LUND UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

# Negotiating Security and Advocacy

*A Qualitative Interview Study with Women's Rights Advocates on Navigating the Silent Security Dilemma Online*

*Saga Blomgren Strinnvik*

*Supervisor: Rola El-Husseini Dean*
*Word Count: 17 309*
*Graduate School, Global Studies*
*06/2024*

A sincere thank you to all the interviewees for this project who contributed with their time, expert knowledge, and stories.

A profound thank you to my partner Erica Brodén, who has believed in me in sickness and in health.

I want to express my gratitude to Hanna Bergman for always knowing what I am trying to say before I know it myself, as well as to my family and friends for believing in me and cheering me on.

*Abstract*

Prominent female figures engaging in the societal debate, such as journalists and activists, tend to be targeted for online hate speech and threats disproportionally. At the same time, people in Sweden depend on an online presence to function as individuals. Feminist security studies have yet to incorporate the gendered online dimensions of hate speech and threats. This paper examines how the feminist security studies theory of *the silent security dilemma* shapes the experiences of Swedish women's rights advocates as they engage in activism online. It also explores how they navigate the challenges related to this. Through qualitative interviews, this paper finds that the silent security dilemma exists online. By adaptation of the silent security dilemma to account for technology-facilitated gender-based violence, this paper demonstrates how the current debate within feminist security studies needs to account for the 'new' violence that occurs online and through information and communication technology.

*Keywords:* feminist security studies, ICTs, TFGBV, activism, Sweden

# 1 Introduction

Digital activism, or activism facilitated and conducted via information and communications technologies, has helped women and girls who are engaging in women's rights questions to reach out. Despite the benefits of emerging online-based technologies, such as access to information, education, self-expression, mobilization, and participation, these technologies have also opened the path to new forms of violence and oppression (Sobieraj, 2022). Women and girls engaging in activism online are identified as a group with a heightened risk of experiencing harassment and threats based on their gender and work (Cerise et al., 2022:2).

Studies and reports that have looked at online harassment and compared the nature of threats have found that the nature of the threats highly depends on the receiver. Men are more likely to be harassed online for their political views or opinions, whilst women tend to receive harassment and threats online based on their gender and consisting of violence and sexual abuse (Henshaw, 2023; Nadim & Fladmoe, 2021; Siapera, 2019). A report by Plan International surveyed 14,071 girls and young women between ages 15-25 from 22 countries (Plan International, 2020:9). The study found that more than half of the surveyed participants had been harassed and abused online. 47% percent of affected girls had experienced threats of sexual or physical violence, and 85% of the affected participants had experienced multiple types of harassment online (Plan International, 2020:17). The difference in threats suggests that online security is a gendered issue. It is, therefore, not enough to look at online harassment at large since nuances of power structures become overlooked when not adopting a gender perspective.

One key finding relevant to this thesis is that there are broad patterns of harassment the participants have experienced. One broad group is being harassed simply for being a girl or woman online, whilst the other category is harassed for being a girl or woman online and actively engaging in debates (Sobieraj, 2022). Online violence is commonly directed toward female journalists, activists, and

members of parliament. 73% of women journalists have experienced online violence connected to their work. Furthermore, 58% of women parliamentarians in Europe state that they have experienced online violence (Cerise et al., 2022:2).

The findings presented are not unique and follow a growing body of literature (Giannoumis & Skjerve, 2021; Henshaw, 2023; Loney-Howes, 2020; ed. Lumsden & Harmer, 2019) and reports by human rights groups (Amnesty Reveals Alarming Impact of Online Abuse against Women, 2017; The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2024, 2024; Plan International, 2020; Wilk, n.d.) as well as governmental bodies (Cerise et al., 2022; Ra'ad Al Hussein, 2018) that women and girls are disproportionally affected by online harassment and abuse, especially those who engage in the debate online.

That women and girls are excluded from participating in the societal debate online is an issue both at the personal level and structural level. At the personal level, it is an issue of being hindered from networking, keeping in touch with family and friends, using basic infrastructure, and accessing information (Giannoumis & Skjerve, 2021; Trott, 2022). At a wider societal level, it is an injustice and a threat to democratic institutions and national security (Caprioli, 2005). The gendered abuse online facilitated by communications and information technology is referred to as *tech-facilitated gender-based violence* in this paper.

Although tech-facilitated gender-based violence is a prominent issue, feminist security studies have failed to incorporate it into existing theories (Downing, 2023; Henshaw, 2023; ed. Mhajne & Henshaw, 2024). This section will mention the theory of the silent security dilemma. The full breakdown of the theory will be accounted for in the theory chapter, where I also add my contributions to the theory and expand on my understanding of it. However, to understand this section, it is essential to know that the Silent Security Dilemma is a feminist security studies theory presented by Lene Hansen to capture a situation of

insecurity that arises when the insecure cannot voice and bring attention to their insecure situation.

Therefore, this paper explores how the feminist security theory *the silent security dilemma* can be brought online and contribute to understanding tech-facilitated gender-based violence.

This will be done by showing how tech-facilitated gender-based violence can be included as a type of violence in the silent security dilemma. This will contribute to the knowledge about tech-facilitated gender-based violence and how it affects activists online. Therefore, the research question for this project is:

*How does the silent security dilemma shape the experiences of Swedish activists as they engage in online activism around women's rights issues, and how do they navigate these challenges?*

## 1.1 Background

The purpose of this section on background is to make sure that readers from different fields have the same basic knowledge about the case. Since feminist security studies don't usually study social media, this section will focus on determining the foundations of how social media works. This section will also present relevant information on the case of Sweden, including some legislation and political

### *1.1.1 Gender-based violence in Sweden*

A woman is killed by a man every third week in Sweden (Mäns Våld mot Kvinnor, 2022). During the writing of this thesis, in the spring of 2024, 12 women were murdered, and in 9 of those cases, the suspect was a man in close relation to the victim (SvD, 2024). Sweden is often portrayed as a forerunner in questions of

gender equality. However, gender-based violence prevails. This gender equality paradox creates a unique context for exploring the issues women's rights activists face online.

### *1.1.2 Internet usage in Sweden*

Sweden has high internet penetration rates, with 90.44% of the population having access to the internet. Over 80% of 16–85-year-olds use the Internet multiple times daily (Share of Persons Who Have Used the Internet Several Times per Day, 2024). Sweden relies heavily on online services in everyday life. For example, the digital ID service BankID is used at banks, state agencies, and companies. BankID has 8.5 million unique users, and 99.4% of the population aged 18-67 have their own BankID (BankID, statistics, 2024). Only 1 out of 10 Swedes made their last purchase with cash. Credit card or mobile payment options are the most common ones. To use mobile options for payment, you need to have a BankID. The direct payment option Swish is the second most common form of payment. Swish is common for transferring money between individuals and paying for goods or services in person or online (Betalningsrapport 2024, n.d.:9-10).

In addition to vital infrastructure increasingly being online, social media usage is high in Sweden. 94% of Swedes have a social media account and 85% use social media on a daily basis (Sociala medier 2023, 2024). 68% of the population are active users on Facebook (Facebook, 2024). 64% of Swedes have an Instagram account, and 46% use Instagram daily (Instagram | Svenskarna Och Internet, 2024).

The option to stay offline in Sweden I declining with more and more services, both private and public, being accessible only by using online services.

### *1.1.3 Legislation in Sweden*

This paper will not focus on legislation in Sweden. However, some points of reference are important to understand the context of the study. The overarching law in Sweden is that what is criminal offline is also criminal online. There are, then, a multitude of specific laws according to different fields, such as commerce. In addition to this, the different platforms can enforce their own rules by the terms and conditions that users have to agree to when signing up (Forsén, 2020).

The European Union Digital Service Act (DSA) was enforced in February this year (The Enforcement Framework under the Digital Services Act | Shaping Europe's Digital Future, 2024). The legal framework complements the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which was launched in 2016 and fully implemented in 2018 (The History of the General Data Protection Regulation | European Data Protection Supervisor, 2018). The DSA includes various legislation, but the part relevant to this paper is that no one is longer allowed to use direct advertisements that target people under 18.

### *1.1.4 Women's shelters in Sweden*

There are 140 women's- and girl's shelters in Sweden and some of them also have the competence to support LGBTQ-people (Om Unizon Unizon är riksförbund för över 140 idéburna kvinnojourer, tjejjourer och ungdomsjourer som arbetar för ett jämställt samhälle fritt från våld. - Unizon, 2024). The shelters are non-profit organizations that work closely with governmental bodies such as social services. Many shelters have received less financial aid from the government at a time when new legislation is being enforced, forcing many to fire workers and close safehouses for women and children in need (Sundbeck & Debels, 2024). Norrbotten County has no safe houses due to the new legislation (Karlsson, 2024; Saleha, 2024), and other counties face a similar situation. The new legislation aims to increase the quality of care given at a myriad of institutions and weed out

unserious actors on the market. The new regulation, however, does not consider how the women's shelters have been built and operated.

### *1.1.5 A brief introduction to social media platforms*

To understand the analysis and discussions in this paper, it is crucial to have an overarching understanding of how social media platforms work. The definition of a *platform* follows van Djick's (2018) definition: "We defined a platform as a programmable architecture designed to organize interactions between users." Social media platforms are business models built on interactions, and the primary income sources are advertising and the selling of user data. In the early days of social media most meta-data produced by the users, such as locations and timestamps, was viewed as a byproduct. Today, user-generated data is viewed as a prime resource and a foundation of the social media business model (Van Dijck, 2018a:33). Van Dijck summarizes the platform economy as: "Datafication endows platforms with the potential to develop techniques for predictive and real-time analytics, which are vital for delivering targeted advertising and services in a wide variety of economic sectors." To generate data, platforms must ensure that users stay on their platforms and interact as much as possible. This is done through many practices, and the most relevant for this project is algorithms. Since Instagram is the platform that the interviewees primarily use, this will serve as the example for this brief introduction to the attention economy.

Instagram does not disclose exactly how their algorithms work, however, there is no need to know the precise technical mechanism of their algorithms to understand and form an opinion about them (Bucher, 2018a). Instagram does not have one algorithm, the platform is made up of a myriad of algorithms, classifiers, and processes that tailor the experience to the unique user. The in-app functions Feed, Stories, Explore, Reels, Search, and all else have their processes to sort and present content to the user. Head of Instagram, Adam Mosseri, published a post in

2023 about the functions on Instagram and how content is recommended to the user:

> "With Feed we consider recent posts shared by the people you follow, as well as posts from accounts you don't already follow that we think you might be interested in. We determine what you might be interested in based on a variety of factors, including what and whom you've followed, liked or engaged with recently. We personalize the experience for you to try to strike a balance between content from accounts you follow with content from accounts you don't follow but might be interested in.
>
> Next we take all the information we have about what was posted, the people who made those posts, and your preferences. We've also started considering other factors like format, so if we notice you prefer photos, we'll show you more photos. We call these "signals," and there are thousands of them. They include everything from when a post was shared to whether you're using a phone or the web to how often you like videos." (Mosseri, 2023)

The importance of the signals is ranked as follows: activity (the interactions a user makes), information about the post (popularity, location, interactions, etc.), information about the person who posted (their account, activity, etc.), and the user's history of interaction (interactions between accounts, relationships, close friends) (Mosseri, 2023). The important takeaway from this brief introduction to how Instagram sorts content is that interactions, or signals, in all forms, make up the platform's foundation. There is a fine line between ensuring that a foundational understanding of social media mechanisms exists without striding too far from the topic of this paper. I, therefore, recommend *Breaking the Social Media Prism* (Bail, 2022), *Introduction to Algorithms* (Cormen et al., 2022), *Artificial Intelligence Basics: A Non-Technical Introduction (Taulli, 2019),*

and *The Platform Society* (van Dijck et al., 2018) for those who want to know more.

# 2 Literature review

This paper has its primary foundation in feminist security studies. However, this literature review is based on two different fields: digital feminism and feminist security studies. Feminist security studies argue that gender-based violence is a security issue. Nevertheless, the interaction between feminist security studies and the online sphere is not well-developed, and therefore, this project draws on digital feminism to fill the gaps. Digital feminism has embraced and started tackling the challenges of emerging technology. I argue that these two fields need to intersect to understand the implications of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and the security threat it poses. This chapter starts by presenting previous research and definitions of gender-based violence and TFGBV. The chapter then continues with a section each on digital feminism and feminist security studies. The chapter concludes with the broad trends in both fields and the gap this thesis aims to fill.

## 2.1 Different Types of Violence and Their Definitions

To put the debate and research on TFGBV into context, this section will start off with a part on the broader issue of gender-based violence (GBV).

### *2.1.1 Gender-Based Violence*

The umbrella term GBV includes various issues such as intimate partner violence (IPV), female genital mutilation, forced marriage, hate crimes, and sexual exploitation (Ali & Rogers, 2023:8). The World Health Organization classifies violence against women as “a global problem of pandemic proportions” (Violence against Women, 2024). This classification speaks to the vastness of the issue. Gender-based violence has been studied in many fields outside of feminist security studies, such as social work (Brockbank & Greene, 2022), psychology (Yerke & DeFeo, 2016), public health (Melgar Alcantud et al., 2021), law (Limantė et al., 2023), criminology (Julie King et al., 2021), and gender studies

(Bourdieu, 2001; Mascha Wiechmann, 2022). To find one unanimous definition that encompasses all aspects of GBV is, therefore, difficult, but the definition this paper follows is:

> "Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately."
> (European Commission, 2024)

Gender-based violence takes different forms, and the main categories are physical, sexual, economic, and psychological. 31% of women over 15 in the EU have experienced physical violence, 5% have been survivors of rape, and 43% have experienced psychological violence by a partner (European Commission, 2024). This paper adapts the term gender-based violence because it acknowledges that the violence is based on gender, gender norms, and unequal power relations. Gender-based violence compasses all violence made towards a group based on their gender but does not include all violence the person has ever experienced (Russo & Pirlott, 2006:181). This paper has its primary focus on gender-based violence against women. However, I don't want to exclude vulnerable groups by using the binary term *women*. Some of the interviewees for this project also work with supporting non-binary people and trans men who face unique challenges under the patriarchal system. The term violence against women is, therefore, too narrow.

### *2.1.2 Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence*

TFGBV is a part of GBV, and they are not two separate entities. Different kinds of GVB may be facilitated via information-communications technologies (ICTs)[1] and is, thus, TFGBV. For example, gender-based economic harm can be done through online banking as well as through physical means (Nyman et al., 2023).

[1] ICT includes computer hardware and software and network hardware and software.

Psychological violence can be facilitated by social media as well as occurring offline (Mendes et al., 2019). Online violence does not exclude offline violence, and vice versa. The two are often connected, which is why this chapter started by defining GBV.

TFGBV may be known under different names, such as *online harassment* (Cuenca-Piqueras et al., 2020; Nadim & Fladmoe, 2021), *cyber violence against women and girls* (Lomba et al., 2021), *online gender-based violence* (Hicks, 2021), and *digital violence against women* (Çaliş Duman, 2023). All these terms try to capture the same phenomenon, which is violence occurring online or facilitated by information and communications technology (ICT) by one or more people based on gender. A research paper published by UN Women in cooperation with WHO defines *tech-facilitated violence against women* as:

> "Technology facilitated violence against women is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of ICTs or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms." (UN Women, 2023:3).

Although the quoted text says women, this thesis will use *gender*. As with GBV, the term *women* is too narrow for this project. Also, as with GBV, the focus on gender provides a lens that focuses on gender-based violence instead of all violence. Therefore, this paper will use the definition presented by UN Women and WHO but adapt it to read *tech-facilitated gender-based violence*.

TFGBV is part of GBV, but studying it separately is necessary as TFGBV presents new challenges. This thesis will primarily look at tech-facilitated gender-based violence on social media. However, there is a broader point to be made by including the new term *tech-facilitated gender-based violence*, instead of *online harassment* or the like. TFGBV captures different phenomena facilitated by

information and communication technology (ICT) but are not necessarily limited to social media platforms. Phenomena such as doxxing, the public release of an individual's personal information or documents on the Internet, may have offline consequences but is primarily an online phenomenon (Calabro, 2018). Another phenomenon is swatting, which consists of using public information, or information from doxxing, to call in tips to the local police force about an ongoing hostile incident at the victim's house. There is no ongoing hostile incident, but the police don't know that and send a full swat team to the victim's home address (Calabro, 2018:56). These are just two examples of the intersection of online and offline violence and the usage of ICTs.

One study based on interviews in Sweden highlights how the progression toward digital financial services opens new types of gender-based economic abuse in intimate partner relationships (Nyman et al., 2023). The authors of the article note, just as I do, that Sweden makes for an interesting case since the reliance on ICTs in everyday life is high. Nyman et al. (2023:369) suggests that research on tech-facilitated intimate partner violence (TFIPV) and research on economic abuse need to converge to understand the implications of the issue. Another example where different forms of TFGBV converge is from 2017, when a woman in Sweden reported that her ex was harassing her via the payment platform Swish. She had blocked her ex on all social media and taken every measure imaginable to prevent the ex from contacting her using ICTs. The ex then repeatedly transferred small amounts of money via Swish (Sveriges Radio, 2017). Swish lets you include a short message with every transfer, and he used the function to continue to harass her. Nowadays, you can block people on Swish, but it remains an illustrating example of what TFGBV violence can look like outside of social media in Sweden.

In addition to specialized strategies such as the one used by the ex-boyfriend on Swish, there are endless other tech-facilitated ways for perpetrators to get to their victim outside of social media. Apart from calling, texting, or sending e-mails,

there is also hacking of smart-home functions, installing hidden tracking apps in a partner's phone, and using known tracking tools embedded in the phone against the owner's will. So, although this study focuses on social media, parts of the analysis will include a wider definition of technology since ICT and social media can't be separated.

## 2.2 Digital Feminism

Digital feminism has looked at intersecting issues of gender, technology, and society for a long time. A foundational work is Donna Haraway's essay *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1990), which focuses on understanding and questioning the boundaries of humanity, machines, and nature. Haraway argues, "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs." (Haraway, 1990:7). Haraway's view in *A Cyborg Manifesto* is positive towards the cyborg as it can lead the way to a more equal society beyond traditional binaries. To her, it is a liberating force. The tech optimism found in Haraway's essay is typical of the early years of digital feminism, where the internet was predominately seen as a positive force (Kelly, 2023:830). Haraway laid the foundation for digital feminism to evolve. The general view on the cyborg experience from a digital feminist research perspective has since changed. Today, the dominant research from a digital feminist perspective focuses on how technology further deepens societal inequality and enhances biases towards women, specifically women of minorities (Amrute, 2020; Bucher, 2018a; Noble, 2018) or specific groups, such as women engaging in activistic work (Ra'ad Al Hussein, 2018; Siapera, 2019).

There is an extensive literature within Digital Feminism that I have chosen to not focus on, and it is that of INCELS, the manosphere and other issues that include how misogynistic movements mobilize online. Although these groups are highly relevant to (in)security online, they lie outside the scope of this paper. Other areas of study that I will not cover are specific forms of abuse, such as non-consensual image sharing, grooming, online violence towards children, trafficking, sugar

dating, hacking, and the dark net. All these issues are relevant, but they cannot fit into the scope of this paper.

Digital feminism has addressed issues such as gendered virtual reality (Schulenberg et al., 2023), the digital gender gap (Amaral et al., 2022), and the effects of increased online presence due to the COVID-19 pandemic (The Ripple Effect: COVID-19 and the Epidemic of Online Abuse, 2020). However, one of the major areas of research is hate speech online. This might be because it has been a prevalent issue in the wider societal debate and also because of the ease of accessing large amounts of data online through chat forums, social media platforms, and the like. This research area is still new and started gaining traction around five years ago. There have been studies that look at the intersection between gendered hate speech and race (Francisco & Felmlee, 2022), justice in cases of online harassment (Im et al., 2022), and the production of misogynic online speech (Jones et al., 2020). Some conclusions from the research on gendered hate speech online are that women receive hate and threats primarily based on their gender and not their opinions (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2021).

One major area of study is the links between gendered hate speech online and the challenges it poses to democracy. In *Credible Threat,* Sobieraj (2020) argues that online threats to women undermine their contributions to public discourse, often at great personal cost. The issue is that "the abuse targets their identities, pummeling them with rape threats, attacks on their appearance and presumed sexual behavior, and a cacophony of misogynistic, racist, xenophobic, and homophobic stereotypes and epithets" (Sobieraj, 2020:4). Different from a political debate, these attacks are hate crimes and worse.

Connected to issues of democracy are also a substantial number of studies that have looked at the gendered hate and threats that women politicians, journalists, and activists face in their work. In other words, women who have a prominent place in the societal debate. Threats and online harassment toward female

politicians can be directly linked to threatening democracy and undermining institutions (Stabile et al., 2019).

Women's rights movements such as #MeToo exemplify social media's great mobilizing power. Digital feminism has also shown the resistance to these movements and how that resistance is facilitated by the same technologies that enable the movement (Rennie, 2023; Thornborrow & Chartier, 2023).

The other part of digital feminist literature has focused on structural violence. One paper published in 2021 and co-authored by six scholars called for critiquing algorithmic violence (Bellanova et al., 2021). This paper displayed that algorithmic violence cannot be approached from one perspective but is as diverse as gender-based violence. The overall argument of the article is "that it is important to examine how algorithmic systems feed (into) specific forms of violence, and how they justify violent actions or redefine what forms of violence are deemed legitimate" (Bellanova et al., 2021:121). Algorithmic violence is part of TFGBV and will be discussed as a structural issue in this paper.

Connected to the issue of algorithmic systems, there is a wider debate about how tech giants, such as META, are winning in keeping the algorithms as mystical, non-human entities. Bucher (2018:42) argues that the image of algorithms as a mystical black box shuts most people out from contributing to the debate about using AI and algorithms in society. The black box, or algorithms, becomes an ungoverned force that is impossible to hold accountable. Where humans made the decisions before, in banks, the police, and the military, there is now a seemingly impartial judge in the form of an algorithm instead (Bucher, 2018:42-43). The only ones that 'can' critique the algorithms are the techs that developed them. This is problematic, as Amrute (2020) shows in *Bored Techies Being Casually. Racists: Race as Algorithm* show. Amrute (2020) adds to the growing number of studies that show how algorithms are not neutral, not all-knowing (Ciston, 2019), and do not have simple solutions.

Another example of algorithmic violence is by Couldry and Mejias (2019), who introduced the idea of data colonialism. They argue that the extractive practices of global data mining, combined with the "abstract quantification methods of computing" (Couldry and Mejias, 2019:1) result in a new form of data colonialism. They frame the issue as the need to stay connected becoming less and less voluntary whilst the available infrastructure online builds on capitalist mega companies. The meta-theory of data colonialism is an illustrative example of tech-facilitated structural violence. It is not the result of one process but of many, coming together and creating or amplifying existing structures with new technology.

Most studies have used quantitative or mixed methods, such as digital ethnography and surveys. This has been needed to prove the prevalence of TFGBV over large populations. However, the lived experiences of women and minority groups are needed to complement more abstract data. This paper will complement the existing studies as it uses qualitative interviews. The research done on tech-facilitated gender-based violence is extensive and does not leave room for questioning if online harassment is an issue. Although the percentages of women and girls affected vary from study to study the main conclusion of the extensive research done is that online harassment is a real and persistent security threat. Percentages of how many women and girls are affected, and to what extent, vary with factors such as age, social network, sexuality, and others. However, the percentages of affected women and girls are consistently high. Although the dominant view from the digital feminist perspective is that TFGBV is a structural issue and poses a real threat to women, digital feminism has failed to frame TFGBV as a security threat but has succeeded in proving its devastating effects.

## 2.3 Feminist Security Studies

Feminist security studies have focused on shifting the definition of security from a narrow, state-based definition to a broader definition that looks beyond the state (Buzan & Hansen, 2009:187). In doing so, other subjects than the state can be included in the analysis. This shift will be further explained in the theory section. For now, the critical point is that feminist security studies look beyond traditional security threats, such as the state and military, and include women's everyday insecurity. Feminist security studies have shown that women's rights issues are security issues. This has been done through several means and in different research areas. Carol Cohn is a pioneer within the field. She challenged the traditional, state-centric view of security by gendering masculine institutions like the military (Cohn, 1987). Her primary focus has been on gender and security questions in a global context through conflict and war. But Cohn, and the field at large, have expanded to study (in)security in post-war contexts (Bergeron et al., 2017) as well as linking new security threats such as climate change to existing security doctrines (Cohn & Duncanson, 2020). Until last year, the interactions that feminist security studies have made with the online world are primarily through cyber security. The focus has been on gendering broad, state-centric issues such as cybersecurity. While these broad issues need to be addressed by feminist security studies, I argue that in doing so, the strength of feminist security studies where the lived experiences are central is lost.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought attention to our online lives, and this can be seen in research today (Pacciardi, 2023). Feminist security studies are currently focusing on addressing the 'new' dimension of security: the online. Mhajne and Henshaw (2024) published an anthology on cybersecurity and feminist security studies in March during the writing of this paper, and last year, two books on critical security studies and the online sphere were published. *Critical Perspectives on Cybersecurity: Feminist and Postcolonial Interventions* (ed. Mhajne & Henshaw, 2024) deepen the feminist security analysis of important issues, such as data weaponization in armed conflict and transnational

authoritarianism. However, the critique and insights are posed at a meta-theoretical level, as cybersecurity is the issue they are addressing. The book is still important for critical security studies in understanding the online world.

In 2023, Joseph Downing published the book *Critical Security Studies in the Digital Age: Social Media and Security*. This book is a critical milestone for introducing the not-so-new phenomenon of the digital age to the field of security studies. However, in the book, feminist perspectives on security are left out of the scope of the research. Downing's book provides a comprehensive overview of the security challenges of the digital age and how different parts of the field of security studies respond to them. The author notes that "it is better than to consider this book *a starting point* for some of these discussions and a point of departure rather than a point of arrival" (Downing, 2023:3, *my emphasis*). To leave out critical perspectives on security, such as feminist security, whilst discussing security questions in the digital age is not feasible.

Although a *starting point* is needed, that starting point needs to include contemporary perspectives under the umbrella term critical security studies. The subject of study in the digital age often includes emancipatory movements that fall under feminist or postcolonial perspectives. Downing did not leave out feminist perspectives on security because they are lacking in any way but chose to focus on traditional perspectives from realism up to securitization theory developed in the 90s. However, he stopped there due to the vastness of the project. This paper will, therefore, contribute to exploring the relationship between security studies and the online, digital world.

Based on all these advancements, feminist security studies today incorporate various issues. However, little research has been done from a feminist security standpoint on TFGBV and the security issues that it poses. last year, significant advancements occurred within the field of feminist security studies with the publication of Alexis Henshaws's (2023) *Digital Frontiers in Gender and*

*Security: Bringing Critical Perspectives Online*. This book provided a well-needed introduction to TFGBV's challenges to critical security studies and, thus, feminist security studies. (Henshaw, 2023)touches upon some crucial topics that feminist security studies need to address. These include big data, the digital gender gap, technological surveillance, digital activism, decentralization of the economy, and gender-based violence online.

Henshaw's book is a great starting point for feminist security studies to connect to the online world. However, there is still much to be done. The conceptualization of security and gender throughout the book is broad and provides little insight as to *how* the issues can be approached from a feminist security perspective. The following chapter on theory in this paper will suggest how existing theories within feminist security studies can be used in an online setting. Rather than coining a new theory or changing an existing one beyond recognition, I show how a theory within feminist security studies already possesses the nuanced foundations for capturing elusive threats such as TFGBV.

So, digital feminism has failed to articulate TFGBV as a security threat, whilst feminist security studies have failed to incorporate the 'new' dimensions of gender (in)security. Within digital feminism, there has been a lot of work on online harassment, online threats, and other types of insecurities that women face online. However, the harassment and threats have not been treated as security issues. Within feminist security studies, much work has been done on re-imagining what security is to include otherwise excluded subjects. However, the everyday threats that women face online have not been included in this debate. I suggest that these two fields can complement each other as a foundation to explore how technology-facilitated violence against women can be understood as a security issue.

# 3 Theory

This paper was written during times of increased instability in Europe with Russia's war in Ukraine and Israel's war on Gaza, meaning that hard threats such as armed conflict are high on the security agenda. Soft threats, including questions of gender security, are therefore competing for space on the security agenda (Gul, 2023). These competing views of what constitutes (in)security are highly relevant to security studies, as the main question throughout the research history of the field is the concept of security itself. Relevant questions include: What constitutes a security threat? Who or what is being (in)secure? Who or what decides the nature of the threat? Or, as Lene Hansen put it in the 50th anniversary edition of *Security Dialogue*: "What is constantly changing? The concept of security" (Salter et al., 2019:36). This chapter will explore the concept of security by investigating how TFGBV can be accounted for in feminist security studies by building on existing literature.

This paper leans primarily on the feminist security theory presented by Lene Hansen in 2000 called *the Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma* (hereby referred to as *the silent security dilemma* or *the dilemma*). The theory aims to capture the insecurity that arises when a security threat cannot be voiced out of fear of aggravating said threat. However, to understand the feminist theory of the silent security dilemma, it is crucial to understand the traditional views of security that the theory criticizes. Therefore, this chapter starts with a brief overview of the traditional security perspectives and then explains securitization theory, which is the foundation of the silent security dilemma. The chapter then moves on to the silent security dilemma and ends with a section on adapting the dilemma to an online setting.

## 3.1 Security Studies: An Introduction

Security studies can be largely divided between traditional security perspectives and critical ones. Realism and liberalism constitute the traditional perspectives on

security. The critical security perspectives include a wide array of perspectives such as ontological security (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2018; Steele, 2007), decolonial perspectives (Vergès, 2021), feminist and postcolonial perspectives (Sjoberg, 2010; Whetstone & Luna, 2024), human security (Thakur, 2016), and securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998). These perspectives fall under the umbrella term critical security studies.

From the traditional perspectives on security, the state is generally the primary subject of security. The realist approach to security is the most state-centric of the traditional theories. Kenneth Waltz's *theory of international politics* (Waltz, 2010; *originally published 1979*) has been a significant work and has given way to other state-centric, military-focused scholars such as Robert Gilpin (1981), John Mearsheimer (2018), and Stephen Walt (2005). These scholars follow a traditional, post-World War II research line. This means that the concept of security is narrow and centered on the state and military as securing actors and as actors that can be insecure (Nyman and Burke, 2016:168-170. The end of the Cold War meant a shift from traditional security threats, such as inter-state warfare, to more elusive and borderless threats, such as terrorism, health, and environmental concerns. Realist security perspectives could not account for the non-state actors and new types of proxy warfare, thereby allowing critical security perspectives to evolve (Downing, 2023:29).

Liberal perspectives on security have evolved and existed parallel to realist perspectives. However, liberals argue that the end of the Cold War and the triumph of the liberal West over the communist East resulted in "an ultimate victory that had set the world on a course for a new future, in which like-minded capitalist and democratic states conducted their relations in peace " (Hough, 2018:39). The idea that democratic states don't engage in war between each other build on an idea presented by Immanuel Kant where he argues that constitutional republics was a necessary condition for perpetual peace (Kant, 1903, *originally published 1795)*. Democratic peace theory was built upon Kant's thoughts in the

1960s and still has traction, despite its shortcomings (*see* Kustermans, 2023). Liberal perspectives on security greatly emphasize institutions that uphold democracy and, therefore, peace. International bodies such as the United Nations and the World Bank and regional bodies such as the European Union are examples of central institutions. This school of thought, known as liberal peace theory, has been highly criticized by a wide array of scholars (Elman and Jensen, 2014:53). For the aim of this paper, the most relevant critique is that liberal peace theory and its views on security issues still promote the state as the primary subject that is insecure. Although liberal perspectives on security include other actors than the state, their view on (in)security is still narrow.

Critical security studies (CSS) started to emerge in late 1980 and have a broad view of the concept of security contrary to the traditional ones. CSS often uses *(in)security* to show how security for some can mean insecurity for others. The field argues that (in)security can be based on factors other than military and economic and looks beyond the state as the primary subject of security. (Downing, 2023:34). Such factors include identity, health, culture, and the environment. After the broadening of security studies, the so-called *critical turn*, numerous sub-fields of security studies have spawned (Buzan and Hansen, 2009:187). Most of the critical perspectives will not be part of this review since they lie outside the scope of this paper. For example, environmental security and water security will not be included since they are not, or are in a limited way, engaging with questions relevant to this thesis. The field most compatible with the aim of this project is feminist security studies. Feminist security studies are compatible with the aim of this project since the subjects of study are women and their experiences concerning tech-facilitated gender-based violence. It is, however, important to understand the previously mentioned traditional perspectives of security studies to understand the critical perspectives that have emerged from them. One such perspective is Securitization Theory, which comprises the theoretical standpoint that Hansen criticizes.

## 3.2 Securitization Theory

Lene Hansen's *The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma* (2000) builds on a critique of the Copenhagen School of Securitization. So, to understand the silent security dilemma, it is crucial to understand the securitization process presented by the Copenhagen School. Securitization theory was developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver & Jaap de Wilde in their book S*ecurity. A New Framework for Analysis* (1998). These scholars, among others, have been known as the Copenhagen School. Securitization theory is one of the most well-referenced and used theories that fall under the umbrella of critical security studies, and the main empirical issues that have been studied using securitization theory are health, migration, and terrorism (Baele and Jalea, 2023:380). Securitization theory can account for non-state actors and proxy warfare, as traditional security theories can't. This is because the theory aimed to capture the emerging threats tied to the end of the Cold War and provide a solution to what should and should not be included in the security analysis (Buzan et al., 1998:2).

Securitization is based on speech act theory that emphasizes the spoken word. Security within speech act theory is defined as: "the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization" (Buzan et al., 1998:23). Security is context-based in securitization theory, where a question can be securitized in one context but not another. The theory is highly constructivist as security. Is a certain form of social praxis (Buzan et al., 1998:205).

The basic idea of the securitization process is that a person, phenomenon, or the like can be framed as a security threat through speech. The securitization process starts with an elite actor who makes a securitizing move that frames a perceived security concern as a security threat. The second step of the securitization process is for the audience that receives the securitized issue to accept its new status as a security threat. It is, therefore, not enough for the elite actor to frame a non-

traditional security issue as such since the audience needs to accept the new status of the issue (Buzan et al., 1998). The now securitized issue is then moved onto the security agenda, and actions are taken against it. Figure one illustrates the securitization process.

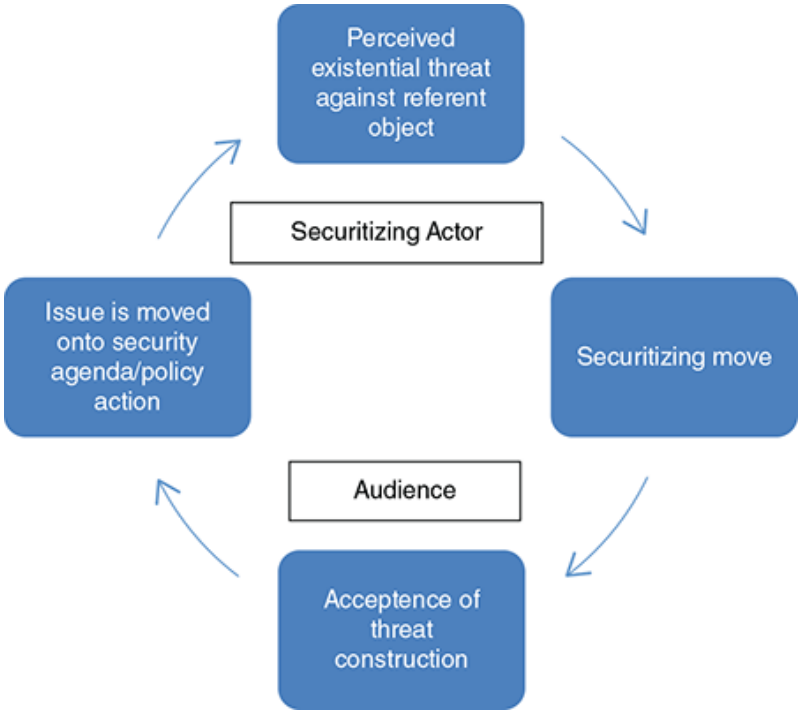


**Figure 1.** The securitization process (Sjöstedt, 2017:4).

Securitization theory offered an answer to the debate about widening and deepening the concept of security. They state:

> "In theory, any public issue can be located on the spectrum ranging from nonpoliticized (meaning the state does not deal with it and it is not in any other way made an issue of public debate and decision) through politicized (meaning the issue is part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations or, more rarely, some other form of communal governance) to securitized (meaning the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal

> bounds of political procedure). In principle, the placement of issues on this spectrum is open: Depending upon circumstances, any issue can end up on any part of the spectrum" (Buzan et al., 1998).

So, as they say, any public issue can be securitized. At the same time, the Copenhagen school argues that there is a difference between *international security* and *social security. International security* consists of hard threats to the referent object[2] and concerns survival, but this does not mean that the state and military are the only objects to be threatened. *Social security* is concerned with inequalities and social justice, which places it below international security on the security agenda (Hansen, 2000:288). The distinction between societal and international security is not based on whether it occurs at a national or international level. The distinction is based on whether the threat concerns *collective survival* and needs to be addressed or securitized by a larger audience. Securitization theory expands into five sectors: economic, societal, military, political, and environmental. Each sector has its own referent object, so in the societal sector, identity is the referent object, but only if the threat to the referent object concerns collective survival (Buzan et al., 1998:119).

## 3.3 The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma

Lene Hansen (2000) critiqued the original securitization theory presented by the Copenhagen School as lacking in gender analysis. By making an analogy of the little mermaid, who sits on the rocks as a statue not long away from the Copenhagen School, Hansen argues that not everybody will be able to voice their security concerns. The little mermaid's story centers on her love for the prince and her longing to walk on land. She trades her voice to become a human but is faced with the threat of dying if the price does not marry her. In the pre-Disney original,

[2] Securitization theory often uses the term *referent object*, which means something that is threatened and needs to be protected.

the little mermaid never marries the prince, dies, and becomes part of the sea as foam on the water. Hansen reflects on the original story as follows:

> "The tale of the Little Mermaid highlights the importance of voice and body for the construction of subjectivity, and it speaks about the chances, even deadly ones, one might take in the pursuit of desire and happiness. It shows that in the absence of speech, the prince fails to see who the Little Mermaid really is. Her silence prevents her from ever fully materialising as an embodied subject, and it prevents her from letting him know how his construction of her subjectivity fundamentally endangers her." (Hansen, 2000:285)

Through the tale of the little mermaid, Hansen poses the question of what if the subject can't voice their insecurity? What if the securitization effort never starts? Hansen calls this *the silent security dilemma.* The original securitization theory views security as something that exists within five sectors: economic, societal, military, political, and environmental. The dilemma differs from the original securitization theory as it criticizes these sectors for being exclusionary of gendered issues. The point of the sectors, and part of the securitization theory's success, is the argument that if the concept of security is broadened without stops, everything can be a security issue, and the concept will lose its meaning. However, Hansen asks what is being excluded from the analysis by building strictly on these five sectors (Hansen, 2000:288). The reasoning of the Copenhagen School is gender-blind and follows the division of public and private where domestic issues are to be treated privately and not by the public eye. Through a case study on honor killings in Pakistan, Hansen argues that gendered security issues are a part of collective security and not 'just' individual security. By focusing on the societal structures in Pakistan, Hansen shows that there is a need to broaden further than the Copenhagen School suggests and that the concept of security will still hold its meaning (Hansen, 2000:300).

The silent security dilemma consists of two parts: *security as silence* and *subsuming security.* When the silent security dilemma is referred to in this text, it includes both security as silence and subsuming security. Otherwise, they are referred to separately. First, let's look at Hansen's *security as silence.*

### *3.3.1 Security as Silence*

Hansen states: "' Security as silence' occurs when insecurity cannot be voiced, when raising something as a security problem is impossible or might even aggravate the threat being faced" (Hansen, 2000:287). In other words, the securitization process, as presented by the Copenhagen School, never begins because the securitizing actor cannot voice the security concern. The first step of the securitization process, as illustrated by Sjöstedt (2017:4) in Figure 1, never moves on to the second part of the process, as illustrated in my modified version in Figure 2. Because the securitizing actor can't make the securitizing move, the audience will not have the opportunity to accept the construction of the threat, and the issue will not move onto the security agenda. This haltered securitization process is what Hansen calls *security as silence*.

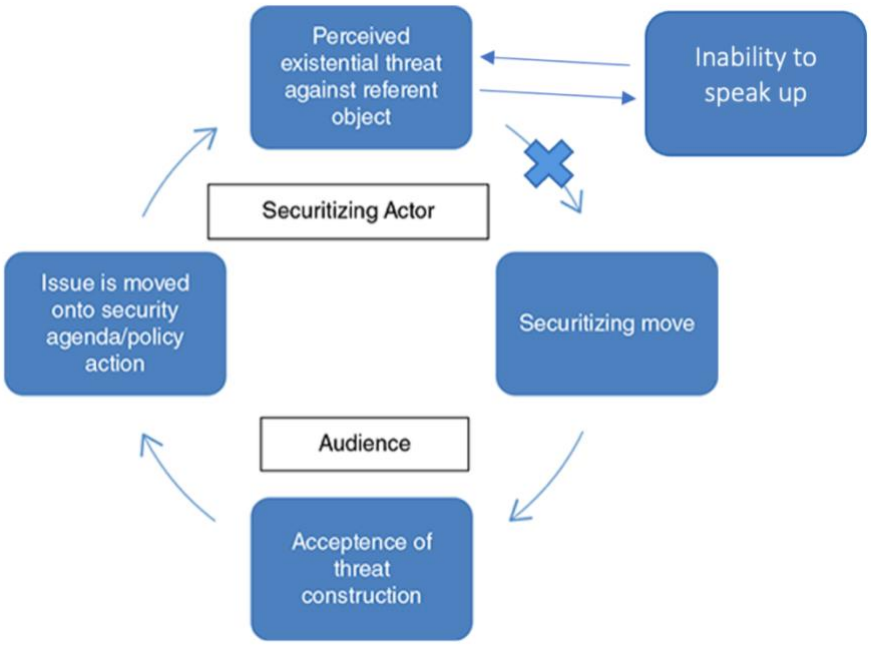


*Figure 2. Security as Silence, built on a model by Sjöstedt (2017:4).*

### *3.3.2 Subsuming Security*

The second part of the silent security dilemma is called *subsuming security*. The word subsume means to bring something under control, or authority, of something else. Hansen argues that identity markers, such as nationality, 'absorb' the gendered issue, and gender is, therefore, excluded from the security analysis. In her example concerning honor killings in Pakistan, she argues that the issue of honor killings has been framed as a religious one. So, the killings of the women take place because of their religious identity and not because of their gender identity. This means that the solutions to honor killings focus on issues centered on the religious identity of the victims (Hansen, 2000:295-296). Hansen argues, however, that the killings take place because of the victim's gender and that women face a unique set of security issues compared to men in this situation. She states, "The targeting of individual Pakistani women is deeply connected to their inscription within an inferior gendered collectivity. Or, put differently, a decision to locate this case within the realm of individual security would seriously diminish our possibilities of grasping its collective aspects" (Hansen, 2000:291). The possibility and conditions for gendered issues to become referent objects are then almost non-existent (Hansen, 2000:300).

Subsuming security is a concept that can be used to identify gendered security issues, especially within new areas of research. Hansen published this theory in 2000, and at the time of publication, there was a great debate within the field of security studies about whether gender security should be included in security studies. The concept of subsuming security directly responded to that broader, structural debate about how and why gender should be a point of analysis in security studies. At the time, there was a great need to strengthen the argument that gender security is collective security and not 'just' individual security. Later in the year that Hansen publicized the little mermaid's silent security dilemma, the

UN adopted resolution 1325[3], which many see as a milestone in mainstreaming questions of gender security.

UNSC resolution 1325 did not solve the silent security dilemma, but it speaks to the ongoing debate. An example of subsuming security is made by Nilsen (2016), who looked at the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 in post-war South Sudan. Nilsen argues that the resolution aimed at empowering women in, among all, post-war contexts could solve the silent security dilemma. Nilsen found that the resolution, seen as a securitizing effort, has not been accepted by the target audience in Sudan. Therefore, *subsuming security* has been the result.

An influential concept in feminist security studies since Hansen published the article in the 2000s is intersectionality. The concept of subsuming security is not the same as intersectionality, but it shares similarities, nonetheless. Intersectionality looks at overlaps in identities and how the intersecting identity markers affect security (Sjoberg, 2010). Subsuming security focuses on how gendered issues of security are not considered and how other identity markers, such as religion, are prioritized. Therefore, gendered issues of security are more difficult to spot, and even more so when there are other intersecting identity markers.

### *3.3.3 Adapting the Silent Security Dilemma to an Online Setting*

To my knowledge, the silent security dilemma has not been applied online before. Therefore, part of this thesis explores what the silent security dilemma might look like online. To do this, this thesis draws on other theories and sources to outline the presumed phenomenon. This section presents some theoretical underpinnings for applying the silent security dilemma to an online setting.

[3] The resolution recognizes the essential need for women's involvement in peace and security issues at all levels of society (Martinelli, 2015).

As mentioned, the original securitization theory presented five sectors: economic, societal, military, political, and environmental. The question, then, is whether the online dimension should become its own sector or not. Hansen and Nissenbaum (2009) published an influential piece arguing that cyberspace, along with the original five should be its own sector. They base their arguments on how cyberspace has its own unique referent objects and securitizing actors. However, I argue that this model is not feasible since it separates cyberspace, or the online world, from the offline. This addition to the theory aligns with early 2000s views on the internet, where it was seen as a tool and not an integrated part of society.

The overall view of the internet has changed, particularly in the case of Sweden. I argue that the suggested addition by Hansen and Nissenbaum isn't feasible and that the online world should be an overarching point of analysis rather than be analyzed on its own. The five sectors + cyberspace are by default placed in the offline world. This is articulated by neither the Copenhagen School nor Hansen and Nissenbaum because, at the time, it was not relevant to explain that economic, societal, military, political, and environmental issues occur in the offline world. However, as this paper will show, and previous research has already pointed out (Downing, 2023; Henshaw, 2023; ed. Mhajne & Henshaw, 2024), there is no gap between the online and the offline. They are integrated, and the five original sectors exist within both realms simultaneously and interchangeably. As Hansen originally critiqued Copenhagen School for separating the public and private, I argue that the online and offline cannot be separated. With this in mind, the question to answer is: What does this mean to the silent security dilemma?

First, *security as silence* captures the lived experiences of those who otherwise would be excluded from the security debate. The theoretical standpoint for this project is that these lived experiences take place *both* online and offline. Before the social media boom and the widespread integration of online infrastructure, the Internet was often seen as a tool. There is no offline/online divide nowadays, but people live their lives simultaneously and interconnected online and offline

(Nordenson, 2016). In other words, everyday reality is experienced seamlessly online and offline.

Second, the concept of *subsuming security* will be used to explore the silent security dilemma online and understand its gendered dimensions. Subsuming security puts the gendered analysis first but does not exclude other intersecting factors such as class, ethnicity, and sexuality. As TFGBV is highly underexplored from a feminist security standpoint, I will not adopt a broader, intersectional perspective on the issue due to the scope of this project.

And lastly, *the silent security dilemma* might look different due to other mechanisms driving the silencing forces. Parts of the violence experienced by women and girls today are conducted via or facilitated by technology. Although the harmful structures driving that violence may be the same as offline, the way it takes form online differs. Previous research (Cuenca-Piqueras et al., 2020) shows that TFGBV takes a myriad of forms, meaning that looking for sources of insecurity with the blueprint of 'offline' violence is fruitless. This is a case of having to balance two thoughts simultaneously. On the one hand, there is no clear border between online and offline lived experiences. On the other hand, gender-based violence might not look the same online as it does offline, and they frequently overlap.

In addition, this paper will draw inspiration from some work by others in the field of securitization. Burton (2023) provides some insights on AI-driven algorithms and securitization. Burton argues that algorithms are far from neutral and that actors using AI to counter extremism may play into the hands of the polarizing forces. He also highlights how AI has made contributions to political violence through the strengthening of harmful societal structures. He argues that there lies a great danger in viewing AI as something neutral since the data on which its decisions are often not (Burton, 2023:7). The paper is written with the state as the

primary actor in mind. However, Burton's argument on non-neutral algorithms applies to all levels of analysis and will be included in this paper.

Another adaptation to understanding securitization and the silent security dilemma online is using means other than speech as part of the securitization process. Some inspiration can be taken from Massari (2021), who argues that securitization can be done through other means than speech. Massari (2021:68) focuses on visual securitization and how narratives are formed in images communicated by NGOs concerning the displacement of Syrian people. The method developed by Massari is not closely connected to that of this thesis. On a theoretical level, however, Massari makes an important development of securitization theory by extending it beyond the act of speaking. Although communication online is done through text and videos, it is also done through emojis, pictures, and the like. The focus of this thesis is not to do a visual analysis. It would, however, limit the understanding of TFGBV by excluding means of communication apart from speech. Means of visual communication will, therefore, be included.

### *3.3.4 Contemporary Debates*

The most recent debate concerning securitization theory comes from a decolonial perspective and is fronted by Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit (2020). They critique securitization theory for methodological whiteness and that the theory has developed as normatively white. Howell and Richter-Montpetit argue that the "Copenhagen School securitization theory is structured not only by Eurocentrism but also by civilizationism, methodological whiteness, and antiblack racism (Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 2020:3). The critique made by Howell and Richter-Montpetit sparked answers from both Hansen and Weaver and Buzan and the debate is still ongoing (Hansen, 2020; Wæver & Buzan, 2020) [4]. Wæver and Buzan (2020:387) stated that the: "article could perhaps best be used as a teaching

[4] I would love to have accounted for the arguments to their full extent, but I recommend reading these three papers, if not for context, then for the intriguing debate.

tool for how not to make an academic argument. The kind of deepfake methodology it employs should have no place in academic debates and should certainly not be published in a reputable journal." These two initial papers sparked a debate with a multitude of aspects.

Gomes and Marques (2021) continued the decolonial critique in their article *Can securitization be saved from itself? A decolonial and feminist intervention*, where they highlighted the need for stronger empirical studies. They maintain that: "it is also essential to conduct empirical studies that use racial and gender discourses as variables of analysis in an operational and pragmatic way." (Gomes and Marques, 2021:79). Further additions to the debate have been made by Baele and Jalea (2023:383), who found that almost all published articles focusing on securitization theory were published in European or US-based journals. Although the decolonial perspective is not the focus of this paper, I want to address and acknowledge this ongoing debate.

Hansen was not the primary focus of Howell and Richter-Montpetit. She was mentioned and therefore answered, and made a point that is highly relevant to this paper:

> "The first is a more practical, methodological one, though with ramifications for how we discuss the choice of case studies and how we conduct them. There is no doubt that had I researched Pakistani honour killings today, I would have collected a larger and more diverse body of sources. I would look to social media, and I would use digital resources to better incorporate Pakistani activists and the words of women who have survived or identified themselves as at risk." Hansen (2020:383).

This ongoing debate has inspired me to reflect on some academic practices and influenced my choices for this paper. First, I chose to look at the case of Sweden

for this project because it is fitting in the sense that internet usage is high while issues of gender-based violence prevail. However, I also chose the case of Sweden so as not to add to the extractivist[5] practices that have been prevalent in security studies. First, I know the Swedish context well. The risk of me making assumptions based on prejudice or misinformation is lower here, although it is still a risk. Second, I don't want to go somewhere for a limited amount of time, especially since this is a master's thesis, extract the data I need by asking about potentially traumatizing events, and then leave without benefiting the interviewees. Third, there have been a lot of studies done by Western feminists where the case study or empirical material has been gathered in a context far from where the beneficiaries of the research are. Hansen herself made the decision, in a limited scope of her paper, to use honor killings in Pakistan as the empirical example. A choice that, per the quoted text, Hansen would have modified today. Although I don't agree with Howell and Richter-Montpetit (2020) on several points, one issue I do agree on is the overarching need to address the colonial foundations of feminist security studies. The research practices have contributed to the image of the global north as the righteous society and the global south as the other, consisting of oppressed women. Hansen answered that critique, and I have adjusted the theory to find a way forward. It is an ongoing debate without an answer yet, and this paper suggests one way forward.

[5] By extractivism I mean the research practice of taking advantage knowingly or unknowingly of knowledge and resources from marginalized communities. This often happens without benefiting the communities. For literature on the topic, see, for example, (Cruz & Luke, 2021).

# 4 Methodology

As with other constructivist research, the aim of this project has not been to generalize over a large population but rather to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the interviewees (Mann, 2016:14). This project aims to gain a deeper understanding of *how* the silent security dilemma shapes the experiences of Swedish activists as they engage in online activism. It also asks *how* they navigate these challenges. This project is mostly exploratory since it aims to gain a deeper understanding of complex, lived experiences. However, the research question leans a bit towards confirmatory as it also asks how the activists navigate the challenges. This hints that, building on previous research, I suspect that online activism might be challenging in different ways. These challenges and their responses are central to capture since they allow for further investigation of the silent security dilemma. Therefore, this project has relied on semi-structured interviews as its method. Qualitative interviews were deemed the most appropriate method for this project as the research question focuses on the experiences of activists and navigating the silent security dilemma online.

This thesis will interview and look at individuals but see their experiences as part of structures and not individual problems. The silent security dilemma highlights the importance of lived experiences and how marginalized groups are often disproportionally affected by security issues. This differs from securitization theory, in which elite actors hold the role of securitizing actors. This means that the securitization process can take form on an individual level, and the silent security dilemma applies to different levels of analysis. This follows the broader feminist security literature where gender-based violence is seen as a structural issue that affects all levels of society and is not 'just' seen as a question of individual security. The following chapter presents the chosen method for this project as well as the chosen approach to data analysis and ends with a reflection on my positionality and how it might affect the research.

## 4.1 Participants

Twelve interviewees participated in this project. Nine interviewees were representatives of women's shelters, where they were responsible for the social media platforms and their content. Three interviewees were independent, meaning they did not represent an organization but were the front figure of their account. Two of the interviewees from shelters were representatives from girls' shelters, where one of the shelters also focuses on supporting young trans persons. The sample was determined through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling (Brinkmann, 2023a:97). The participants needed to meet certain criteria to be relevant for this project. These were:

1. Participants must be 18+ years old.
2. Participants need to be active on social media platform(s) via private account(s) and/or business account(s).
3. Participants must actively use social media to conduct activism on women's and/or girls' rights.
4. The social media presence should primarily relate to the Swedish context; however, the participants could also engage in international questions of women's rights issues since they frequently overlap.

Purposive sampling was chosen due to the criteria of the participants, who had to be active on social media as well as actively carrying out activism online. Furthermore, this project had no set sample size, as the goal was to reach saturation where no new themes emerged rather than aiming for a set number of participants (Mann, 2016:213). New themes and debates emerged rapidly throughout the interviews until interview 9, when it started to slow down. By interview 12, no new themes emerged, and I stopped recruiting new participants.

| *Name** | Age | Type of account | Role | Education | Platforms | Number of followers on Instagram** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Sara* | 62 | Women's shelter | Operations Manager | - | Instagram, Facebook | 1000 |
| *Katarina* | 47 | Independent | Co-Founder | Doctor, specialist | Instagram | 60k |
| *Cornelia* | 42 | Women's shelter | Communicator | - | Instagram, Facebook | 1200 |
| *Hillevi* | 64 | Women's shelter | - | - | Instagram, Facebook | 400 |
| *Camille* | 43 | Women's shelter | Communicator | - | Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn | 1200 |
| *Francis* | 41 | Women's shelter | Communicator | - | Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn | 1200 |
| *Anna* | - | Women's shelter | Operations Manager | Social Worker | - | 1100 |
| *Lisa* | 28 | Girls' and trans' shelter | External operations developer | - | - | 1700 |
| *Nikita* | 37 | Women's shelter | Volunteer | Social Worker | - | 500 |
| *Lily* | 35 | Independent | Founder | Business Executive Degree | Instagram, LinkedIn | 22k |
| *Maria* | 26 | Girls' shelter | Operations Manager | Yrkeshögskola | Instagram, webpage. Marketing on snapchat, | 1500 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | TikTok, and Facebook | |
| *Helen* | 51 | Independent | Founder | Doctor, specialist | Primary: Instagram. Secondary: LinkedIn, X, TikTok, Facebook | 6700 |

*Table 1.* The participants.

* The interviewees were given pseudonyms; I will expand on this under ethical considerations.

**The number of followers is not exact as a measure to protect the identity of the interviewees.

The table presenting all the interviewees present all the social media accounts they use. All interviewees used Instagram as their primary platform for conducting their activism online. Facebook was used either as a secondary, passive platform or for personal accounts. The primary platforms that the interviewees used were Instagram, and the secondary platforms were Snapchat and Facebook. Snapchat was more commonly used when the interviewee's target audience was younger; however, it was only used for marketing and not for publishing content. Only one of the interviewees was active on TikTok.

The initial contact with candidates was done via direct messages on social media. I searched on Instagram for women's shelters, women's rights groups, feminist activists, and body activists. Over 100 accounts that fit the criteria for an interviewee for this project were asked if they were interested in participating. Around 20 answered the request, and from that, 8 led to interviews. I also used snowball sampling to broaden my network and use the contacts my interviewees were able to refer me to. 4 of the interviewees were booked via snowball sampling.

After the initial contact, the interviewees received a consent form via email. There is a difference between consent and informed consent. Informed consent means that the participant fully understands what it means to participate in the study (Mann, 2016:76). To ensure there was informed consent the participants received a message before the interview that informed them about data storing, that the interviews are voluntary, and that the interviews are anonymized. The message also contains a brief statement of the purpose of the study as well as the anticipated length of the interview. The consent form can be viewed in its full length in Appendix A. Who an activist is and what activism is differ greatly depending on the definition used. This project does not use the term activist because none of the interviewees resonated with the term.

## 4.2 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

This thesis has followed the definition of qualitative interviewing as set by Brinkman and Kvale: "It is defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:16). The semi-structured form of interviews was chosen since it allows for flexibility and follows the exploratory nature of the project. Brinkmann phrased it as: "Compared to structured interviews, semistructured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee" (Brinkmann, 2023a:18). The semi-structured form for an interview was deemed feasible since I as the researcher is not an expert on the interviewees' emotions and experiences (Brinkmann, 2023:16).

The interview guide followed an hourglass form as advocated by Katz-Buonincontro (2022:35). I started by re-stating the consent form and making sure that the interviewees understood that the interviews were confidential and based

on voluntary participation. The interviews started broad with basic, easy-to-answer questions about what platforms the interviewees use, what type of questions they post about, and how long they have been conducting activism online. After that, the interview continued with questions of a more complex nature and ended on a lighter note by focusing on whether the interviewee would like to add something. The main body of the interview, or the complex questions, centered around themes connected to the research question. Based on previous research on tech-facilitated gender-based violence, some interview questions could be formed to try and explore the silent security dilemma and how it manifests in the online setting. The silent security dilemma is not a known theory outside of the academic world; therefore, I chose not to ask questions containing that term but rather focus on connected phenomena.

The security dilemma arises when security questions cannot be voiced, as it may aggravate the threat (Hansen, 2000). To try and grasp how the silent security dilemma may shape the experiences of Swedish activists as they engage in online activism, questions regarding the interviewee's behavior and feelings were used. An example of one of the questions asked is: "What factors do you consider before posting something online that relates to your activism? Why?". This question captures the *silence* in the silent security dilemma. It offers an opportunity to explore what factors go into deciding if the interviewee will or will not post something. Another question about balancing risk and advocacy was: "Can you tell me how you navigate the risk of online threats or harassment while still advocating for your cause?". The full interview guide can be viewed in Appendix B.

## 4.3 Data Collection Procedures

The interviews were all held in the spring of 2024, and the anticipated duration of the interviews was 1 hour. This project has relied on videoconference calls, or online camera-based interviews, to conduct the interviews. The interviewees and

the interviewer were not able to meet in person due to physical distance, hence why all interviews were conducted via video call. Videocalls are the option that most closely resembles face-to-face interviews (Salmons, 2012:15). The risk of technology barriers was deemed low since all the interviewees actively spent time online as a base characteristic for participation. Nevertheless, the interviewees were asked if they were able and willing to interview via video call and what type of technology they felt most comfortable using (zoom, teams, facetime, etc.).

Since communication in an interview includes more than spoken words, it was a goal to conduct the interviews in a way where the interviewee and interviewer could see each other. Non-verbal communication includes chronemic communication, paralinguistic communication, kinesic communication, and proximity communication; all of which are essential to gain a deeper understanding of the interviewee (Salmons, 2012:3). These non-verbal cues offer additional information about the challenges that the interviewee is talking about when discussing difficult topics. During the interviews for this project, body language and the like were noted as complementary information to the transcription. To protect the interviewees' data this project utilized a Dictaphone to record the interviews for transcriptions later. A Dictaphone stores data locally, as opposed to using built-in functions of the video-call services or a smartphone to record since they are more vulnerable to outside interference and data-leakage.

## 4.4 Data Analysis and Coding

The data analysis method has been thematic analysis since the main part of the research question is exploratory. Thematic analysis was fitting since it starts with a predetermined theme but stays open to new, emerging themes. The initial theme for this project was "experiences concerning interactions online" where the interactions concerned the interviewees' work with activism. I started broad with the categories "negative interactions" and "positive interactions" since I knew there were going to be interactions. I continued from the coded positive and

negative interactions to find specific types of interactions (likes, DMs, comments) and coded more precisely how the interviewees responded to the interactions.

Thematic analysis was fitting for this project since a part of the research question is confirmatory, which asks about the challenges that activists might face when conducting activism online. The openness for new themes to emerge lets the lived experiences of the interviewees take a central role. This would not be the case if the data they generated had been coded to a preexisting framework. Based on the thematic analysis approach, I could both confirm and challenge the predetermined characteristics of the silent security dilemma. This project used NVivo to code the transcripts of the interviews. NVivo provides a clear structure and a codebook. A codebook provides transparency in giving a clear record of the coding decisions that have been made. It also provides clarity and rigor as it clarifies what the codes are capturing. Furthermore, the codebook helped to keep codes consistent over time as it served as a log for me to look back at after a pause in the coding work. Lastly, the codebook helped keep codes organized and provided an overlook of overarching themes. I chose not to code by hand since I wanted the ability to run queries and compare coded data with correlating identity markers such as *independent* and *shelter*.

The interviews were all conducted in Swedish, so the quotes in this thesis have been translated from Swedish to English. I have made all the translations, and my mother tongue is Swedish. The quotes are as close as they can be. However, some meaning is always lost when translating from one language to another. The translation was particularly challenging when the interviewees used profanities and sayings. These categories hold much meaning beyond the actual words being used, so for one of the quotes, I included a footnote with the Swedish saying and some information about the context to minimize the loss of context in the translation process.

## 4.5 Ethical Considerations

There were several different measures taken to anonymize the participants to protect their identity. First, the interviewees were given the option to choose a pseudonym. I opted for pseudonyms instead of generic "interview 1, 2, etc." because I wanted to keep the human element in the text. Reducing the interviewees' stories to mere numbers loses the feeling of them being real people. I gave the participants the option to choose their pseudonyms since it allowed for a lighthearted moment at the end of the interviews, easing the transition from interview to thanks and goodbye. In the case where the interviewees didn't care about what they would be called or didn't want to be able to recognize themselves in the finished material, I used a name generator to give them a randomized name. The second measure taken to anonymize the participants was to not include some key elements of their accounts in the methods section. The online community of women's rights activists, primarily focusing on Sweden, is not an extensive sample group, meaning that it could be possible to triangulate the identity of the interviewees if I provided enough key information. Therefore, the interviewees were separated into two groups: independent and representative of shelters. Furthermore, I don't disclose the exact focus or niche of women's rights questions that they focus on. This is also due to the small sample size of the interviewees.

## 4.6 Limitations

One crucial limitation of this project is that it only looks at one social media platform, Instagram. Some of the other platforms, such as Snapchat, are mentioned briefly, but they are not the main part of the analysis. Social media change quickly and, therefore, single-platform studies tend to be outdated quickly. Think of studies that have looked at the specific functions of Twitter before it became X, or think about social media before the algorithm-regulated feed was introduced and the feed still operated chronologically. It is a fine line between what to include and what to exclude. Partially because of that reason and the scope of this paper, I have not focused on social-media-specific phenomena such

as echo chambers and filter bubbles. The primary platform for this study was Instagram because the participants primarily use it for their activism. In the analysis and discussion, I have, therefore, aimed to discuss the over-arching implications of the results instead of deep-diving into platform-specific mechanisms, as these are bound to change soon.

## 4.7 Positionality

I am, in many ways, an insider to the group I interview. I haven't actively conducted activism online, but I share the general values of the interviewees. Although it makes for a comfortable conversation, and the interviewees might feel more comfortable opening up to me, it is not ideal as it might influence the interpretations of the material and said conversations. Salmons (2012:2) states that a successful researcher: "draws on the best of human qualities when conducting an interview: trust, thoughtful questioning and perceptive probing, empathy and reflective listening." However, these crucial aspects can also give way to challenges in the form of biases. I am aware that past experiences may influence my understanding of the challenges faced by the participants. As a researcher from Sweden, I broadly share the same cultural context with the interviewees, which has its benefits since I have an embedded understanding of cultural context, making it easier to converse and interpret. On the other hand, I might take things for granted and misinterpret what the interviewees mean. As an insider to the community I study, I risk taking things for granted and ignore the fact that these individuals differ from me in their own experiences. However, I acknowledge that my lived experiences differ from theirs and are influenced by upbringing, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and all else that influence everyday life. I am committed to entering this project with an open mind and seeking diverse perspectives from participants to ensure a diverse interpretation of the silent security dilemma and online activism.

# 5 Findings and Analysis

Hansen's silent security dilemma consists of two parts: security as silence and subsuming security. The findings and analysis in this paper will be structured around these two pieces of the silent security dilemma. This introductory part will present some overall findings. The second part will focus on security as silence and what this looks like in an online setting. The third part of the analysis will focus on subsuming security and what that looks like online. The last part of the analysis will be dedicated to a broader debate on the silent security dilemma and feminist security studies need to connect to the Internet.

To begin with, the material generated from the interviews contains 14 sources of insecurity. All the sources of insecurity can be found in Table 2 below. The sources of insecurity were deemed as such because they made the participants feel unsafe or hindered their work.

| **Codes** | **Number of coding references** | **Number of items coded** |
|---|---|---|
| Hate speech and Threats | 15 | 8 |
| Previous experiences of (in)security | 13 | 7 |
| Trolls | 11 | 7 |
| Community Guidelines and Rules | 15 | 6 |
| Lack of resources | 8 | 5 |
| Misinformation | 10 | 5 |
| Easy Access to Private Information | 4 | 3 |
| Legislation | 4 | 3 |
| Uncertainty | 4 | 3 |
| Anonymity | 4 | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Men defending other men | 4 | 2 |
| Other Activists | 2 | 2 |
| Algorithmic Violence | 1 | 1 |
| Reported Content | 1 | 1 |

*Table 2.* The identified reasons for the Silent Security Dilemma are based on coding references and the number of items coded.

The 14 identified sources of insecurity can be roughly divided into the two categories of the silent security dilemma: security as silence and subsuming security. The next sections are dedicated to exploring security as silence and subsuming security.

### *5.1.1 Security as silence*

Seven of the 14 sources of insecurity relate to the concept of security as silence. These are hate speech and threats, previous experiences of insecurity, trolls, misinformation, easy access to private information, men defending other men, and other activists. However, just because somebody experiences an insecure situation does not mean that security as silence will occur.

The definition of if the participants have experienced security as silence has been deemed from their strategies of handling insecure situations and the impact that the strategies have had on their activistic work. Table 3 presents the methods the participants used to deal with insecurity in their work online.

| **Negative Impact** | **Neutral or Positive Impact** |
|---|---|
| Self-censorship of their content, | Debrief and seek support with colleagues |
| Modify the settings for ads | Attempted dialogue with the aggressor |
| Diversion in the forms of burying controversial posts under other content | Expose the trolls by posting about them |

| | |
|---|---|
| Close the comment section due to the inability to moderate or due to a large number of hateful comments | Fantasies of what the world could look like without the hate |
| Avoid commenting on current big news | Ignore the source of insecurity |
| Refrain from using specific platforms due to the climate there | Moderate by removing or hiding comments, answer to hateful comments with a warning, and the like |
| Increased caution in all or certain aspects of the activism | Positive mindset about the situation |
| Increased anonymity online and/or offline | |

*Table 3.* Impact on the activistic work when dealing with the silent security dilemma

Security as silence arises when a source of insecurity is coupled with strategies that negatively impact the work. For example, if a participant received hateful comments in their work and had to self-censor their content moving forward, security as silence would have arisen.

The most common reason for security as silence to arise was found to be Hate Speech and Threats. Eight of the 12 participants had experienced Hate speech and/or threats when conducting their activism online and were forced to use methods with negative impact on their work to deal with the situation. One interviewee described a situation where an incident happened in the local community, and they chose to not comment on it:

> "It's provoking for some to see the words "men's violence against women" in the feed. Many seem to feel that it singles out men in a way /…/ And because I know that many react to that phrase, those words, we didn't post about that [local incident]. I feel like it's not

> worth it if there would have been too much fighting… On the other hand, you shouldn't let yourself be silenced. It's that constant balancing act… Should we or should we not?"- Cornelia, *women's shelter*

The balancing act Cornelia describes was a recurrent theme throughout all interviews that experienced security as silence. In this paper, hate speech include everything from users commenting laughing emojis on posts on serious crimes committed against women to death threats received by the interviewees. One interviewee gave an example of a scenario where hate speech was often prevalent:

> "When you post on your feed and don't promote it, I think the people who follow us are friendly, and it sets a good tone. When we market the posts, we target women. The times that I've forgotten it, or we've forgotten it, and it's targeted to both men and women, then it's not fun. Then there will be a lot of comments and a lot about… "You should think about men as well," and "Women are also violent," and all this and beyond. /…/I think it's very noticeable when we go out and market widely and happen to get the men as a target group as well. Then some men out there don't think that what we do is very good." – Anna, *women's shelter.*

So, hate speech and threats occur on the profiles in the comment sections but also on ads that the interviewees put out. Self-censorship and other strategies that hinder the activistic work are an issue. Still, unique challenges occur when the strategies are coupled with social media mechanisms. At first, I thought that the interviewees were self-censoring primarily for their personal safety and to try to avoid receiving so much hate. However, when I asked why they chose to self-censor, the answer was dependent on the overarching goal of their activism.

The different interviewees' activism goals were found to be either to provide support to the target audience or to increase public knowledge on certain issues. Several of the activists had multiple goals, and in this case, they were asked about their primary goals when managing their accounts.

The ones with the primary goal of increasing public knowledge on certain issues were all independent accounts and two shelters. The shelters said that the overarching goal of their operations is to give support to the target group; however, on their social media, their primary goal was to increase public knowledge of men's violence against women. The interviewees with the goal of increasing public knowledge were less prone to moderate their comment sections heavily or to self-censor. One interviewee stated:

> "I think it's so important that there is a debate as well. Because you know, preaching for the choir will not get you anywhere. It's when you face opinions other than your own that you are challenged to reflect on your standpoint, you know? Why am I thinking the way I am?" – Helen, *independent*

On the other hand, the group that aimed to increase public knowledge was more concerned about their personal safety than the group with the goal of providing support to their target group. This can be attributed to the fact that the independent creators and the two shelters in this group were central to the activism as faces of their accounts. The other group, which only consists of shelters, conducted activism in their work role and was not featured online related to the shelters content on their pages. For the interviewees whose primary goal was to support women and girls in need, the dilemma often took a less personal approach. Since the interviewees with this goal represented organizations instead of independent accounts, they could be rather anonymous online.

It was more common amongst the interviewees for independent accounts to receive Hate Speech or Threats than it was for accounts run by shelters. The hate received by the independent accounts was more consistent and not tied closely to specific events or incidents. The accounts run by organizations reported that the hate that they had received was often linked to one reporting on a local incident or when advertising.

In the cases I interviewed where hate speech and threats existed as more common, not isolated incidents, the interviewees often referred to someone they knew was getting even more hate and even more threats.

> "I think in mine… In my channels, the tone of the debate is good or friendly. Overall, the tone is good, you know? There are idiots as well, but they are allowed to be there. But if you look at, I don't know, [famous Swedish influencer], the amount she gets… I mean the tone of the debate over there is fucking insane" – Interview Lily, *independent*

This train of thought was often coupled with ignoring negativity and hate. Whether or not the account had received hate and threats, 11 out of the 12 interviews revealed a worry about receiving them. The worry was seen in phrases such as "we are very lucky" and "I know how it is in the comment section on other accounts". These comments were often followed by, or paired with, the idea that the internet can be a tough space to work within. This theme of opportunity versus risk was seen in some form in all interviews.

> "I mean, I've seen what all the other women, or many women, have been through. I think it's just horrible. Sadly, the consequences are that you… that I self-censor. I am extremely aware of the fact that I do it. But I don't feel like… I also have kids, and I want to protect them. If it was only me perhaps…" – Sara, *women's shelter*

When asked about that, the general answer was that it was a constant source of worry or that the thought about it was in the back of the mind. Even though it did not hinder the daily operations the examples from other accounts where hate-speech and threats were out of hand were seen as scary.

Eight of the participants stated that their activism and online presence aimed to support women in need. Everybody in this category represented women's and girls' shelters and engaged in activism online through their work role managing an organization's account. For the accounts that had the primary goal of giving support, they need to reach their target group to do so. However, several shelters reported that support-seeking clients do not have a private life online. To quote one of the interviewees:

> "I just came to think about this woman I spoke to not long ago who was being harassed by her ex. She felt completely unprotected. He had all her passwords, and that was uneasy to hear that he was under her skin like that.[6] /…/ Then there is nowhere to hide, you know? Every time she uses her phone, he can see it all. /…/ I mean, it is a direct danger for these women to go to our page and follow it. They just can't "– Hillevi, *women's shelter.*

The issue for these interviewees with social media platforms is that the platforms rely on engagement, and these accounts won't get engagement from their target group due to the security risk it poses. The shelters cannot rely on their target group to boost engagement and, through that, increase the visibility of their social media accounts. Without interactions and engagement, the account will have

[6] The original saying in Swedish is "att någon kryper under skinnet på en nästan" and translates more directly to "to have someone crawling under your skin". The saying illustrates how somebody gets uncomfortably close to you, often when they haven't received consent to do so.

limited reach and, therefore, be unable to reach as many women as possible in need.

The shelters need to reach their target group to provide support and resources. Still, Instagram is less likely to recommend the shelter content to the target group since the target group can't interact with the shelter's content or similar content. At the same time, the shelters are reluctant to use methods to reach out, such as commenting on local news, since this may attract people who are opposed to their work and thereby create an unsafe space in the form of hateful comments and the like.

> "It totally depends on what your goals for external communications are. So yeah, we want more dialogue and debate. We should work actively to get the dialogue going on our page, especially with the ones willing to discuss. But we shouldn't aim for too much dialogue and discussion just in case we get all the trolls to come in here, too. It's just not the right place for it. /…/ We want [the support-seeking clients] to be able to come to us and talk about things. There needs to be a balance there, so we don't forget about our target group." – Cornelia, *women's shelter.*

Table 1 presents the interviewees and the type of accounts they use and includes the number of followers. I hesitated to include some of the shelters due to the low number of followers. I initially thought these accounts didn't have much reach and were less relevant to the analysis. They usually don't have many interactions in the form of likes and comments, either. It is impossible to determine exactly what the low number of followers depends on for each account. However, it is not far-fetched to think that part of it is because of a shared situation of security as silence between the organizations and the followers. The downward spiral of the target audience being unable to interact and the shelters being hesitant about engaging with a broader audience creates a negative feedback loop.

For the shelters that had identified the dilemma of their target group, they tried to mitigate it by reaching out through targeted ads. This leads to the second part of the silent security dilemma: subsuming security.

### *5.1.2 Subsuming security*

Seven of the 14 sources of insecurity relate to the concept of subsuming security. These are community guidelines and rules, lack of resources, legislation, uncertainty, anonymity, algorithmic violence, and reported content. As in Hansen's description of the concept, these sources of insecurity are structural and less direct than security as silence. Although, as this section will show, they are challenging in other ways, and, together with security as silence, they put the interviewees advocating for social change in a difficult situation.

Six out of the 12 interviewees stated that platform and community guidelines have hindered the continued work on their accounts. The most common reasons found where the platform is hindering content are ads and boosted content being flagged as political content, resulting in the interviewees having to remove or modify the material.

> "For example, sometimes an ad can be rejected, and it usually happens when its content is centered on LGBTQ issues. Meta can sometimes detect it as a political matter. And I think that sometimes it also happens that maybe someone reports the ad. So, the ad has been approved. It runs for a week, for example, but then suddenly, it gets blocked for some reason. And I think that maybe someone has reported the ad because they just become so butthurt about it." – Lisa, *girls- and trans shelter.*

The case accounted for by Lisa shows how intersecting factors, in this case, gender and sexuality, make certain groups more vulnerable to algorithmic

violence than others. Ads targeted towards LGBTQ people get blocked more often than ads targeted to women in general by Lisa's shelter. However, as Lisa also states, ads can get blocked without a clear reason, and this is often due to the content being reported by users on the app. Lisa explained that they sometimes contest the decision but that it is time-consuming. As explored in the previous section, targeted ads and content are one of the few ways for the shelters to reach their target audience. To some extent, they rely on marketing to reach the women and girls who need support.

Furthermore, Lisa accounts for how new legislation in the EU has hit them hard. Since their target audience is younger than the shelters that target women, 10-25 years, the new EU legislation affects them differently. With the implementation of DSA this year, they are no longer allowed to target users younger than 18 for their ads. Snapchat has yet to implement the new legislation, and Lisa comments:

> "We can still target the younger audience of 13-18 on Snapchat, and we get most of the visits to our webpage from ads on there. When we get them to our webpage, we can also offer them support via chat there. I suppose we get quite a lot of support-seeking clients from there" – Lisa, *girls'- and trans shelter.*

It was less common for the content that was not boosted or part of advertising to be flagged, removed, or in any other way hindered from reaching the intended audience. All the accounts that had ads or boosted their content were shelters. None of the independent accounts boosted their content. However, one account that focuses on women's reproductive health and bodies has had problems with pictures being blurred due to its content. The co-founder of the account reasoned as follows:

> "It's actually happened a couple of times during the last year or so and it sucks. We're going to have to think about it if it happens more

> because, you know, we have this policy on our account that nothing about the female body is taboo. Everything needs to be showcased." – Katarina, *independent.*

The blocked content often featured blood or tissue, for example, a picture of a myoma from a uterus. Although it is not possible to say exactly, the content was probably flagged and/or removed automatically since the algorithms identified prohibited elements in the pictures.

> "It's a high price to pay since we often start with a picture of the topic we discuss in the post. We always include the academic article as a screenshot as well, but you don't want that as the first picture in the post that is too boring. /…/ If we are forced to have the boring, or less exciting, academic article as the picture and exclude the real-life ones then, well, that's not exciting enough." – Katarina, *independent.*

So, to summarize, the shelters struggle with outreach and low interactions due to the precarious situation of their target group, inadequate resources, and legislation. Independent accounts struggle with keeping the debate civilized and handling the personal safety concerns they face by being a woman who discusses women's rights questions in public. A finding they all have in common is that the interviewees struggle with outreach based on gender since most of their followers tend to be women.

The issue then is that based on how social media platforms today operate, there is an issue with outreach. The shelters cannot market to all gender identities, both out of lack of resources but also due to the safety risk of hate speech and harassment. At the same time, many of the shelters state that their strategy to reach out is by reaching professionals, for example, social workers, and then hope the social worker will inform their client that the women's shelter near them

exists. Women's rights issues are not *women's* issues but concern the whole society. When the followers of an account are almost exclusively women, this signals to the algorithm that the content of these pages isn't relevant to men. Since the group that aims to give support to their client needs to reach women, the algorithms might work in their favor for them. However, by having the vast majority of female followers, the algorithms will exclude men from seeing the content and learning more about the issues. This is problematic since it further deepens the view that violence against women is a women's issue and not a structural problem addressed by the wider public and institutions.

### *5.1.3 The five sectors*

The third finding of this project is that the offline world matters to the online world, and vice versa. All interviewees struggle with the silent security dilemma to some extent, regardless of amount of followers, strategies, and location. When talking about algorithms, the discussion can be that the algorithms sort out and down-prioritize the content from marginalized groups. But, there is also a discussion to be had on the commodification of interactions and what happens when somebody needs to be reached by a certain kind of content, but they won't be because they cannot interact with it. Social media platforms are a business, and the accounts that have nothing to sell but offer support and knowledge might have a difficult time reaching out. The platforms are not designed for them, even though they are often portrayed as giving voice to the voiceless. A combination of platform design and structural issues of inequality results in a medium that both gives a platform to reach out but can also work against the most vulnerable groups.

Social media growth is based on interactions through likes, shares, follows, or the like. The group the shelters are trying to reach are not in a position to follow, like, or share their content. The independent accounts do not share that issue but face

issues of personal security since the platforms are designed with gender security as an afterthought, not something integrated into the entire system.

I argue that TFGBV and the ‘cyber sector’ need to be integrated into the silent security dilemma, not added onto it. With this, I mean that cyber security should not be its own sector but be treated as the offline world, namely the sphere where lived experiences take place. The silent security dilemma faced by Swedish advocates for women’s rights occurs both online and offline. To separate the two weakens the understanding of the daily struggles where offline gendered violence is facilitated via ICTs and the other way around.

# 6 Concluding remarks

It has already been stated throughout this project that the theoretical standpoint of this project is that the online and offline worlds are interconnected. However, geography matters, social media is not disconnected from the offline world, and although the medium itself is highly globalized, the local context still plays a fundamental role in the dilemma. There is a need to discuss the over-arching implications of subsuming security. Cybersecurity is a hot topic today, and legislation concerning privacy and data is debated and researched. Legislation such as GDPR is taken into account in every instance of society. However, gender security seems to be an afterthought regarding new, emerging technology. Efforts are being put into place to protect data and property, but not protect the people using the technology. I argue that, based on previous research and the findings of this paper, TFGBV is far down on the security agenda and this need to change.

This information is not new, as accounted for in the chapter on previous research, the ways perpetrators incorporate ICT are studied. However, what the development of ICTs means for the silent security dilemma and what it looks like needs further research. This further research, focusing on ICT and the silent security dilemma, could also strengthen the idea of incorporating and/or adapting existing theories to include tech-facilitated gender-based violence.

The reason why it is important to understand and integrate tech-facilitated gender-based violence to existing theories is because of the need to stay online. Whether you use social media or not, there is an increasing need to stay online to be a functioning member of Swedish society. When the technology that is produced and adapted at a large scale does not prioritize gender security, marginalized groups are left in the hands of global companies to be safe online. The discussion in this paper is just the tip of the iceberg where feminist security studies need to address contemporary online issues spanning further that cyberwarfare and cyberterrorism. The everyday threat that women face online is an integral part of

understanding gendered insecurity in contemporary debates, and many fields outside of feminist security studies have generated great insights into these.

So many issues are not addressed in this paper due to the project's limited scope. I, therefore, urge future research to include broader views on ICT to explore and strengthen the analytical frameworks that feminist security studies already possess, as well as develop new ones. The findings of this project have indicated that perpetrators use all types of ICT to stalk, harass, and threaten their victims. Some examples that have come up during the interviews have been calls, texts, finding private information online and sending threatening letters, sewing bugs in clothes and children's toys, and installing hidden tracking apps on smartphones. Some tracking apps may connect to social media apps or other data that already exists within the technology most women in Sweden use today. Sensitive material from so-called nanny cams can be shared on social platforms without consent. These examples, brought up by the interviewees, showcase how social media is not separated from the offline world and how important it is to look beyond social media when studying tech-facilitated gender-based violence. It is time for feminist security studies to address TFGBV as the security issue it is and argue for its urgency as an everyday security threat.

# 7 References


Ali, P. & Rogers, M. M. (2023). Gender-Based Violence: A Comprehensive Guide, Springer Nature

Amaral, I., Basílio-Simões, R. & Poleac, G. (2022). Technology Gap and Other Tensions in Social Support and Legal Procedures: Stakeholders' Perceptions of Online Violence against Women during the Covid-19 Pandemic, *El Profesional de la Información*, [e-journal] vol. 31, no. 4, pp.1–12, Available Online: https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=lih&AN=158894653&site=eds-live&scope=site [Accessed 7 February 2024]

Amnesty Reveals Alarming Impact of Online Abuse against Women. (2017). *Amnesty International*, Available Online: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/ [Accessed 7 February 2024]

Amrute, S. (2020). Bored Techies Being Casually Racist: Race as Algorithm, *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, [e-journal] vol. 45, no. 5, pp.903–933, Available Online: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0162243920912824 [Accessed 4 January 2024]

Baele, S. J. & Jalea, D. (2023). Twenty-Five Years of Securitization Theory: A Corpus-Based Review, *Political Studies Review*, [e-journal] vol. 21, no. 2, pp.376–389, Available Online: https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=poh&AN=163456217&site=eds-live&scope=site [Accessed 6 February 2024]

Bail, C. (2022). Breaking the Social Media Prism: How to Make Our Platforms Less Polarizing, [e-book] Princeton, UNITED STATES: Princeton University Press, Available Online: http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lund/detail.action?docID=6450584 [Accessed 31 October 2023]

BankID, statistics. (2024). *bankid.com*, Available Online: https://www.bankid.com/om-oss/statistik [Accessed 13 May 2024]

Bellanova, R., Irion, K., Lindskov Jacobsen, K., Ragazzi, F., Saugmann, R. & Suchman, L. (2021). Toward a Critique of Algorithmic Violence, *International Political Sociology*, [e-journal] vol. 15, no. 1, pp.121–150, Available Online: https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/15/1/121/6170592 [Accessed 6 December 2023]

Bergeron, S., Cohn, C. & Duncanson, C. (2017). Rebuilding Bridges: Toward a Feminist Research Agenda for Postwar Reconstruction, *Politics & Gender*, [e-journal] vol. 13, no. 04, pp.715–721, Available Online: https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S1743923X17000368/type/journal_article [Accessed 9 May 2024]

Betalningsrapport 2024. (2024). , Available Online: https://www.riksbank.se/globalassets/media/rapporter/betalningsrapport/2024/svensk/betalningsrapport-2024.pdf [Accessed 13 May 2024]

Bourdieu, P. (2001). Masculine Domination, Stanford University Press

Brinkmann, S. (2023). Qualitative Interviewing: Conversational Knowledge Through Research Interviews, [e-book] Oxford University Press, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197648186.001.0001 [Accessed 29 April 2024]
Brinkmann, S. & Kvale, S. (2015). InterViews : Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing, 3., [updated] ed., Sage Publications
Brockbank, M. & Greene, S. (2022). Beyond the Carceral/Anti-Carceral Binary: Considerations for Addressing Gender-Based and Sexual Violence, *British Journal of Social Work*, [e-journal] vol. 52, no. 8, pp.5027–5044, Available Online: https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=ccm&AN=160696017&site=eds-live&scope=site [Accessed 23 April 2024]
Bucher, T. (2018a). Neither Black nor Box: (Un)Knowing Algorithms, in T. Bucher (ed.), *If...Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*, [e-book] Oxford University Press, p.0, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190493028.003.0003 [Accessed 28 August 2023]
Bucher, T. (2018b). If...Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics, [e-book] Oxford University Press, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190493028.001.0001 [Accessed 29 April 2024]
Burton, J. (2023). Algorithmic Extremism? The Securitization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Its Impact on Radicalism, Polarization and Political Violence, *Technology in Society*, [e-journal] vol. 75, p.102262, Available Online: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160791X23000672 [Accessed 23 February 2024]
Buzan, B. & Hansen, L. (2009a). The Evolution of International Security Studies, 1st edn, [e-book] Cambridge University Press, Available Online: https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9780511817762/type/book [Accessed 17 February 2024]
Buzan, B. & Hansen, L. (2009b). The Evolution of International Security Studies, *Cambridge Core*, Available Online: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/evolution-of-international-security-studies/BB04557E83B673F58799E2B62FA83DA1 [Accessed 17 February 2024]
Buzan, B., Waever, O. & Wilde, J. de. (1998). Security: A New Framework for Analysis, Boulder, Colo.: Rienner
Calabro, S. (2018). From the Message Board to the Front Door: Addressing the Offline Consequences of Race- and Gender-Based Doxxing and Swatting, *Suffolk University Law Review*, [e-journal] vol. 51, no. 1, pp.55–76, Available Online: https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/sufflr51&i=65 [Accessed 8 May 2024]
Çaliş Duman, M. (2023). Digital Violence and Women: Systematizations of Researchs and Suggestions for Future Research, *Anadolu Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, [e-journal] vol. 24, no. 3, pp.359–398, Available Online: http://dergipark.org.tr/en/doi/10.53443/anadoluibfd.1187094 [Accessed 8 May 2024]
Caprioli, M. (2005). Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in

Predicting Internal Conflict, *International Studies Quarterly*, [e-journal] vol. 49, no. 2, pp.161–178, Available Online: https://academic.oup.com/isq/article-lookup/doi/10.1111/j.0020-8833.2005.00340.x [Accessed 22 January 2024]
Cerise, S., Lew, R., Mingeirou, K. & Osman, Y. (2022). ACCELERATING EFFORTS TO TACKLE ONLINE AND TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG), Available Online: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Accelerating-efforts-to-tackle-online-and-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-en_0.pdf [Accessed 1 May 2024]
Ciston, S. (2019). Intersectional Artificial Intelligence Is Essential: Polyvocal, Multimodal, Experimental Methods to Save AI, vol. 11, no. 2
Cohn, C. (1987). Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals, *Signs*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp.687–718
Cohn, C. & Duncanson, C. (2020). Women, Peace and Security in a Changing Climate, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, [e-journal] vol. 22, no. 5, pp.742–762, Available Online: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14616742.2020.1843364 [Accessed 9 May 2024]
Cormen, T. H., Leiserson, C. E., Rivest, R. L. & Stein, C. (2022). Introduction to Algorithms, Fourth edition., MIT Press
Couldry, N. & Mejias, U. A. (2019). Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject, *Television & New Media*, [e-journal] vol. 20, no. 4, pp.336–349, Available Online: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1527476418796632 [Accessed 4 January 2024]
Cruz, M. & Luke, D. (2021). Methodology and Academic Extractivism: The Neo-Colonialism of the British University, in *Decolonising Curricula and Pedagogy in Higher Education*, Routledge
Cuenca-Piqueras, C., Fernández-Prados, J. S. & González-Moreno, M. J. (2020). Face-to-Face Versus Online Harassment of European Women: Importance of Date and Place of Birth, *Sexuality & Culture: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, [e-journal] vol. 24, no. 1, pp.157–173, Available Online: https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=edssjs&AN=edssjs.82BB4631&site=eds-live&scope=site [Accessed 1 February 2024]
Downing, J. (2023). Critical Security Studies in the Digital Age: Social Media and Security. [Elektronisk Resurs], Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.
Elman, C. & Jensen, M. A. (eds). (2014). Realism Reader, London: Routledge
European Commission. (2024). *European Commission*, Available Online: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence_en [Accessed 18 April 2024]
Facebook. (2024). *Internetstiftelsen*, Available Online: https://internetstiftelsen.se/guide/anvandarvillkoren/facebook/ [Accessed 13 May 2024]
Forsén, J. (2020). Vilka lagar gäller egentligen på internet?, *Internetkunskap*,

Available Online: https://internetkunskap.se/artiklar/sa-funkar-internet/vilka-lagar-galler-egentligen-pa-internet/ [Accessed 14 May 2024]
Francisco, S. C. & Felmlee, D. H. (2022). What Did You Call Me? An Analysis of Online Harassment Towards Black and Latinx Women, *Race and Social Problems*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp.1–13
Giannoumis, G. A. & Skjerve, R. A. (2021). Digital Accessibility and Intersectional Discrimination: Accessible Technology and the Developing World, Oxford: Oxford University Press
Gilpin, R. (1981). War and Change in World Politics, Cambridge University Press
Gomes, M. S. & Marques, R. R. (2021). Can Securitization Theory Be Saved from Itself? A Decolonial and Feminist Intervention, *Security Dialogue*, [e-journal] vol. 52, no. 1_suppl, pp.78–87, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106211027795 [Accessed 6 February 2024]
Gul, A. (2023). Revisiting the Russia-Ukraine War through the Lens of Realism, *Institute for a Greater Europe*, Available Online: https://institutegreatereurope.com/revisiting-the-russia-ukraine-war-through-the-lens-of-realism/ [Accessed 6 February 2024]
Hansen, L. (2000). The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, [e-journal] vol. 29, no. 2, pp.285–306, Available Online: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/03058298000290020501 [Accessed 3 October 2023]
Hansen, L. (2020). Are 'Core' Feminist Critiques of Securitization Theory Racist? A Reply to Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, *Security Dialogue*, [e-journal] vol. 51, no. 4, pp.378–385, Available Online: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0967010620907198 [Accessed 3 October 2023]
Hansen, L. & Nissenbaum, H. (2009). Digital Disaster, Cyber Security, and the Copenhagen School, *International Studies Quarterly*, [e-journal] vol. 53, no. 4, pp.1155–1175, Available Online: https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.27735139&site=eds-live&scope=site [Accessed 6 February 2024]
Haraway, D. (1990). Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, New York: Routledge
Henshaw, A. (2023). Digital Frontiers in Gender and Security: Bringing Critical Perspectives Online, 1st edn, [e-book] Bristol University Press, Available Online: https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.1544761 [Accessed 7 May 2024]
Hicks, J. (2021). Global Evidence on the Prevalence and Impact of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), [e-journal], Available Online: https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/16983 [Accessed 7 February 2024]
Hough, P. (2018). Understanding Global Security, Fourth edition., [e-book] Routledge, Available Online: https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=cat07147a&AN=lub.6274217&site=eds-

live&scope=site [Accessed 22 January 2024]
Howell, A. & Richter-Montpetit, M. (2020). Is Securitization Theory Racist? Civilizationism, Methodological Whiteness, and Antiblack Thought in the Copenhagen School, *Security Dialogue*, [e-journal] vol. 51, no. 1, pp.3–22, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010619862921 [Accessed 23 January 2024]
Im, J., Schoenebeck, S., Grill, G., Batool, A., Alharbi, R., Funwie, A., Gankhuu, T., Gilbert, E., Naseem, M., Iriarte, M. & Wilkinson, D. (2022). Women's Perspectives on Harm and Justice after Online Harassment, *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, vol. 6, no. 2 CSCW
Instagram | Svenskarna Och Internet. (2024). *Internetstiftelsen*, Available Online: https://svenskarnaochinternet.se/utvalt/sociala-medier/instagram/ [Accessed 13 May 2024]
Jones, C., Trott, V. & Wright, S. (2020). Sluts and Soyboys: MGTOW and the Production of Misogynistic Online Harassment, *New Media & Society*, [e-journal] vol. 22, no. 10, pp.1903–1921, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819887141 [Accessed 7 February 2024]
Julie King, Mark King, Nicole Edwards, Julie-Anne Carroll, Hanna Watling, Mujibul Anam, Melissa Bull, & Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios. (2021). Exploring Women's Experience of Gender-Based Violence and Other Threats to Safety on Public Transport in Bangladesh: International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy, *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, [e-journal] vol. 10, no. 4, pp.158–173, Available Online: https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=edsdoj&AN=edsdoj.b488b9162d914851971c5d70c392b8fb&site=eds-live&scope=site [Accessed 23 April 2024]
Kant, I. (1903). Perpetual Peace; a Philosophical Essay, 1795, London: S. Sonnenschein
Karlsson, B. (2024). Alla skyddade boenden i Norrbotten tvingas stänga, *SVT Nyheter*, 23 April, Available Online: https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/norrbotten/allt-fler-kvinnojourer-i-norrbotten-tvingas-stanga-kvinnor-lamnas-at-sitt-ode [Accessed 14 May 2024]
Katz-Buonincontro, J. (2022). Interviews, in *How to Interview and Conduct Focus Groups.*, [e-book] Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, pp.23–45, Available Online: https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=psyh&AN=2022-79852-003&site=eds-live&scope=site [Accessed 7 March 2024]
Kelly, L. (2023). Re-Politicising the Future of Work: Automation Anxieties, Universal Basic Income, and the End of Techno-Optimism, *Journal of Sociology*, [e-journal] vol. 59, no. 4, pp.828–843, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833221128999 [Accessed 14 May 2024]
Kinnvall, C. & Mitzen, J. (2018). Ontological Security and Conflict: The Dynamics of Crisis and the Constitution of Community, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, [e-journal] vol. 21, no. 4, pp.825–835, Available Online: http://link.springer.com/10.1057/s41268-018-0161-1 [Accessed 22

January 2024]
Kustermans, J. (2023). Democratic Peace: A Historical and Cultural Practice, London: Routledge
Limantė, A., Tereškinas, A. & Vaičiūnienė, R. (2023). Gender-Based Violence and the Law. Global Perspectives and Eastern European Practices: Taylor & Francis EBA Social Sciences & Economics 2023-2024; DOAB Directory of Open Access Books, Routledge
Lindhal, D. (2017). Stalkad på swish - P3 Nyheter Granskar - P3 Nyheter Dokumentär, *Sveriges Raadio*, Available Online: https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/963932 [Accessed 28 March 2024]
Lomba, N., Navarra, C. & Fernandes, M. (2021). Combating Gender-Based Violence: Cyber Violence : European Added Value Assessment., Available Online: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/23053 [Accessed 2 February 2024]
Loney-Howes, R. (2020). Online Anti-Rape Activism: Exploring the Politics of the Personal in the Age of Digital Media, [e-book] Emerald Publishing, Available Online: https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/43818 [Accessed 7 February 2024]
Lumsden, K. & Harmer, E. (eds). (2019). Online Othering : Exploring Digital Violence and Discrimination on the Web, Springer International Publishing
Mann, S. (2016). The Research Interview, [e-book] London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, Available Online: http://link.springer.com/10.1057/9781137353368 [Accessed 1 March 2024]
Mäns Våld mot Kvinnor. (2022). *unizonjourer.se*, Available Online: https://www.unizonjourer.se/vara-sakfragor/mans-vald-mot-kvinnor/ [Accessed 18 April 2024]
Martinelli, M. (2015). UNSC Resolution 1325 Fifteen Years On, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Available Online: https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06910 [Accessed 15 May 2024]
Mascha Wiechmann. (2022). Gender-Based Violence and the Nordic Paradox: Journal of Comparative Social Work, *Journal of Comparative Social Work*, vol. 17, no. 2
Massari, A. (2021). Visual Securitization: Humanitarian Representations and Migration Governance, [e-book] Cham: Springer International Publishing, Available Online: https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-030-71143-6 [Accessed 23 February 2024]
Mearsheimer, J. J. (2018). The Great Delusion : Liberal Dreams and International Realities, Yale University Press
Melgar Alcantud, P., Campdepadrós-Cullell, R., Fuentes-Pumarola, C. & Mut-Montalvà, E. (2021). 'I Think I Will Need Help': A Systematic Review of Who Facilitates the Recovery from Gender-Based Violence and How They Do So, *Health Expectations*, [e-journal] vol. 24, no. 1, pp.1–7, Available Online: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/hex.13157 [Accessed 23 April 2024]
Mendes, K., Ringrose, J. & Keller, J. (2019). Introduction: Digital Feminist Interventions, in K. Mendes, J. Ringrose, & J. Keller (eds), *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture*, [e-book] Oxford

University Press, p.0, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190697846.003.0001 [Accessed 7 March 2024]
Mhajne, A. & Henshaw, A. L. (eds). (2024). Critical Perspectives on Cybersecurity. Feminist and Postcolonial Interventions, Oxford University Press
Mosseri, A. (2023). Instagram Ranking Explained, *Instagram.Com*, Available Online: https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/instagram-ranking-explained [Accessed 25 April 2024]
Nadim, M. & Fladmoe, A. (2021). Silencing Women? Gender and Online Harassment, *Social Science Computer Review*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp.245–258
Nilsen, A. E. (2016). The UNSC Resolution 1325 and Sudan: Solving the 'Silent Security Dilemma'?, *International Relations*, vol. 1, no. 2
Noble, S. U. (2018). Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism, [e-book] NYU Press, Available Online: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1pwt9w5 [Accessed 22 January 2024]
Nordenson, J. (2016). Contextualizing Internet Studies: Beyond the Online/Offline Divide, *CyberOrient*, [e-journal] vol. 10, no. 1, pp.115–131, Available Online: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/j.cyo2.20161001.0006 [Accessed 22 January 2024]
Nyman, C., Evertsson, L. & Henrikson, A.-S. (2023). Digitally Facilitated Economic Abuse in the Age of Digital Financial Services – New Risks for Economic Abuse in Intimate Partner Violence, *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, [e-journal] vol. 7, no. 3, pp.368–382, Available Online: https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/journals/jgbv/7/3/article-p368.xml [Accessed 7 May 2024]
Om Unizon Unizon är riksförbund för över 140 idéburna kvinnojourer, tjejjourer och ungdomsjourer som arbetar för ett jämställt samhälle fritt från våld. - Unizon. (2024). *Om Unizon Unizon är riksförbund för över 140 idéburna kvinnojourer, tjejjourer och ungdomsjourer som arbetar för ett jämställt samhälle fritt från våld. - Unizon*, Available Online: https://www.unizonjourer.se/om-unizon/ [Accessed 14 May 2024]
Pacciardi, A. (2023). Viral Bodies: Racialised and Gendered Logics in the Securitisation of Migration during COVID-19 in Italy, 3, *Critical Studies on Security*, [e-journal] vol. 11, no. 3, pp.176–193, Available Online: http://lup.lub.lu.se/record/8c1b1bf0-fdb0-4b58-982f-6c61b2fe6712 [Accessed 23 February 2024]
Plan International. (2020). Free to Be Online? Girls' and Young Women's Experiences of Online Harassment, United Kingdom: Plan International, Available Online: https://plan-international.org/publications/free-to-be-online/ [Accessed 8 February 2024]
Ra'ad Al Hussein, Z. (2018). The Impact of Online Violence on Women Human Rights Defenders and Women's Organisations, *OHCHR*, Available Online: https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2018/06/impact-online-violence-women-human-rights-defenders-and-womens-organisations [Accessed 1 May 2024]
Rennie, E. (2023). 'What a Lying Slut': The (Re)Production of Rape Myths in Online Misogyny towards Women Disclosing Their Experiences of Rape through

the #MeToo Movement, *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, [e-journal] vol. 7, no. 2, pp.204–219, Available Online: https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/journals/jgbv/7/2/article-p204.xml [Accessed 7 May 2024]
Russo, N. F. & Pirlott, A. (2006). Gender-Based Violence, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, [e-journal] vol. 1087, no. 1, pp.178–205, Available Online: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1196/annals.1385.024 [Accessed 14 May 2024]
Saleha, S. (2024). Kvinnojouren tvingas stänga skyddat boende – når inte upp till kraven, *Sveriges Radio*, 13 April, Available Online: https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/kvinnojouren-tvingas-stanga-skyddat-boende-nar-inte-upp-till-kraven [Accessed 14 May 2024]
Salmons, J. (2012). Cases in Online Interview Research, [e-book] 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., Available Online: https://methods.sagepub.com/book/cases-in-online-interview-research [Accessed 21 April 2023]
Salter, M. B., Cohn, C., Neal, A. W., Wibben, A. T., Burgess, J. P., Elbe, S., Austin, J. L., Huysmans, J., Walker, R., Wæver, O., Williams, M. C., Gilbert, E., Frowd, P. M., Rosenow, D., Martins, B. O., Jabri, V., Aradau, C., Leander, A., Bousquet, A., Stavrianakis, A., Stern, M., Sandvik, K. B., Lobo-Guerrero, L., de Goede, M., Bellanova, R., Gusterson, H., Epstein, C., Mustapha, J., Lidén, K. & Hansen, L. (2019). Horizon Scan: Critical Security Studies for the next 50 Years, *Security Dialogue*, [e-journal] vol. 50, no. 4S, pp.9–37, Available Online: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26753670 [Accessed 23 January 2024]
Schulenberg, K., Freeman, G., Li, L. & Barwulor, C. (2023). Creepy Towards My Avatar Body, Creepy Towards My Body": How Women Experience and Manage Harassment Risks in Social Virtual Reality, *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, vol. 7, no. CSCW2
Share of Persons Who Have Used the Internet Several Times per Day. (2024). *Statistikmyndigheten SCB*, Available Online: https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/living-conditions/living-conditions/ict-usage-in-households-and-by-individuals/pong/tables-and-graphs/share-of-persons-who-have-used-the-internet-several-times-per-day/ [Accessed 18 April 2024]
Siapera, E. (2019). Online Misogyny as Witch Hunt: Primitive Accumulation in the Age of Techno-Capitalism, in D. Ging & E. Siapera (eds), *Gender Hate Online: Understanding the New Anti-Feminism*, [e-book] Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp.21–43, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96226-9_2 [Accessed 14 May 2024]
Sjoberg, L. (2010). Feminist Security Theorizing, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, [e-book], Available Online: https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-437 [Accessed 12 May 2024]
Sjöstedt, R. (2017). Securitization Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, [e-book] Oxford University Press, Available Online: https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acr

efore-9780190228637-e-479 [Accessed 22 January 2024]
Sobieraj, S. (2020). Credible Threat: Attacks Against Women Online and the Future of Democracy, [e-book] Oxford University Press, Available Online: https://academic.oup.com/book/36620 [Accessed 2 May 2024]
Sobieraj, S. (2022). Gender, Digital Toxicity, and Political Voice Online: The Oxford Handbook of Digital Media Sociology:, Oxford University Press
Sociala medier 2023. (2024). *Internetstiftelsen*, Available Online: https://svenskarnaochinternet.se/rapporter/svenskarna-och-internet-2023/sociala-medier/ [Accessed 13 May 2024]
Stabile, B., Grant, A., Purohit, H. & Harris, K. (2019). Sex, Lies, and Stereotypes: Gendered Implications of Fake News for Women in Politics, *Public Integrity*, [e-journal] vol. 21, no. 5, pp.491–502, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2019.1626695 [Accessed 18 April 2024]
Steele, B. J. (2007). Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State, London: Routledge
Sundbeck, J. & Debels, M. (2024). Kvinnojouren tvingas säga upp personal: ”Blir svårare att få hjälp”, *SVT Nyheter*, 5 April, Available Online: https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/uppsala/kvinnojouren-tvingas-saga-upp-personal-blir-svarare-att-fa-hjalp [Accessed 14 May 2024]
SvD. (2024). Tolv kvinnor misstänks ha mördats i år, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 4 April, Available Online: https://www.svd.se/a/gEXr39/tolv-misstankta-kvinnomord-pa-tre-manader [Accessed 18 April 2024]
Taulli, T. (2019). Artificial Intelligence Basics: A Non-Technical Introduction, [e-book] Berkeley, CA, UNITED STATES: Apress L. P., Available Online: http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lund/detail.action?docID=5845528 [Accessed 22 January 2024]
Thakur, R. (2016). The United Nations, Peace and Security: From Collective Security to the Responsibility to Protect, 2nd edn, [e-book] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Available Online: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/united-nations-peace-and-security/A9564185E2C701D897E877289A6A5A8B [Accessed 22 January 2024]
The Enforcement Framework under the Digital Services Act | Shaping Europe’s Digital Future. (2024). , Available Online: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/dsa-enforcement [Accessed 14 May 2024]
The History of the General Data Protection Regulation | European Data Protection Supervisor. (2018). , Available Online: https://www.edps.europa.eu/data-protection/data-protection/legislation/history-general-data-protection-regulation_en [Accessed 14 May 2024]
The Ripple Effect: COVID-19 and the Epidemic of Online Abuse. (2020). , Available Online: https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Glitch-and-EVAW-The-Ripple-Effect-Online-abuse-during-COVID-19-Sept-2020.pdf [Accessed 15 May 2024]
The State of the World’s Human Rights: April 2024. (2024). , Available Online: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/ [Accessed 14 May 2024]
Thornborrow, J. & Chartier, P. (2023). Sharing Stories of an Experience Shared:

From ‘Me Too’ as Narrative to #MeToo as Political Movement, in D. Dalton & A. Smith (eds), *Gender, Sexuality and the UN’s SDGs: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, [e-book] Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp.147–168, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31046-1_8 [Accessed 2 May 2024]
Trott, V. (2022). Feminist Activism and Platform Politics, London: Routledge
UN Women. (2023). Technology-Facilitated Violence against Women: Taking Stock of Evidence and Data Collection
van Dijck, J., Poell, T. & de Waal, M. (2018). The Platform Society, [e-book] Oxford University Press, Available Online: https://academic.oup.com/book/12378 [Accessed 22 January 2024]
van, J. (2018a). The Platform Society as a Contested Concept, in J. van Dijck, T. Poell, & M. de Waal (eds), *The Platform Society*, [e-book] Oxford University Press, p.0, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190889760.003.0002 [Accessed 28 August 2023]
van, J. (2018b). Platform Mechanisms, in J. van Dijck, T. Poell, & M. de Waal (eds), *The Platform Society*, [e-book] Oxford University Press, p.0, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190889760.003.0003 [Accessed 28 August 2023]
Vergès, F. (2021). A Decolonial Feminism, translated by A. J. Bohrer, London: Pluto Press
Violence against Women. (2024). , Available Online: https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women [Accessed 26 April 2024]
Wæver, O. & Buzan, B. (2020). Racism and Responsibility – The Critical Limits of Deepfake Methodology in Security Studies: A Reply to Howell and Richter-Montpetit, *Security Dialogue*, [e-journal] vol. 51, no. 4, pp.386–394, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010620916153 [Accessed 6 February 2024]
Walt, S. M. (2005). Taming American Power : The Global Response to U.S. Primacy, 1. ed., Norton
Waltz, K. N. (2010). Theory of International Politics, Reissued., Waveland Press
Whetstone, C. & Luna, K. C. (2024). A Call for Feminist Insights in Cybersecurity: Implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security in Cyberspace, in A. Mhajne & A. Henshaw (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Cybersecurity: Feminist and Postcolonial Interventions*, [e-book] Oxford University Press, pp.25–51, Available Online: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197695883.003.0002 [Accessed 14 May 2024]
Wilk, A. V. D. (n.d.). Cyber Violence and Hate Speech Online against Women
Yerke, A. & DeFeo, J. (2016). Redefining Intimate Partner Violence Beyond the Binary to Include Transgender People: Journal of Family Violence, *Journal of Family Violence*, [e-journal] vol. 31, no. 8, pp.975–979, Available Online: https://ludwig.lub.lu.se/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=a9h&AN=119974171&site=eds-live&scope=site [Accessed 23 April 2024]

## Appendix A. Consent Form.

Here is information about the study you have been asked to participate in. The interview will take approximately one hour. The material will be used for a master's thesis in social sciences at Lund University and will be translated into English. Only the interviewer, in this case Saga Strinnvik, will take part in the entire material. Part of the anonymized material can be shared with the thesis supervisor. The study aims to explore and understand the experiences of conducting activism online. Please read the following points and reflect on whether you are comfortable with them. If you have any questions or would like some clarification, don't hesitate to contact me.

- I am willingly accepting to participate in this study
- I understand that I can withdraw from participating at any given time and can refrain from answering questions without consequences
- I've had the aim of the study explained to me in writing and had had the opportunity to ask questions about it
- I consent to the interview being recorded (voice only)
- I understand that the material will be anonymized by changing my name, the name of my social media accounts and other relevant information that otherwise might reveal my identity or the identity of people I mention throughout the interview
- I consent to the original recordings being stored locally until the thesis has been handed in and passed
- I understand that I have the right to ask for information about my interview and request access to my recording

<u>If you consent to all the points above, please answer this email with the following text:</u> I NAME SURNAME have read, understood and consent to all the points in the consent form.

## Appendix B. Interview Guide

### Introduction

- Thank you for being here
- Remind the participant that their participation is voluntary and that they can refrain from answering questions.

### Background

- Name, age, pronouns, education
- What social media platforms do you use? How do you use them?
- Tell me a bit about yourself; how did you get involved in women's rights questions?

### Activism

- What content do you usually post relating to your activism?
- (If applicable) Do you post about women's rights questions on your private accounts, too?
- Why is it important to you to post about women's rights issues?
- Do you advocate for these questions online only or offline as well? How so?

### The dilemma

- What is the thought process before posting something related to your activism?
- What types of interactions do you have on your account?
    - Mostly likes or DMs or comments?
- Have you been hindered by the community guidelines on your social platforms?
- What do you feel about the tone online? How do you feel about the tone of your account?

- Have you had to close comment sections on your posts or, in other ways, restrict interactions on your account(s)?
- Have you removed posts? Why?
- Can you discuss anything online? Why?

**Navigating the dilemma**

- Do you have any strategies to stay safe in your activism online? If so, what are they? Why have you adapted these strategies?

**Conclusion**

- Is there anything that you want to talk about that I missed to ask about?
- (If they want to choose their pseudonym) What would you like to be called if you had another name?
- After our conversation today, do you have anyone in mind that I should contact for an interview? Is there anyone you want to introduce me to?
- Thank you for your time! Ask if they would like to have the finished thesis. Remind them that if they have any questions, they can contact you.