through social media coverage and circulation that allow for broad visibility well beyond any singular place or time.

Shame and shaming in hateful online encounters

The strategies and registers of online hate aim at shaming and the creation of fear. Through combinations of verbal abuse, death threats, rape threats, and body shaming, online hate is oriented toward frightening, intimidating, and silencing the other (see Jessica Megarry 2014).¹ In thinking through the affective politics of fear, Sara Ahmed (2004, 68) asks the crucial question “which bodies fear which bodies?” Fear operates in hateful encounters online in (at least) two interrelated ways: as fear of the other, and as a silencing strategy. Attempts to silence, distance, intimidate, and mark apart the other can be seen as motivated by fear that is unequally distributed due to how it intersects with violence, and the threat thereof (Ahmed 2004). The unpleasant intensities of fear connected with online hate have the power to reroute the bodies of women and other others, and to diminish their ability to act, to speak, to challenge, and to engage.

Online hate can be understood as a disruptive force aiming to modulate and control the capacities of bodies to act and move, to affect and to be affected by one another. As such, it not only affects certain representational politics but also affective registers and capacities. If power within intersectional theorizing is usually something which links and organizes identity categories, power here becomes that which moves between bodies. Power, then, comes to work relationally in a different sense, as an affective force that can be restraining, but also enabling (rather than only determining). Power—much like online hate that it intermeshes with—comes to consist of affective circuits that tie subject and objects together,

make them shift and change, possibly quite violently so. It then means that these affective circuits are core terrain of resistance and jamming.

Alongside the possibly chilling effects of fear, online hate efficiently silences and otherwise incapacitates the bodies of others through shaming. By violently threatening, exposing, and sexualizing the bodies of female, feminine, and racialized subjects—whose bodies are always already at the risk of being addressed in unwanted manners—misogynistic online hate has an intricate relation with shame. Not unlike fear, shame works on and through bodies by shaping and reshaping the social spaces in which they move. When animated by shame, bodies turn away and inward in ways that imply their shrinking of sorts, as well as the shrinking of spaces in which they move (Elspeth Probyn 2005). For Silvan Tomkins, shame operates as a circuit breaker, a disruption in sociality. Animated by a sense of inferiority and failure, shame emerges when one has desired to be recognized and approved by others yet fails to be: as such, shame requires interest or desire that becomes deferred or blocked. Understood in this vein, shame does not result from repression or internalization of “bad” behaviour, but rather from a fundamental interruption in relational identity (Ahmed 2004, 103–05; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003, 37; Silvan Tomkins 1995, 399–400). Shame makes identity by orienting and re-routing relational strategies toward oneself and others in ways that connect affect with cultural politics.

There are those, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003, 63) notes, “whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most durably to the note of shame.” To Sedgwick, the question of shame-prone identities is intimately (although not exclusively) linked to queer shame, whereas others have emphasized intersections of women and queers (Sally R. Munt 2007; Probyn 2005), and of “black” and “queer” (Kathryn Bond Stockton 2006) in the circuits of shame. Such groups and their overlaps crystallize through experiences of being cast as social inferiors and misfits, for having been publicly marked as failed and degraded. Conceptualized in this vein, shame-prone identities take shape unevenly due to their proximity to and failure to embody white, straight, male norms and to be recognized and valued in relation to them.

The resistance to, and the reworking of shame makes evident that the affective currents of fear and shame ripple, stick, and slide differently in relation to different bodies: there is no one singular affective dynamic that would operate to uniform effect. Rather, fear, shame, and shamelessness are part of a mutable field of forces that impacts bodies and moves them differently from one state to another. These directions may be surprising: the recipient of hate speech may burst out in laughter over its absurdity, failing to register any of the intended fear, anxiety, or insecurity (see Katariina Mäkinen 2016). Online hate then efficiently truncates the spaces of agency but they equally mobilize bodies into action. Feelings of shame and victimization can turn the shamed into the shamer, who quickly overturns the burning sensation of shame by searching for someone else to shame: in such instances, shame shifts and moves toward other bodies (Arlene Stein 2006).

One key feminist counter-tactic is to turn shame on its head, and to use “shamelessness” as a tactic of resistance. Queer and feminist voices on shame often have in common an interest in political tactics to brave or overcome shame (e.g., J. Brooks Bouson 2009; Virginia Burrus 2008; Munt 2007; Stockton 2006). Emphasizing anger as a way out of shame and fear was an early feminist tactic, and the move through shame into pride was in line with the tactics of the gay pride and the black power movements. This has long involved the appropriation of hateful terminology, from cultural feminists reclaiming hags and crones for gynocentric purposes (e.g., Mary Daly 1978), to the repurposing of terms such as “queer” or “dyke”

as sources of pride (see Claudia Bianchi 2014; Robin Brontsema 2004), and the more recent Slut Walks opposing slut-shaming and gendered victim-blaming in incidents of sexual crime (Jessica Ringrose and Emma Renold 2012). Appropriation has been broadly recognized as a tactic of the subaltern to turn the strategies of shaming and ridicule into potential sources of empowerment. As Jo Reger (2015) notes on Slut Walks in the United States, such points of identification are nevertheless not similarly accessible to all. Here, as in so many other contexts, derogatory labels intended to shame stick less firmly to bodies marked as white.

The labels of naïve flowerhat aunties and out-of-control tolerance whores coined by Finnish anti-immigration activists seem to emerge from such sense of hurt and shame caused by accusations of racism, as well as from being overlooked and resented by members of a higher socioeconomic group (Mäkinen 2016, 552). Flowerhat aunties and tolerance whores earn their titles by accusing anti-immigration activists of racism, redneckish ignorance, and prejudice. In this dynamic, a perceived sense of being shamed triggers the necessity to shame others in return. As offbeat as it may be, the affective reverb continues as these others embrace the labels intended to shame, not through the tactic of shamelessness inasmuch as acceptance of sorts to be thus singled out. If the shamed desires no recognition or acceptance from the party doing the shaming, the affective circuits of shame, inferiority, and failure fail to be animated: the interpellation to shame falls short.

Feminist politics of shamelessness

We have thus far mainly focused on linguistic appropriation as a way to fight back online hate and shaming by reinterpreting the pejorative as positive, or at least as potentially productive. In what follows, we zoom in more closely on the forms and functions of shamelessness as a feminist counter-tactic, through Swedish case studies involving a more particular affective retuning connected to non-male agency.

During a couple of months in late Spring 2016, a type of feminist guerrilla movement was formed through the Facebook event “Skamlös utsläckning” (shameless extinction).² The initiative came from Alice Kassius Eggers, a Swedish author, journalist, and literary critic, and her colleague Elliot Lundegård. Attendance was cautious at first, but over the course of just a few days the event attracted more than 6000 attendants, out of which many were renowned public figures. The invitation included a call for “a wave of half-assed but genius artistic expressions on the internet and irl, in the city and on the countryside, outside of theatres and in stairwells,” an appeal with the intent to redirect and redistribute the unequal circulation of shame.³

Their idea was as simple as it was seductive. Based on a deep frustration with how white cis-men tend to endlessly support and promote other white cis-men (even where charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent are missing), while at the same time shaming women, they wanted to provide a space of “shamelessness” for non-men where this dynamic could be turned on its head. The term “non-men” would be something of a battleground within feminist practice as a label built on negation that renders explicit the painful friction between woman-centered feminism and trans-inclusive feminism, in relation to which binary gender has never made sense. As a point of departure for a political movement, the category aims to include not only cis-women, but also trans- and non-binary bodies positioned as other in relation to white, straight, male norms.

The recent appropriation of the Swedish term “hagga” (hag, often relating to problematic indulgence in relation to food, sex, and alcohol, as in “wine hag”) on social media platforms and elsewhere also resonates with the political tactics of moving through and reworking shame. In an article that has been shared over 6400 times on Facebook, the Swedish author Elin Grelsson Almestad (2016) traces what she—not entirely correctly—regards as a new feminist tendency driven by a desire to embrace shamelessness. She refers to an excerpt of Aase Berg’s forthcoming novel *Kvinnofällan* (*The Trap for Women*): “I’m in the trap for women. Hell now I’m getting out. I bring hag as my weapon. I now become a hag. And hag is also a verb. To hag. It is an action. A fucking active action.”⁴ Based on a long line of excessive hags in literature and popular culture that connect Chris Krause’s novel *I Love Dick* (in which the “I” describes herself as a money-swindling hag) with the “arch hags” Patsy and Edina of the TV-series *Absolutely Fabulous*, Almestad visualizes a feminist movement that takes inspiration from women deemed “too old” to be rebellious, and certainly too tired to please (straight men).

Aase Berg’s (2015) poetry collection *Hackers*, which has spurred a fair amount of celebratory feminist media commentary, is another key reference in recent Swedish feminist hagg-ing. “This is a threat,” *Hackers* begins, and continues with a furious form of feminist hacking, a poetic reprogramming of heteropatriarchy from within.⁵ In response to male violence, Berg offers angry, raging resistance:

She hits back:
piercing fatso,
grog hag,
self-harm slur.

The well behaved woman
never raises
a hand.⁶

In contrast to well-educated, self-composed, middle-class women, Berg delineates someone much more fleshy, damaged, violent, and considerably white trash. She makes the case that the hag is a much better feminist companion than the harmless “kulturtanten” (culture auntie), obvious liberal kin with the flowerhat aunties of the neighbouring country. Hags in these depictions are aging, boozy, and less than considerate, at least when it comes to men. In a podcast partly dedicated to the hag, the journalists Kristin Nord and Maria G. Francke (2016) point at the importance of alcohol for the hag (obvious in compounds like wine hag and grog hag), as something that lubricates her shamelessness, and urge their listener to engage in hagg-ing also during sober office hours.

To use the hag as an oppositional feminist figure is of course not entirely new. Writing on solidarity between women, hags, and other inappropriate female subjects in the spirit of 1970s cultural feminism, Mary Daly notes that this involves no invitation to men and is “in no way contingent upon male approval. Nor is it stopped by (realistic) fear of brutal acts of male revenge” (Daly 1990, xlvi). This gynocentric project clearly reverberates in the current Swedish rediscovery of the hag and her potential feminist shamelessness.

The Facebook event “Shameless Extinction” involved taking up space in new ways, playing with norms and expectations, dreaming and fantasizing collectively and shamelessly, with the purpose of making room for more and other bodies and voices. The emphasis was primarily on thought experiments rather than direct action. At the same time, such collective thinking, playing, joking, and fantasizing may well be elementary in the affective intensities

it generates that set bodies in motion and reorient them.⁷ During the event, people wrote about grandiose projects, some of them factual and some not. Many spoke about their experiences as non-men, but from a reverse perspective, by casting themselves in the role of the shameless oppressor. In part due to the specificity of the semi-closed world facilitated by the Facebook event function, a safe space and a sense of belonging to a secret society was created. Through the logics of a carnivalesque, transgressive, upside-down-world (cf. Michail Bakhtin 1968), they created a feminist comedic universe densely populated by woman-splainers, woman-spreaders, cuntblockers, absent mothers, female stalkers, middle-aged women with a taste for fresh meat, lesbophobia, old-girls-networks, and the occasional “good” meninist girl. These are no feminist killjoys. This is feminist comedy:

It's so boring that you can't have an intellectual conversation anymore without being accused of “woman-splaining” or “girl-guessing” as soon as you try to inform others about something and happen to be a woman. (35 likes)⁸

Sometimes when men speak to me I don't answer. I need to think for a good long while and sort of don't arrive at an answer. The strange thing is that it only happens with guys, never with girls. Just saw a guy at the subway who was stressed and asked his girl if she had packed their passports, and she didn't reply, just starred emptily in front of her and put in some snuff. I could totally relate! (64 likes)⁹

The day my sons bring home girlfriends, then I'll fucking pull out the gun. No chick will ever put her filthy hands on my princes. I'm a girl myself, so I know how girls work. (253 likes)¹⁰

Sometimes I get a bit offended and send pictures of my cunt. It's after all a fucking good looking cunt. (65 likes)¹¹

The affective boundaries of shamelessness

Online misogyny violently targets non-men, non-white, and non-straight subjects who make noise and embody difference on public online platforms. Public figures like politicians and journalists inhabit particularly vulnerable positions, as do authors, artists, and musicians who stand up for feminism and anti-racism. The Swedish author Maria Sveland (2013) argues that while public feminists and anti-racists are disproportionately targeted by haters, it is often enough to merely be visible and audible as women on online platforms and elsewhere (without expressing any feminist standpoints) to unleash ripples and waves of hate. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2016) in turn understands online “slut shaming” as a displacement of fear cultivated by leaky digital technologies onto the bodies of women and their alleged shameful acts. Although not dealing explicitly with online hate, the activities of “Shameless Extinction” form a foundation to resist it by providing a platform for feminist counter-imaginaries. In this respect, the event contributes toward that which Zizi Papacharissi (2015) addresses as affective publics, namely shared articulations of sentiment that bring forth a more or less temporary sense of connection and which, with a contagious kind of intensity, have potential to fuel political action:

Overwhelmed by guerilla feelings. Goodnight lovelies. Remember, bad is the new political. (93 likes)¹²

Do you understand how many we are? (118 likes)¹³

One gets completely breathless of all these thoughts and ideas, when one imagines the practice of a completely different order, a different world. (24 likes)¹⁴

Alexander Cho (2015) discusses “reverb” as a temporal metaphor for understanding force, intensity, and the flow of affect online. A reverb is something that reverberates through something else, as a re-sounding or an echo, and as such a form of vibratory repetition with a difference. The reverb of the humorous feminist upside-down world was running deep with the participants, carrying an echo in unpleasant past experiences, which resounded in comical ways through the present. While using discomfort, frustration, and anger as a point of departure, the explosive quality of the event had everything to do with a particular and powerful form of “affective resonance” and a sense of sympathetic vibration through recognition (cf. Susanna Paasonen 2011). Additionally, a feel of secrecy and belonging to a low-frequency revolution from below formed an intensely compressed sense of connectivity, reminiscent of how Jodi Dean (2010) discusses the power of networked enjoyment and infectious capture within affective circuits of drive.

As shame is something that makes identity, there is no getting rid of shame. Shamelessness thus is not the opposite of shame, or the absence of shame, but something that *plays with* shame and attempts of shaming by intervening in its affective dynamics of operation, by turning them around, by knowingly ignoring or ridiculing attempts to shame. In rewriting shame, Sally Munt (2007, 182) speaks of the subject who “has been shamed, who has turned away and been released, whose gaze is momentarily free to look around and make new, propitious connections.” “Shameless Extinction” can be seen as a space of such discharge, in which gazes are free to wander and promising novel connections can be made.

There is also a flipside to the political uses of shamelessness, for taking up space always happens at the expense of someone else. Who, then, gets to be shameless? And who may still be bound by shame? A few participants were concerned about how these bold feminist fantasies took shape at the expense of men, only to get schooled at length on the explosive political potential of parody and the rightful practice of the oppressed to kick back. By explicitly inviting “non-men,” “Shameless Extinction” gathered a diverse crowd of people—women, racial others, queers, trans-, and non-binary people—but their mutual differences were not particularly visible or operative in the performative aspects of the posts, since the event came together around a critique and mockery of a set of exclusive white, straight, male norms. Precisely by playing with and performing white straight masculinity (even through the gendered logic of a complete role-reversal), the event mostly concealed how the contributors themselves were differently positioned in relation to such norms. This concealment thus worked to hide how a politics of shamelessness is linked to both class and race privilege among non-men.

Within the gender flip that happens when white straight male norms are turned on their head and performed by female bodies in the feminist imaginary of the upside-down-world, the shameless hag takes centre stage. “She” takes the liberty of moving through the world “like a man,” serving defiance of shame tied to those norms that guard respectable white bourgeois femininity. Whiteness is thus not only assumed as part of the masculine privilege put into play in the event. It simultaneously figures as part of those norms that guarantee respectable femininity, to which the shameless hag is a threat. But to be able to resist or play with the norms of respectable femininity, one needs access to respectability in the first place (cf. Beverley Skeggs 1997).¹⁵ The shameless hag and her white working-class trashiness may seem liberating from the vantage point of middle-class sensibilities, just as “tolerance whore” t-shirts may more snugly adorn middle-class bodies than those diversely marginalized in terms of education and income. The play with shame and respectability is equally

inaccessible to non-white women and other racially marked subjects already cast as shameful, or sexually deviant (Leah Perry 2015). While resisting or working through the gendered politics of shame, the turn to shamelessness in “Shameless Extinction” was, in sum, underpinned by both middle-class privilege and white privilege similar to that identified in slut walk protests.

Reanimating hags and whores

The feminist forms of resistance to online silencing and hate discussed in this article work in a somewhat fantastic political register of appropriation, imagination, and affective re-tunement through shamelessness. Rather than merely being reactive in the face of online misogyny, they are productive in providing a space for feminist counter-imaginaries within an otherwise rather depressive Nordic political climate. As Lauren Berlant argues, “as a political tactic, shamelessness is the performative act of refusing the foreclosure on action that a shamer tries to induce” (in Sina Najafi, David Serlin, and Lauren Berlant 2008). Explicit, or “shameless” forms of shamelessness may nevertheless fold back into shame rather than rupture its affective circuits. To be out and proudly shameless may come with a wish to be shamed by daring others to do so. Berlant uses the political shamelessness of the right-wing media as an example of such hyperbolic performative spaces: “Bring shame on, they say, we’re shameless; so give us your best shot!” But as Berlant notes, performative acts of shamelessness need not be confrontational or in-your-face. They may as well involve composure or self-control in unexpected places.

Understated performances of shamelessness have the potential of undoing normative defenses in that they fail, and actually refuse to tap into the affective registers that shamers require in order to be in control of the exchange. As such, they point to the failure in the dynamic of shaming which, following Tomkins, requires desire to be accepted and recognized by the shamers. If such desire is absent, the affective circuits are cut short and no sense of failure is likely to emerge. In instances where one does not care, or need to comply with the norms according to which the labels of tolerance whores, flowerhat aunties, or shameless hags are articulated, the hurtful stickiness of derogatory labels thins away. As we have argued, such spaces of distance, disinterest, and disavowal are more easily available to those not positioned through inferiority, failure, and shame by default. Affective distance and the possibility to play with speech intended to hurt, in sum, speaks of privilege (Mäkinen 2016, 548).

A kindred way of relieving the pressure of derogatory labels is to linguistically re-appropriate or reclaim the terms used to shame or injure. In their discussion of the animacy of language, that which makes language lively and gives it affective force, Mel Y. Chen (2012) considers how linguistic insults contain hierarchies of matter in that they refer to some humans as less than human. Fueled by its capacity to enliven matter, language works in such instances (perhaps paradoxically) as de-animating and dehumanizing: “Insults, shaming language, slurs, and injurious speech can be thought of as tools of objectification, but these also, in crucial ways, paradoxically rely on animacy as they objectify, thereby providing possibilities for reanimation” (Chen 2012, 30). Due to the vibrant affectivity of language, acts of reclaiming or reanimating certain labels aim at seizing their affective power as a move toward political agency. The shameless hags and tolerance whores can be understood as such linguistic and affective turning points, as instances in which the object-making of slurs are

redirected into practices of subject-making. The hags and whores are in a sense abject subjects (or object subjects), aware of their objectification, but reworking this objectness in the direction of subjectness in ways that mix shame with pride and poise, playing at what Chen calls “the dizzying is-and-is-not politics of the reclaiming of insults” (Chen 2012, 35).

However, as acts of reanimation and reclaiming are based on the volatility of affect, their outcomes are always less than certain. The power of reclaiming lies in the affective stickiness of labels, the fact that the very force of objectification is somehow operative in the new use, if in a yet different way (“is-and-is-not”). But this also means that the boundary between reclaiming and objectifying remains unpredictable. Tolerance whore provides an explicit link between de-animation and reanimation. The work of the hag is more subtle in that her recent upsurge does not correspond to a recent rise in de-animation, but rather builds on a long history of derogatory labeling. The effects of acts of reclaiming may also be unevenly distributed, within and beyond the group that perform these acts. The affective work of labels like “hags” and “whores” in our examples has clear resonance within the group reclaiming the label. It is nevertheless much more uncertain whether this works in the sense of shifting the affective layering of the term for those who use the term to injure, or within society at large. In these acts of reclaiming shameless hags and tolerance whores, something is nevertheless put in motion and amplified through posts, likes, and shares on social media platforms. Social media has an obvious influence on linguistic reclaiming, and the viral stickiness and instant appeal of “weaponized memes” recently deployed in U.S. politics would be one of its more powerful forms. The aging aunties, hags, and whores discussed in this article populate the same social media landscape as Trump’s “nasty woman” and “bad hombres,” terms instantly picked up and reanimated by Clinton supporters and others resistant to Trump. If the culture of online humor has disproportionately targeted women, racial others, and queers (Alice Marwick 2014), these models of resistance and re-animation have added a new stitch to memetic logics. A networked politics of reclaiming is taking shape, one using collective imagination and wit to refuel feminist communities.

Notes

1. As Karen Lumsden and Heather Morgan (2017) point out, such silencing strategies are also operative in urging, for example, women to “not feed the trolls.”
2. “Extinction” refers to behavior psychology and a gradual weakening of a conditioned response, which results in the behavior decreasing or disappearing.
3. Original invitation post in “Shameless Extinction.” All translations from Swedish are ours.
4. “Jag är i kvinnofällan. Nu jävlar ska jag ut. Jag tar med mig vapnet hagga. Jag blir nu en hagga. Och hagga är även ett verb. Att hagga. Det är en handling. En jävligt aktiv handling.”
5. “Detta är ett hot” (Berg 2015, 5).
6. “Hon slår tillbaka: / piercingfetto, / grogghagga, / självskadesludder. / Den fostrade kvinnan / höjer aldrig / en hand.” (Berg 2015, 25).
7. When “Skamlös utsläckning” was dissolved, it was actually divided into two closed groups: one for shameless feminist imagination: “Skamlös utsläckning: Fantastisk fantasi” (Shameless extinction: Fantastic imagination”) which soon changed its name to “Gränslös, skamlös, hejdlös” (“Boundless, shameless, unstoppable”), and one for direct action: “Aktioner i skamlös utsläckning” (“Direct actions in shameless extinction”).
8. Post in “Shameless Extinction,” May 1 2016.
9. Post in “Shameless Extinction,” May 3 2016.
10. Post in “Shameless Extinction,” May 1 2016.
11. Post in “Shameless Extinction,” April 29 2016.

12. Post in “Shameless Extinction,” April 27 2016.
13. Post in “Shameless Extinction,” May 2 2016.
14. Post in “Shameless Extinction,” April 28 2016.
15. For a discussion of young women’s performances of a more decidedly working-class shamelessness—or “laddish femininity”—consisting of intense forms of self-display on social networking sites, see Amy Shields Dobson (2013, 2014).

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