

# Remixing Misandry, Manspreading, and Dick Pics: Networked Feminist Humour on Tumblr

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## Abstract

In this paper, we explore new forms of networked feminist humour curated on Tumblr. First, we consider the Misandry Mermaid Tumblr by exploring how the site remediates antifeminist discourses of man-hating by deploying a sarcastic discourse of misandry. We argue that the site is plagued, however, by a form of gender binary antagonism. Then, we explore an anti-manspreading site, savingroomforcats, showing how the site challenges hetero-masculine spatial dominance through the humorous insertion of cats into manspreading images. We argue that these posts tend to lack an intersectional awareness of racialised masculinity. Finally, we explore the site critiquemydickpic, which subverts dominant understandings of dick pics as threatening, generating a queer politics of disrupting phallic-oriented desire.

## Introduction: networked feminist humour

Historically, just as humour has been used as a mode of activism to challenge the stereotyping of minority groups (C. E. Case and C. D. Lippard 2009), humour is a crucial way in which different styles of feminisms work to challenge misogyny and sexism. J. Gallivan (1992) suggests that feminist humour is characterised as “humour which reveals and ridicules the absurdity of gender stereotypes and ... inequalities.” Humour makes common assumptions “visible, and their stereotypical distortions laughable” (Z. M. Zimbardo 2014, 61). Feminist humour differs from the staid, outdated sexist joke that relies on tired tropes for titillation and, instead, endeavours to shed light on sexism through exposing and criticising them via satire (J. Gallivan 1992).

L. Shifman and D. Lemish (2010) conducted a content analysis of mainstream internet humour and found that most online humour was still sexist, working to reinforce and reaffirm notions of gender that are binary and hierarchically opposite. Whilst the tide may be changing somewhat, with recent research suggesting that jokes made at the expense of men are becoming more common in industrialised countries, often as part of “liberating” women groups (J. Bing 2007; H. Kotthoff 2006), the nature of these jokes and content of digital feminist humour is still under-researched. There are a few notable exceptions: Shifman and Lemish introduced the term “funnymism” (Shifman and Lemish 2010) to provide a lens through which to deconstruct the varying ways in which women challenge sexism through humour, with social media sites providing the prime platform for the production and distribution of feminist humour; C. Rentschler and S. Thrift (2015) have explored what they call networked feminist humour as a weapon of cultural critique; and E. A. Jane (2016) has developed the notion of “digilante” (digital vigilante) feminism and shown how humour has formed part of digital responses to sexism, sometimes problematically heightening antagonistic “gender war” mentalities.

With this paper, we aim to contribute to this now growing area of research on digital feminist humour. We will argue that subverting sexism via humour differs dramatically from other forms of reacting to, and exposing, sexism and sexual violence, aiming to do something *more* than document and prove victimisation, but rather *to change the meaning attributed to the reality being documented*. As Rentschler and Thrift (2015) argue in their analysis of the feminist meme event “binders full of women,” networked online culture interferes (E. Geerts and I. van der Tuin 2015) into the power and authority of “the truth” creating new ad hoc feminist publics and ways of knowing. We also, however, explore some of the limitations of this feminist humour, using an intersectional lens sensitive to race, class and context (Susana Loza 2014) to illustrate how some examples regress into antagonistic and exclusionary gender binaries (Jane 2016). Other examples suggest more radical transformations of heteropatriarchal power relations.

### Researching Tumblr feminist humour

We came to the topic of feminist social media humour whilst working together on a project entitled “Digital Feminist Responses to Rape Culture” (K. Mendes, J. Ringrose, and J. Keller, forthcoming). This research focused on mapping virtual and social media anti-rape culture activism via websites like Hollaback and Everyday Sexism, Twitter hashtags such as #BeenRaped NeverReported, and the Tumblr site Who Needs Feminism? We became increasingly interested in the ways in which humour was being cultivated by feminists in relation to critiques of normative responses to gender and sexual violence. For example, we were particularly influenced by Carrie Rentschler’s examination of the Twitter hashtag “#safetytipsforladies, which demonstrated how women subverted victim blaming rhetoric of rape prevention tactics through humorous come-backs on the hashtag. Through the literature review of our larger rape culture project, we identified several further instances where humour had been highlighted as a tool for feminist fights against antifeminism and male dominance (E. A. Jane 2017). Whilst we isolated a range of Twitter accounts and hashtags (see Emilie Lawrence and Jessica Ringrose 2018) in this paper we focus on the visual memetic expressions of feminist humour flourishing in the microblogging site of Tumblr, which are also often re-shared through more news-oriented platforms like Twitter

Tumblr is a microblogging site that both “curates” content produced by others and prioritises visual images via photo sharing. The ideas of “platform architecture” (Zizi Papacharissi 2015) and “platform vernacular” (Martin Gibbs, James Meese, Michael Arnold, Bjorn Nansen, and Marcus Carter 2015) have been used to denote the types of habits and practices that cultivate specific feelings of risk or safety on different social media networks. Twitter, for example, has been widely critiqued for its hostility, with hate speech increasingly normalised and women disproportionately targeted by trolls due to its communicative structures, which allow any public user to directly @ one another (E. A. Jane 2014, 2017; Karla Mantilla 2015; J. Megarry 2014). B. Renniger (2015) explores the ways in which the structures of Tumblr have fostered a different sensibility and counter-public given Tumblr’s flexible personal profiles, often structured around pseudonyms rather than “singular” or “real world” identities, which allows for

users to experiment with marginalised identities they may want to keep private, whilst easily connecting to like-minded folks. argues that Tumblr's design structures discourage hostility by not allowing users to directly comment on posts because the only way in which a user can add a comment is to reblog content with their own views attached. According to Tumblr founder David Karp, this feature discourages negative comments and flame wars because "if you're going to be a jerk, you're looking like a jerk in your own space" (Rob Walker 2012). Tumblr has therefore become known as a space of "safe" youth, queer, and feminist "remix culture" (Akane Kanai 2015), where content is reblogged and shared by cultivating particular vernaculars or platform-specific social norms of following and sharing that make it "friendlier" to feminism (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller, forthcoming; A. Kanai 2016), and LGBTQ+ communities (Alexander Cho 2015; K. Warfield 2016). However, as Warfield (2016) suggests within Tumblr there are dominant and non-dominant platforms, multiplicities, and a diversity of discourses.

Jane (2017, 8) argues that social media case studies are an emerging field of internet "histi-ography" that enable critical histories of the present. Our paper offers this type of history of recent present, by presenting three case studies from Tumblr, Misandry Mermaid, savingroomforcats, and critiquemydickpic. Our case studies were developed during a 12-month period, beginning in July 2015. We chose cases that demonstrate the cultivation of new feminist lexicons and forms of visual and discursive humour. To generate our cases, we used Tumblr's filtering tool to randomly select 25 posts from each site. We draw upon various data points within each given case, including images and text. Our analysis explores how the humour is discursively constituted but also pays attention to the affectivity (that is charge or pull) generated via text and images (Z. Papacharissi 2009, 2013). Importantly, we attend to how intersectional discourses of diversity of gender, race, class, and sexuality are deployed in the construction of the examples of feminist humour or not (Loza 2014).

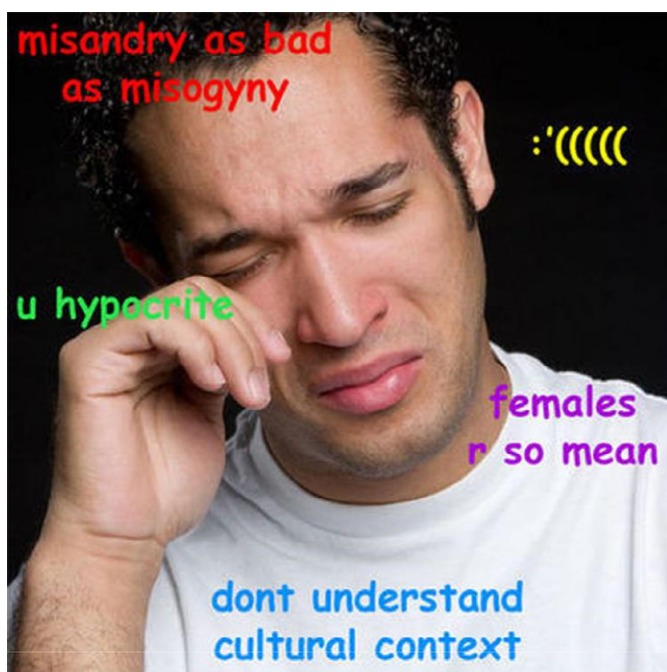
## **Mocking the MRA discourse of misandry**

Defined as the hatred of men, the term "misandry" is often utilised by Men's Rights Activists who use it to construct and position any feminist resistance as "man hating" (D. Ging 2017). Emerging from the 1970s pro-feminist male liberation groups, Men's Rights Activists now argue that because of biased law courts, positive discrimination, and equality acts, men are oppressed. R. Schmitz and E. Kazyak (2016) suggest that "the growth and dissemination of MRA ideology [are] dependent on vast social networks of men connecting with other men to garner support, air their grievances, and recruit new members." Dubbed the "manosphere" by Ging (2017), this online collection of various MRA websites and blogs consists of extreme, misogynistic viewpoints that blame women, particularly feminists, for the downfall of society. However, no longer fringe extremes, Jane (2017, 50) argues trolling behaviours and MRA discourses are now "cultural norms ... enthusiastically taken up by the mainstream internet community." The upsurge of the use of the word misandry beyond MRA communities to

demonise feminism has led to responses from digital feminists, who have ironically embraced or “reclaimed” the term instead.

Our first Tumblr case study, Misandry Mermaid, is a Tumblr page created by an anonymous curator who self-defines as “Cis, pan, female, neuro-atypical, ashkenazi Jewish, first generation immigrant, abuse survivor.”<sup>1</sup> These identifiers are important, as they position her as part of a digital community that recognises and uses these terms. She states that misandry-mermaid is “... a feminist blog that strives towards intersectionality and inclusiveness of all people who experience systemic gender oppression.” Interestingly she also states a warning to users, “Please note there is a permanent trigger warning for this entire site and anything I may link to,” to alert viewers to prepare for potentially disturbing content. The creator has an extensive FAQ session where she addresses questions such as what is misandry, which she notes is “... a defense mechanism by women who have, exclusively at the hands of men, suffered myriad forms of aggression, micro-aggression, violence, pain, violation, and dehumanization.” She also proclaims the provocative nature of the notion of misandry she is developing, noting: “It is used by women to get a rise out of men who, for so many centuries, have used sexist, anti-woman humour to reinforce women’s societal role as second class citizens. We grow up hearing men tell countless jokes about domestic violence, rape, reinforcement of gender roles, and the mocking of female bodies and body types ... For him, a joke at his expense is a rare and shocking occurrence. For women, it is a part of every-day conversation.”<sup>2</sup>

Our interest is in the meme images that are posted on the site elaborating the misandry theme. To create a sample, we viewed the archive of the site, filtered by posts that contained an image and randomly selected and analysed 25 images. Our analysis isolated three dominant themes, including, male tears, male replacement, and female superiority, as we explore through seven images below.





The male-tears-themed memes above start to outline some of the dominant discourses used to defend feminism against misandry, namely, how misandry is a myth, and its users are ignorant and unable to understand how misogyny is backed up by cultural and systemic sexism, whereas misandry has no institutional power. Male tears memes work to decentre male comfort and refute notions of women being accommodating and passive. These memes also suggest that men are upset by the rise of feminism itself and respond in angry and emotional ways that manifest in trolling or online harassment. “White male tears” has even become a misandric slogan that has spawned mugs, T-shirts, bags, and other goods, showing the commercial value of the form of feminist humour. The memes also respond to the assertion that men continually demand women devote emotional labour and time to explaining or justifying feminism whilst men gaslight or derail. Misandry memes present new ways to call out this behaviour, but can they effectively challenge it?

There is very limited academic research into the specific discourses or imagery of memetic misandry, but popular writing suggests that misandry memes are a way of “sticking a tongue out a school yard bully”<sup>3</sup> or legitimate anger at the fact that white men still hold the majority of political, social, and economic power in society. Amanda Hess suggests that “ironic misandry is more than just a sarcastic retort to the haters; it is an in-joke that like-minded feminists tell even when their critics are not looking, as a way to build solidarity within the group.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, C. Rentschler (2015) and S. Thrift (2014) both argue that the construction, use, and distribution of feminist memes depict new forms of communication, community, and conscious raising. They suggest that feminists' memes are new "weapons" of feminist cultural critique and models of political agency for doing feminism (Ibid: 3). What is critical, however, is that these move, and spread rapidly beyond the original platform as: social bonds form around memetic in-jokes, where people who get the joke come to see them-selves as part of a community (see Limor Shifman, 2014: 110; Kate M. Miltner 2014). Highly spreadable memes move from being an in-joke to becoming "a sustainable part of popular culture and [. . .] a unique online community" (Leigh, 2009: 132). (Rentschler and Thrift 2015, 343)

Kanai (2016), similarly, explores the gendered, raced, and classed nature of meme culture in constructing teen feminine subcultures, and how "shared literacies" can be developed through the digital relationships to social media artefacts. She argues that memes can be circulated and repeated, and create new forms of "spectorial girlfriendship." We think this can be extended to think about spectral feminisms, where memes can become shorthand communicative tools, as A. Hess (2014) suggests: "some sexist provocations are too tiresome to counter with a full-throated feminist argument sometimes, all you need is a GIF"<sup>5</sup> which could be the crux of misandry meme deployment; sometimes it is exhausting being a woman online, having to defend feminism and being expected, through the gendered division of labour, to perform the emotional work of educating others on what feminism is or is not. At times when self-care is important, using a meme to demonstrate frustration, feminist solidarity, and anger can still be a valid way of "doing feminism in the network" (Rentschler and Thrift 2015).





Mememes that jokingly claim that “men are temporary; cats are forever” or ones that say “I don’t care for your male opinion” work to reorient women’s dependency on men as the measure of their value and worth, and to replace men as the primary orientation of women’s regard. These mememes become the foundation for the creation of what Paparachissi (2015) calls “affective publics” and what Renniger calls “networked counter publics” via visual and textual artefacts that offer a short-hand response to anti-feminism, with powerful anti-man responses.

Where platforms like 4chan and 8chan are the breeding grounds and meeting centres for MRA groups and networks and the development of “alt-right” misogynistic humour (A. Marwick and R. Lewis 2017), Tumblr offers a space of safety to cultivate different meanings of masculinity and femininity, and responses without rebuke. For example, another dominant trope in misandry mememes is exaggerated displays of *female superiority* to draw attention to systems of inequality, to counter patriarchy with matriarchy:





The use of rapper Nicki Minaj to demonstrate patriarchy is notable in that Nicki is well noted for her sexually explicit lyrics and insistence on sexual pleasure in relationships. In addition, she has publicly discussed feminism, female power, and succeeding in male-dominated industries; all of these behaviours are at odds with notions of female passivity and acceptance of traditional gender roles. Horowitz (2013), writing about a misandry meme that says women should have eyeliner wings “so sharp they can kill a man,” argues that “all of these sites of misandry trade on the bizarre assumption that women who hate men are necessarily unfeminine; thus exaggerated cartoonish expressions of hyper-femininity are aimed at subverting feminists are ugly and masculinised discourses (see also Lawrence and Ringrose, 2018). As Hess (2014) points out, pairing misandry with the trappings of hyper-femininity helps to rewrite understandings of feminism as unattractive. Similar tactics are also used by Singaporean Instagram media influencers in Crystal C. Abidin’s (2016) research, and she uses the term “subversive frivolity” to explore the use of excessive femininity to challenge representations of male dominance on social media sites (2015). We suggest that this is a way of reclaiming femininity and positioning it as autonomous and powerful by re-signifying codes of the whimsical and frivolous such as cats, pink, sequins, sparkle, luxurious bathing, and mermaids.

Another dominant theme in misandry memes, however, is the blatant articulation of anger, frustration, and rage at sexism and discrimination through motifs of female power and superiority.



Extreme violence is foregrounded in the above cases, which toy with a white female religious icon (goddess expressing female superiority) to fight against female heterosexist rivalry over men. The meme is likely meant to shock the viewer into understanding women's potential for violence to protect their feminist beliefs. This style of meme warfare seems to respond directly to the forms of sexual violence common in MRA-type trolling, but as Jane (2017, 12) also argues, some forms of feminist internet conflict dwell in a space of inherent antagonism or gender warfare. These violent misandry memes seem intent on positioning men and women as eternal adversaries/enemies rather than sparking room for debate, critical change, and transformation. Sexual difference is re-inscribed and a male/female binary employed. We wonder about the intersectional appeal of this reversal of female against male violence. Is creating a violent white goddess for feminism funny or is an exclusionary form of "white feminism" (Loza 2014)? When negotiating with "two girls fighting over a boy" or male opinions on make-up, a misandry meme may seem an appropriate response, but how useful are they if deployed in discussions of sexual violence or domestic abuse? What of the heteronormative assumptions in many of the misandry memes, which exclude LGBTQ+ participants from fully engaging in the joke? Furthermore, who is creating the memes and what of the labour involved in this construction and dissemination? Is it recognised? Memes are rarely attributed to one person; instead they become part of a culture where they exist as tools to visually inform, and this could result in the hard work of women rendered invisible. Perhaps the success of misandry memes on Tumblr, then, is how this platform culture enables the posting and sharing without the necessity of emotional labour to defend the post on another platform whose culture would have permitted more hostile and misogynistic interactions. We continue with this line of argument in the following case study.

### **Satirising masculine domination of space**

Another form of image-based networked feminist humour is found in the phenomena of Tumblr sites to post and call out problematic male behaviour such as street harassment or "manspreading." Jane (2016) explains that "manspreading" is "a portmanteau term describing men who sit in a way which fills multiple seats on public transport." Manspreading sites enact a form of digital-documenting activism or vigilantism, which Jane calls "diligantism," by sharing images of men dominating public spaces in attempts to shame the practice. Manspreading is intrinsically linked to notions of men being allowed to be big, to take up space, and to dominate public spaces, whilst women are taught to shrink themselves into acceptable femininity (S. Bordo 1993). Women are expected to tolerate performative displays of masculinity and be inconvenienced or uncomfortable as a result. These sites provide a vehicle for protest, harnessing the virtual space of

social media, using the relative safety of the platform specificity of Tumblr to upload images (versus the potential for risk in challenging manspreading in “real time” or even on other more potentially aggressive social platforms such as Twitter).

There are several humorous manspreading Tumblr sites including: *yourballsarenotthatbig* and *savingroomforcats*. We stumbled across this second site after reading Emma Jane’s 2016 research and selected it as a case study. *savingroomforcats* was created in May 2014 and has hundreds of images uploaded to its site. The site’s tagline is: “men love to take up so much space and spread their legs while sitting down but it’s because they’re saving room for cats! Duh!” We used the filtering tool available from Tumblr to mine the archive of the site, and we filtered the images to select diverse images that captured different types of masculinity across the intersections of race and class specifically, as we explore below.



Here, there is an explicit juxtaposition between entitled men performing masculinity by displaying their groins and taking up space and fluffy cats. The large man with the small cat between his legs works to make us question the dynamics of spatial dominance and gendered use of public spaces, mocking the action and denaturalising manspreading. The ludicrous explanation that men are “leaving room for cats,” breaches the normality of manspreading, highlighting it as a bizarre antisocial form of behaviour.

Jane (2016, 7), however, argues in her discussions of manspreading that savingroomforcats is a type of site that can “drift away from feminism towards whimsy.” We suggest, on the contrary, that the insertion of the cat is a form of satire that potentially *intensifies* the affective force of the images and gets the viewer thinking spatially about the performance of masculinity through the juxtaposition of a serious issues with a “cute” signifier. The insertion of cats works at multiple levels: the pets feminise the men, given that cats are long associated with witches and subversive women (K. J. Sollee 2017), perhaps operating to shift a story of power, dominance, and threat to one of absurdity. A further metaphorical layer is of cats as symbolically the occupiers of the internet (Miltner 2014), and so this metaphor of the internet or visual space (symbolised by cats) is impressing itself into the offline, IRL space dominated by men, indeed, regarding the aesthetic and affective or visibility currency of “cuteness.”

Zuckerman claims that “the ... Internet was designed, in no small part, for the dissemination of cute pictures of cats” (2013) and his coining of “the cute cat theory of digital activism” (2008) is useful here (and was also visible in the misandry meme above). Zuckerman argues that social media platforms predominantly existed for the dissemination of the mundane and sharing of “cute cat” pictures and that this usage ensured that those who used social media sites for political activism were almost guaranteed the platform, as governments would be reluctant to remove spaces that so many people use. Using something so familiar, and easily recognisable, as cute cats draws attention to very real, political issues; the right to space, male dominance, and privilege. The images are thus remediated to diffractively graft with cat humour and the cute aesthetic (Ramon Lobato and James Meese 2014; D. E. Wittkower 2009). Wittkower’s work, *On the Origins of The Cute as a Dominant Aesthetic Category in Digital Culture*, argues “the cute is a category of expression requires only a minimal level of thoughtful engagement, and is for this reason an aesthetic having a natural fit with the speed of engagement on the part of the new media viewer” (2012). We are loath to agree that the affective pull of cute lacks thoughtfulness. Rather, we argue that there is a subversive power in harnessing cat-power to propel a political message. There is a new force of memetic contagious flow whereby feminist politics are reconfigured with additional affective jolt or pull (Ken Hillis, Susanna Paasonen, and Michael Petit 2015).

Jane (2016, 6) offers a detailed analysis of the ethical implications of “shaming and blaming” digilantism through images that identify men as well as the potential risks to “feminist activists” who post the images, which include, amongst others, “scapegoating, mistaken identities” and



disproportionate punishment. Whilst non-consensual image posting is a critical feminist concern, our interest is more in the discursive norms generated in our case study and how men are positioned and constituted differently in savingroomforcats, which requires an intersectional lens sensitive to class, race, geographical context, and more (Loza 2014). Thinking about the types of masculinity being performed in social space, the types of pose enacted, captured, and submitted are all different. The images selected are prototypical of a form of racialisation in the site where black men, for example, are shown taking up space through displays of leisured relaxation, whereas a recurring theme was of white men “businessman,” performing the need for more space through his assertions of power and control. Indeed, the submission above was accompanied by the caption “saving room for cats whilst talking loudly to the guy next to him about the stock market.”

Much has been written on the complexities of race and geography and who has the “right” to occupy space (D. Delaney 2002). K. Day, C. Stump, and D. Carreon (2003) argued that men can feel threatened and fearful when navigating social situations that require them to perform embodied masculinity in contexts such as sport and public places. And this is racialised as K. McKittrick (2011) notes as “a black sense of place, black histories, and communities are not only integral to production of space, but also that the analytical interconnectedness of race, practices of domination, and geography undoubtedly put pressure on how we presently study and assess racial violence” (and we would add practices of masculinity). The right to space for black men is a contested social issue, and an intersectional framing is important in thinking about what might happen between the various men in these examples if they were to jostle for space on the same train. We may also ponder which audience members might find which of the posts funny or be troubled or threatened by which performances of masculinity. These questions are important for qualifying different types of “funnyisms” or social media feminist humour at play and how the humour works as an affective force to move and propel critical thinking around a range of power relations or not. We return to the question of actual impact of these types of campaigns in our conclusion.

### **Deflating the sexual threat of the dick pic**

The final case study we wish to consider is the Tumblr site *critiquemydickpic*, which seeks to reverse and challenge our understandings of dick-pic images. Research on dick pics seems to be primarily a subset of a growing interdisciplinary literature on “sexting” or the gendered difference in the deployment of sexually revealing images (M. Salter 2015; L. Vitis 2016). The majority of feminist responses to dick pics have been to analyse how the power dynamics of males sending nudes is different from that of women, and how many dick pics are unsolicited, operating as forms of “digital flashing” or exposure that leave women feeling victimised (Anastasia Powell and Nicola Henry 2017; Salter 2015; Vitis 2016). Humour has become a facet of negotiating unsolicited dick pics in popular culture. For instance, Laura L. Bates’s (2016) recent “Girl Up” survival guide offers tips



for how women can respond to unsolicited dick pics with ironic messages like “that would look even better with a jaunty little hat on.” This response, while using humour, seems to rely upon individual strategies of refusal and does not disrupt dominant understandings of dick pics, which are positioned as a normative part of sexually predatory masculinity, with the binary between aggressive male sexual desire and passive feminine recipients unbroken.

Our final example <http://critiquemydickpic.tumblr.com/> seeks to reverse and challenge the relations of the dick pic at a more fundamental level. The site works as a popular pedagogical platform that attempts to transform the assumed power relations of the dick pic through humour, advice, and critique. Dick pics are submitted typically by the individual themselves but sometimes by the receiver of the image. The site author, Madeline Holden, selects submissions for posting commenting and giving the image a letter grade—A, B, C. The site is carefully curated, placing the power into the hands of a self-identified queer woman, Holden, who decides which images get showcased, which grades are allocated, and which shots she refuses to engage with. The submitters are at a disadvantage in that they do not know if their penises have even been viewed, if they have been relegated to a recycling bin or passed over in favour of a different submission.

Submissions are open to anyone with a “penis,” but this can include penis props such as dildos or strap-ons, and trans, non-binary, queer, and other non-normative bodies are invited to participate with the site, stating, “submissions from trans people, people of colour, and other groups who are underrepresented in the dick pic world are welcome and encouraged.” Having selected 25 images to explore, we analyse three submissions that demonstrate how Holden works with the submissions to destabilise associations of the penis with heteronormative sexual function and aggression. In each example, we describe, rather than represent, the image with copyright and consent clauses on this Tumblr site.

The first submission, entitled “2 of my best<sup>6</sup>” showcases only a single image of six toy soldiers arranged around a flaccid penis with their guns pointing towards it. The commentary notes

‘this is an amusing and perfectly composed dick pic, sender. I’ve spoken before about how dick pics can be a bit tiresome and sometimes operate as a lazy deflection of intimacy and vulnerability, yours however, is pretty darn funny. The composure is perfect from the positioning of your little soldiers to the lighting, framing and angle and while its not exactly erotic, its definitely the dick pic you set out to take. Well done sender.’

The commentary applauds the image as humorous, in contrast to “the lazy deflection of intimacy” of the typical dick pic. The normative (boring) conventions are defined here as undesirable, contributing to our understanding of what may need to shift to rethink the value of the dick pic. The composure of the image is noted as “perfect,” rather than making any

comment about the penis itself. As Holden notes, the image is not actually “erotic”; rather, the image incorporates the childish with the penis relegating the shot to one of playful humour and repositions the penis as not always sexual. The penis being flaccid and in a position of submission to the soldiers also subverts phallic dominance, and perhaps plays on the idea of sex as a battlefield.

The next submission we analyse, works to transform the meanings of the erect penis. Entitled, “the delicately masculine or powerfully feminine mystique<sup>7</sup>,” the image is of a torso and erect penis encased in a sheer red lacy negligée, with the comments

‘This is a novel, creative and interesting dick pic sender. You have used lighting expertly in this dick pic and the shadows and highlights are a strong feature of your picture. The pop of colour is also a plus and the gender nonconformity you’ve expressed makes your picture stand out. I always find myself harping on about this but I think your picture would be improved by featuring your hands in it; a delicate touch could really accentuate your chosen theme, overall though it’s a well-composed and creative picture.’

The title plays with the binary of masculinity and femininity, and the red lace is juxtaposed against an erect penis, which works to decentre heteronormative masculinity. The penis is literally confined through the negligee, which works in interesting ways to rethink what the erect penis should be and do. The way the commentator focuses on the lighting, and the colour works to deflect the emphasis on the penis itself. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of the site is the tips for improvement offered by Holden, who offers playful helpful hints, in this case suggesting a delicate touch of the hands (which contrasts again to sexually aggressive heteronormative masculinity), further queering the image.

The site’s curator is purposefully imposing her own authority on the image as evident again in our final example, “TGIF submission.”<sup>8</sup> This image showcases a very large flaccid penis hanging downwards, to create the I in TGIF, which has been Photoshopped onto the image. An elaborate dragonfly and diamond tattoo is scrawled on a thin ambiguously raced torso, which again subverts normative heterosexual embodiment (J. Coffey 2013). The commentary reads:

‘This is a humorous dick pic sender with room for improvement photographically, but plenty of heart. The gag here is clear: it’s the classic “thank god it’s Friday” formulation with a surprising and adult twist, and its pretty funny. It’s a non-seedy dick-pic, with little in the way of self interaction, so it comes across as relatively asexual for a dick pic and the primary focus is the joke. It serves its purpose well but its not a mind-blowing picture. Nicely done though, sender. Thank you for submitting to critique my dick pic, your dick pic gets a B.’

It is significant that Holden never comments on the size of the penis, which would affirm the normative hierarchies of penile competition (J. Lever,

D. Frederick, and L. Peplau 2006), or phallometrics as Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) calls them. The commentary artfully redirects the attention from size to artistic impact by saying the image has “plenty of heart.” The commentary also works intentionally to say the image is not sexual, despite the clear implication of having sexual fun at the weekend. This tactic is used to override (queer) laddish humour around the penis into one of aesthetical commentary. Indeed, the relative normativity of the image is what renders it “not mind-blowing” and the commentator grades the image as a B. It is this authority to reclaim and rewrite the norms of what constitutes a good dick pic that makes the site so radical and thought-provoking in our view.

Through the trope of DIY submissions as artful productions, the site’s feedback creates a whole new genre, seeking to displace common understandings of the dick pic, through a focus on humour and aesthetics. The images repeatedly work to reduce a reading of the penis as object of power, threat, danger, sexual intention, etc. to one of relative beauty, vulnerability, delicacy, and style with the penis’s sexual imperative being systematically redistributed in commentary as well as in some of the images themselves. Whilst the images obviously contain a penis, and the intention is to display it, the site chooses to consider how the image can be made more visually appealing, focusing on background detail, lighting, and space dedicated to the rest of the body, for example. The site considers how the image could be better for the audience rather than on how big, masculine, or powerful the organ is. As Holden stated in a 2014 interview, “I find the idea of a ‘perfect dick’ reductive and insidious, and I often have to underline the fact that I’m not here to critique dicks, I’m here to critique *dick pics*.” She is also keen to highlight that critiquing dick pics is a niche market, one that has not existed so publicly before. In the FAQ section of the site, Holden is asked;

it would be so cool if there was a site like this but for pussy or titties !!!!

Her response:

‘that’s the rest of the internet’

summarises how women’s bodies are so readily available for consumption, whereas the service she provides is a new way of figuring penile masculinity. Whilst the site certainly raises questions over the motivation to submit images for critique (Is it narcissism? Pride? Thrill of being nude online?) these motivations are secondary to the discursive and semiotic premise of the site to open a critical feminist space for renegotiation of the dick pic as a phenomenon. The interface of this Tumblr page is not a public forum but a moderated one with strict codes of counter-hegemonic dick-pic photography. Thus, it could be possible that the image with the soldiers was crafted as a *result* of the existence of the platform and the codes the moderator required. In this way, the platform and counter-hegemonic codes may be remediating and reshaping the actual normative visual scripts of dick picks. And it is this common modality of Tumblr—personally curated pages where images are crowd-sourced—that enables

new norms of sexual imagery and feminist humour to flourish. Because people *send in* their images for critique that become spaces for in-depth aesthetic and humorous discussion, we argue that this opens an entirely new relationship to the penis by reorienting it and leaving space for many diverse readings of the dick pic. Beyond simply rejection or parody of dick pics, by turning the penis into an object of complex humorous debate and analysis, the meaning, import, and effect of dick pics are transformed—a significant political manoeuvre made possible through feminist digital mediation.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have explored how social media is enabling new communicative communities of support and conscious raising, which have generated diverse forms of networked feminist humour. However, the digital affordances of the social media platform, are key, and we suggest that Tumblr's sense of safety and community created by sharing and reblogging digital artefacts is important (Warfield 2016). Tumblr enables many complex types of "platform vernaculars" (ibid.), and we have demonstrated the unique affordances enabling the curation of distinct forms of feminist humour in each of our case studies.

These forms of humour are subjective and open to interpretation, and we aimed to think about which voices and views were privileged, suggesting that humour is constructed through specific dynamics of insider and outsider boundaries, and cultural specificity (Shifman and Lemish 2010). We explored how attempts to speak back to the (MRA-led) critiques of women as man-haters with ironic misandry humour may be problematic, since misandry memes may fall into the category of "white feminism" (Loza 2014) by dwelling in a place of implicitly and explicitly coded "white" female rage, where the reversal of violence from women to men is singular and non-inclusive, and fails to consider adequately the question: *which* women and men? Whilst creating space for female rage is a critical component for feminism, this form of mimetic feminism seems to fall into Jane's (2016) category of antagonistic gender warfare. Mimetic pro-misandry violence may be limited for whom it can compel into political action, given it fails to address the intersectional complexities of violence amongst and *between* women enlivened through histories of colonisation, racism, classism, and more.

In considering the Tumblr "making room for cats," we noted that the inclusion of the aesthetic element of cuteness and "subversive frivolity" (Abidin 2016) was not apolitical; rather, it perhaps intensified the affective charge of the images as the cats juxtapose and displace masculine dominance. We also, however, asked what was at stake in making fun of specific aspects of male spatial entitlement, suggesting that race and class shape the masculine battle for occupying space in ways that feminists need to be sensitive to. What is clear is that manspreading social media campaigning has now pushed through from a virtual promise of change to official "anti-manspreading" policies seen in transit poster campaigns in New

York City and Toronto (Jane 2016) and most recently in Madrid, through the development of a meme-style poster, which calls on passengers to consider their spatial being and the position of others in this shared environment.<sup>9</sup>



Finally, we examined the subversive and queer possibilities of the Tumblr site, critique-my dickpic, arguing that the heteronormative sexual aggression of the conventional dick pic and normative feminist responses are reconfigured in this site. We analysed this site as potentially offering space to queer desire by opening up and prioritising the desires of the viewer of the penis images as artistic creations. We suggested this helped to deflate the heterosexual and heteronormative power of the phallus, but subsequently also opens space for a more playful relationship to dick pics as non-threatening, funny, and aesthetically complicated. This specific area of investigation into feminist humour, which goes beyond gender and sexual binaries including the desires of trans women, LGBTQ+ individuals, requires greater investigation. How can feminist humour open these boundaries around who constitutes a biological cis-gender “woman” or “man,” moving towards the more inclusive, multiple, diverse, and respectful form of agonistic dialogue encouraged by Jane (2016)?

Overall, we have used the case studies as evidence of the generative power of the digital and specifically Tumblr affordances for enabling feminist humour to emerge that call out and potentially transform masculine entitlement and dominance. We showed how different types of humour are afforded through diverse meme visual cultures. We agree with Jane (2016) that some feminist “digilantism” remains stuck in antagonistic battles between abstract “women” and “men,” and our contribution here is to argue that it reduces the inclusive scope and reach of this networked feminist humour. However, we also want to suggest that the final effects of

Tumblr remix cultures cannot be known in advance. While not all Tumblr feminist humour is explicitly intersectional, what the online platforms do is open *the potential* for connection, sharing, and dialogue, thereby enabling more diverse forms of feminist think-ing and practice. Digital feminist networks and curated depositories or archives of humour on Tumblr, therefore, enrich the possibilities of engagement, consciousness raising, and transformation both online and offline. In closing, we think what is urgently required now is further study into how diverse Tumblr “producers” (A. Bruns 2008) relate to, feel, and experience this humour as variable affective force (C. Pedwell 2017; see Warfield 2016). What we need is to gain greater understandings of the actual complex workings of networked feminist humour—its connective and collective dynamics in practice.

## Notes

1. <http://misandry-mermaid.tumblr.com/>
2. <http://misandry-mermaid.tumblr.com/post/49132216263/on-misandry-being-real-and-not-being-real>
3. <http://www.vice.com/read/the-year-in-male-tears>
4. [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2014/08/08/ironic\\_misandry\\_why\\_feminists\\_joke\\_about\\_drinking\\_male\\_tears\\_and\\_banning.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/08/08/ironic_misandry_why_feminists_joke_about_drinking_male_tears_and_banning.html)
5. GIFs are an additional affordance element here; the rise of memeing apps and gif-making apps that link directly to social media platforms is also key in the increasing visibility of visual modes of feminist satire, although we do not have time to fully explore GIFs; see Shifman 2014.
6. <http://critiquemydickpic.tumblr.com/page/12>
7. <http://critiquemydickpic.tumblr.com/post/142367122400/the-delicately-masculine-or-powerfully-feminine>
8. <http://critiquemydickpic.tumblr.com/post/146754552490/tgif-submission>
9. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/08/madrid-tackles-el-manspreading-public-transport-with-new-signs#img-2>

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