

Digital Policy. A feminist Introduction

by Francesca Schmidt

Unfortunately, the book is currently only available in German. But you can read the introduction & conclusion here.

Introduction: The beginnings

Progressing digitalization is restructuring society, whereby existing dominance and power structures – including in the shape of sexism and racism – manifest themselves in technologies, algorithms, and the use of media. The aim of digital policy is to establish a regulatory framework for the digital transformation of society. Ideally, this should lead to a strengthening of the positive, emancipatory aspects. In academic circles, digital policy has been a topic of discussion since as early as the 1990s. This separate policy and legal area still tends to be a less familiar topic among the broader public, despite civil society initiatives long having called out the need for a certain level of regulation. With regard to the digital public sphere and social networks in particular, the calls for regulation have since grown very loud in the media and have, in part, also resulted in the adoption of policies. That being said, the number of active citizens quickly narrows when it comes to copyright matters outside of cease-and-desist lawyers or data flow monitoring.

At its core, digital policy encapsulates the following four broad thematic areas: addressing and politicizing 1) access to the internet, 2) access to content, 3) copyright, and 4) data protection and privacy (Braman 2011). In the meantime, the digital public sphere is being touted as the fifth broad thematic area (Ganz 2013). Digital policy thus concerns a policy for the internet. The digital policy area is, in the context of the German-speaking world at least, not significantly impacted by feminist approaches. From a policy perspective, i.e. above all in the sense of being enshrined in parliament, digital policy is, in fact, still evolving (Greef 2017; Reiberg 2018; Schröder 2012). Hence, the aim of this book is to spell out or put forth feminist contributions and standpoints.

Exactly what the digital policy area entails is outlined further below. It can already be stated at this juncture, however, that it relates to the interplay between internet governance and internet policy, i.e. (international) regulations and frameworks (Working Group on Internet Governance 2005), on the one hand, and legislation that has been specifically established or needed to be adjusted to the digital environment (Braman 2011), on the other. This interaction affects all four of the aforementioned thematic areas.

Even though these thematic areas are explained individually here, and in the course of this book, they are nevertheless mutually dependent in their practical application. The realms of digital violence and surveillance chosen for inclusion in this book and of relevance to feminist policies can be found in multiple thematic areas of digital policy. As a consequence, both the digital public sphere and access to the internet and its content are areas of significance to the regulation of and discursive negotiation concerning digital violence. By contrast, surveillance focuses on access to content and/or on data protection and privacy, though this field of application also deals with matters concerning access to the internet in general as well as the

digital public sphere. Both of these practical examples illustrate the interwoven nature of these areas as they relate to feminist digital policy.

Digital policy requires an intersectional, feminist perspective, i.e. a viewpoint that both analyses and critically appraises how forms of discrimination based on gender, social background or *race*¹ are interconnected with new technologies and digital cultures. The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined by Prof. Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in her essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”. Citing three legal proceedings, she illustrates the mechanisms that render impossible any recognition by the courts of specific forms of discrimination experienced by Black² women. In all three proceedings, Black women were either denied being representative of all women, or the combination of *race* and gender – in this case of Black and female – was not recognized as being a discriminatory fact (Crenshaw 1989).

This book seeks to contribute to the research and activism environment of feminist digital policy by adopting an intersectional perspective and, through digital violence and surveillance, illustrate what gender-based structures of discrimination and disadvantage at the interface between *race* and social background currently exist in the digital culture: What feminist perspectives are the result of reshaping digital policy and rebalancing the ensuing debates surrounding it? How can digital violence be regulated and why is this urgently necessary in order to comprehend the nature of the change that the relationship between the private and the public spheres is subjected to. Surveillance is another issue that is ideally suited to illustrating the feminist, intersectional perspectives of structures of suppression and discrimination and thus exemplifying that the desire for security and control over one group leads to surveillance and restriction of the other. A formal distinction is made to achieve this: The first part of this book provides a conceptual and historical classification, whilst the second half is devoted to the application.

Here, regulation is not limited to the enforcement of laws, i.e. bans. Digital and technological advancements pose challenges to regulatory policy as “the governance of society through regulatory policies, i.e. by means of the establishment, monitoring and sanctioning of general rules, [proves to be] highly preconditional – especially when the contents of regulations are politically controversial, need to adapt quickly to changing problem areas, and their compliance is difficult to monitor” (Czada, Lütz & Mette 2003, 13). Moreover, regulation can not only mean enforcing laws through a bureaucratic implementation of rules. Otherwise, laws will always come across as a barrier to development. “[W]hen science and technology produce new problems and solutions, [the law is unable to keep up] - unless it got in the way of that development.” (ibid., 14). A feminist perspective on digital policy must also be aware of the ambivalences associated with the current, pressing call for the state to intervene with regulatory action. Even though such a call –triggered by (digital) patriarchal violence – is understandable, the question remains as to whether (patriarchal) violence can be combated through equally violent structures, such as sanctions. The acknowledgement of violence against women, be it mental or physical abuse, is one of the successes of the women’s movement of the late 20th century. Hence, there is a comprehensive, theoretical examination

¹ The term ‘race’ makes it possible “to evade the implicit biologism and fascist connotations of the German word” (Dietze 2013: 29). It furthermore refers to the tradition of critical appropriation (cf. Lepold & Mateo 2019) (this is true for the German version of the text).

² The term ‘Black’ is always capitalized below to illustrate the inscribed resistance potential of People of Color and Black people (cf. Eggers, Kilomba, Piesche & Arndt 2005).

of this topic (Dackweiler & Schäfer 2002; Geiger 2008; Hagemann-White 1992, 2002; Sauer 2011). Violence thus occurs in many forms and places but is never random. It runs its course alongside power and discriminative structures and affects some groups more than others. Digital violence acts in much the same way, the difference being that – unlike sexualized violence, which primarily takes place in domestic surroundings – it largely occurs in the public sphere, i.e. in forums, on social networks, in commentaries under online articles (even though domestic, sexualized violence is also increasingly spreading into the digital space). What's more, this form of violence is typically personified. That being said, comments such as: "You're nothing but a dumb slut that pisses out their mindless drivel along with their army of commentating whores. Get a job, you fucking cow!" (hatr.org 2011) impact the entire group. This quote will be the only verbatim example of its kind in this book as I do not wish to afford such violence any more attention than it deserves. However, it is also necessary to cite the level of articulated violence at which we currently find ourselves. Digital violence, in its various manifestations, has, unlike domestic violence, a public bargaining framework that extends beyond the personified level. Or, to put it another way: the digital public sphere is the bargaining space for digital violence. At the same time, digital violence represents the mechanism that produces exclusions within the digital public sphere. One of the tasks of the (digital) public sphere is to establish a democratic public sphere that can help shape policies through discussion. Although it also lives off the bargaining space of the digital public sphere, digital violence impacts the level of participation in precisely this democratic public sphere and can lead to exclusions. In response to the exclusions, but also ever since the inception of digitalization, digital feminists have used the potential of the Net as a means of discussing and politicizing feminist matters on precisely this platform. As important as their engagement may be, this volume seeks to shift the emphasis. In what follows, I will draw a line between digital feminism³³ and feminist digital policy or digital policy with feminist perspectives. A multiplicity of digital feminists does politics through the Net. Feminist digital policy does politics for the Net. The former use the internet as a tool; the latter concern themselves with the (physical) structures of the internet, the associated forms of gendering, and the impacting emancipatory policies. The feminist confrontation with the internet and/or digital technologies, as can also be read in Chapter 2, has a long-standing tradition. Back in the early 1990s, it was Judy Wajcman who called attention to the impact of technology on gender relations in the area of work and on gendered technology as such (Wajcman 1991). In the German-speaking world, there have been numerous examinations of the relationship between women and information technology. This occupational area used to be dominated by female specialists who, as this field has grown in influence and profitability, have taken a backseat since the 1990s and been replaced by men (Becker-Schmidt 1994; Höfels 2001; Hoffmann 1987; Roloff 1993; Schelhowe 1990). Furthermore, this era increasingly saw the emergence of cyberfeminist groupings who, in their disparity, have further opened up the internet as a bargaining space for a feminist confrontation with technology. These have been both artistic/activist in nature (Critical Art Ensemble 2020; Old Boys Network 1997; VNS Matrix 1991, 1996) and science-oriented (Braidotti 2002; Fernandez 2003; Haraway 1991; Plant 1997; Stone 2016; Wilding 1998). One major finding of cyberfeminism advocates was that: the internet "is not a utopia of nongender; it is already socially inscribed with regard to bodies, sex, age, economics, social class, and race" (Wilding 1998: 9). In the last years in particular, this intersectional feminist confrontation with power relations and technology has continued to be intensively pursued. With regard to biased algorithms, i.e. automated decision-making processes, it becomes apparent that relations of

³ For more information on how digital feminist issues and modes of expression are categorized in media science, compare (Kohout 2019).

violence and inequality are frequently part and parcel of the system, and consequently the technology (Buolamwini & Gebru 2018; Noble 2018). But intersectional debates are also being held on gendered and racialized internet access, on representation and technology. They also allude to the fact that reflecting on *race*, critical whiteness studies, intersectionality (Noble & Tynes 2015) and Black cyberfeminism (McMillan Cottom 2016) can greatly contribute towards the field of Internet Studies not remaining shackled by the spectacle of *the Other* and thus disavowing the racism that exists (Daniels 2013). Within the realms of visual cultures, Lisa Nakamura states that the internet is indeed a place for Black women or Women of Color for their own *race*-related, ethnic or gender-specific visual and virtual cultures (Nakamura 2008). Shortly thereafter, she takes things a step further in her collaboration with Peter Chow-White (2012) by maintaining that the infiltration of digital media as a way of thinking and knowing, and as a format for producing and consuming information, forces us to rethink our understanding of *race* both in digital and analogue media by broadening the spectrum beyond issues of access and representation (Nakamura & Chow-White 2012).

Relations of violence and inequality appear to manifest themselves on the internet as if through a magnifying glass. Feminist research has, as far back as the early 1990s, described trolling as the conscious disruption of communication (Herring 1997). Soon thereafter, the political and legal discourse centers around the issue of regulating digital violence (Citron 2014; Hentschel & Schmidt 2014; Lembke 2018), which subsequently also always constitutes a regulation of communication, a contentious issue in feminist circles (Schrupp 2011). The communication discourse revolves around changing the relationship between the public and private spheres that is taking place in the course of digitalization, whereby, on the one hand, it is suggested that spaces for feminist engagement are opening up and can ultimately unfold a discursive force (Drüeke and Klaus 2014; Drüeke and Zobl 2013). On the other hand, it is precisely such an opening, the digital public sphere and/or the increasing desire for *low privacy* (Heller 2011; Jarvis 2011; mspro 2011) which poses a danger to vulnerable subject positions, whether through increasing surveillance or digital violence. Within the realms of feminist digital policy, seen as a policy for the Net, there is currently only one study, by Kathrin Ganz (2013), that opens up this field, though it does not delve deeply into the fields of application. This book seeks to follow on from this and illustrate new aspects.

Let's take another look back in time. The internet was once associated with the liberation of gender norming, racialization or homophobia. In the 'new' world of cyberspace, restrictive and one-dimensional categories were no longer supposed to play a role (Barlow 1996; Draude o.J.). John Perry Barlow ended his "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" of 1996 with the sentence: "We will create a civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace. May it be more humane and fair than the world your governments have made before" (Barlow 1996). The notion that the internet was a space where categories such as gender, *race* or class would no longer play a role and which, in this regard, would neither require any specific structural analysis nor should it undergo any regulation, came from the very same group with the most privileges and the fewest experiences with structural discrimination. To a certain extent, the notion of a neutral technology was directly carried over into the space. According to this logic, from such supposedly neutral frameworks, only neutral living conditions could possibly emerge. 24 years later, it is becoming increasingly apparent that, more than anything, market 'civilization' (DiGiacomo 2016; Fuchs 2018; Srnicek 2016) rules. Moreover, digital violence (Brodnig 2016; Citron 2014; Ganz 2019; Hentschel & Schmidt 2014; Nakamura 2015; Van Der Wilk & Natter 2018) and the exercise of state power via surveillance increasingly dominate the internet (Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund & Sandoval 2012; Tufekci 2014; Zuboff 2018).

At the same time, the internet enables democratization processes or social debates to be set in motion. The uprisings in North Africa in 2010 and 2011 are an example of this. Using social media and internet-based applications, which primarily served to communicate, collaborate and to exchange information, people were able to successfully mobilize and help topple regimes (cf. Antonakis 2015). Another example is the ongoing #MeToo hashtag campaign. The hashtag #MeToo has sparked a worldwide debate on sexualized violence and everyday sexism from which mostly women suffer. This debate is currently translating into the first concrete measures: many of the largely male abusers have been dismissed (Carlsen et al. 2018); a support center for victims of sexual abuse in the creative industry has been awarded funding by the German Government Commissioner for Culture [German Government Commissioner for Culture and Media (BKM) & founding members of the association '*Vertrauensstelle gegen sexuelle Belästigung und Gewalt*' 2018]. The potential that the internet can still unfold in spite of all prophecies of doom is apparent here.

What understanding of feminism can be based on a description of feminist digital policy? Feminism, which, at its core, is historically seen as equality of women and men and the abolition of the patriarchy as a structuring element of gender injustice, has grown enormously and, at the same time, changed in the wake of queer and intersectionality theories. As a subject, the 'woman' – especially in the wake of digitalization – is no longer the undisputed actor at the center of feminist struggles (Butler 1990, 1993). It is perceived either as a process (doing gender; (Gildemeister 2008)) or intersected with diverse differences (intersection; (Crenshaw 1989; Puar 2011; Walgenbach, Dietze, Hornscheidt & Palm 2012)). Even though these approaches can only be merged into one dialogue to a limited degree, my belief is that it is vital to avoid essentializing settings related to the feminist subject and labelling specific and, in this sense, specifically interlacing categories of order spawned by biases. Gender, or rather woman, and the associated forms of discrimination therefore are no longer the sole focal point of the analysis. Rather, it entails linking the gender category with other categories such as *race*, gender identity, or age, and thus keeping tabs on all forms of discrimination. The starting point is therefore intersectional power relations that unequally dole out privileges and biases – not only on the basis of gender. In terms of digital policy, this can mean that, in order to develop targeted strategies, it is not enough to say that women have less access to the internet or have been more impacted by digital violence as a group. Rather, it is about fleshing out which women are affected by which other discrimination attributes. Continuously providing such an intersectional, feminist perspective will not always be possible, for one thing because of a lack of corresponding data bases⁴. The aspiration remains the same, however.

This book is divided into two main sections that approach the field of feminist digital policy from a theoretical and a theoretical-practical outlook. The first section deals with concepts and narratives that, on the one hand, introduce the nascent policy area of digital policy and, on the other, illustrate historical perspectives and, through an excursion into cyberfeminism (Chapter 2), underline that feminist perspectives have long since been cultivated in this area. To me, feminist digital policy thus represents a key addition to and, above all, a further development of cyberfeminism and digital feminism, not an alternative to them.

As a policy area, digital policy (Chapter 3) has yet to be assigned to a ministry in Germany as a primary bargaining space in spite of the appointment of Dorothee Bär as Federal Government Commissioner for Digitalisation. Much like other policy areas, such as environmental policy,

⁴ When it comes to digital violence, conclusive numbers relating to intersectionality are few and far between, especially in Germany. The chapter on digital violence presents some statistics, above all from international studies, which are only comparable to a very limited degree.

digital policy is characterized by movement-political linkages. A look into the history of the internet (Chapter 4) shows that efforts to politicize and regulate the issue – by civil society as well as business and politics – have been furthered from the beginning, even though their interests in doing so were divergent.

The second section of the book builds on the theoretical, historical, and thematic bases of digital policy and cyberfeminism as a means of contributing feminist discourses, regulatory approaches, and perspectives on the basis of two fields of application.

As a fifth major thematic area, the digital public sphere introduced by Kathrin Ganz (2013) in her study on feminist digital policy takes on a special role (Chapter 5). Because both the digital public sphere and the resulting shift in the public realms as well as the relationship between the private and the public spheres are bargaining spaces for digital violence, which are therefore examined in greater detail.

The section on digital violence (Chapter 6), first and foremost, illustrates that and why (BIPOC-)⁵ women, LGBTIQ+ persons, people with a migration background and/or with disabilities are affected by digital violence, even though hardly any robust statistical data on digital violence exists in Germany. The fact that their struggle persists at such a slow pace poses a risk to democracy.

Leaning in on this, I strive to argue in this chapter that, in addition to bolstering the powers of self-regulation on the internet, we clearly need to consider new internet policy approaches that regulate and sanction, for example, violent communication (culture) without also closing or endangering spaces for marginalized standpoints. In this context, whilst the right to privacy and freedom of speech should be the guiding principle, it should be critically scrutinized in terms of dominance and power. I will demonstrate why it is urgently necessary, (not only) from a feminist perspective, to develop (digital) policy and societal regulatory concepts. Through the German Network Enforcement Act, a comparably comprehensive law already exists that, admittedly, only very imprecisely includes feminist or women's policy demands. Essentially, this law regulates violent communication on social media platforms, but it shifts responsibility for erasing and classifying such language away from the state to the platform operators. This leads to a privatization of the enforcement of the law. In turn, from a feminist perspective, it would be interesting to address questions of collectivization of legal mobilizations as facilitated in a class action, for example. The options that already exist and are still being demanded are also explained in the chapter on digital violence.

The second field of application that I want to critically examine is the surveillance complex (Chapter 7). Since 9/11, state surveillance efforts have continuously gained momentum. The disclosures made by Edward Snowden have led to a heightened discussion about the surveillance state, also in Germany (Beckedahl & Meister 2013). An intersectional, feminist perspective on this thematic area is urgently needed, as, in this area in particular, the fact applies that one group's freedom means that another's is under surveillance. The increasing levels of surveillance on social media, in communication, in the public space also articulate a desire for protection from (digital) violence, for example, which, at the same time, represents a desire for inflexibility, immutability and norms. For everyone who does not share this desire, security is becoming an uncertainty factor, because they fail under closer scrutiny if they do not accede to the norms, for example. Or they become test subjects for surveillance technologies because of their greater dependence on the state. Here again, deprived

⁵ BIPOC stands for: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

individuals or groups of individuals are affected. This chapter will illustrate that intersectional, feminist perspectives undoubtedly exist and can come to fruition. In addition to providing a historical classification of the various surveillance discourses, I will show that the issue of privacy can also pave the way for a discourse on surveillance, but should not remain the only one (Dubrofsky & Magnet 2015). Social media contribute to a digital control society in just the same way as artificial intelligence and algorithms. In this area as well, an intersectional, feminist view furthermore highlights power and dominance structures and illustrates that surveillance neither makes society more secure nor freer.

Feminist digital policy must therefore address the structures through which dominance is perpetuated and any use of the internet is influenced – emancipatory policies included. It should therefore be of feminist interest to focus on (ongoing) structures of discrimination and dominance from the very beginning and to develop alternatives and not only turn the screws in hindsight through an internet policy. Or, to quote Audre Lorde: “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” (Lorde 2018). Sticking with this metaphor, the house should therefore be intersectional and feminist.

Conclusion: Policy for the net needs feminist perspectives

Technology, and therefore the internet as a structure, are non-neutral. Rather, they translate current forms of discrimination into code and thus codify them for digital applications and communication practices. In doing so, structural inequalities and biases resulting in injustice are essentially implemented in how the internet and the digital technologies associated with it operate. Through the interaction between technological developments, algorithmic patterns and digital learning architectures, society is being redrawn and, at the same time, designed in the continuity of gender inequities, racial stigmatizations, and class-based exclusions. Only once we comprehend what form the attempts undertaken by the business sector and the state to increase their power take and how everyday discrimination structures are not only prolonged but changed or even amplified can strategies be developed to help eliminate them (Schmidt 2018b).

This book seeks to help understand this by illustrating potential feminist strategies for various areas of application. Feminism is characterized by its aspiration to shape society by taking into account the intersectional entanglement between structures of discrimination, power, and dominance. Through the internet, it is precisely these structures that are presently being refashioned, though not necessarily in an emancipatory feminist sense. The first section of this book, which dealt with policies and history, revealed how contested the area of regulation, i.e. internet governance, the structural, normative framework, and internet policy, the actual legislation, is. Despite the fact that digital policy is a nascent policy area (Greef 2017; Reiberg 2018), it covers a broad range of topics, including the subareas internet and content access, copyright and ownership, data protection and privacy, as well as the digital public sphere (Braman 2011; Ganz 2013). For each of these subareas, this book has shown the potential that intersectional feminist perspectives offer for bringing visibility to the power structures and inequality relations that have been handed down over time, and the means through which they can be eliminated. It has yet to be fully determined who will ultimately have the upper hand when it comes to regulation. What has been ascertained, however, is that market economy and political interests cannot always be reconciled with the interests of civil society. To develop policy approaches that – instead of coming across as wholly repressive – have emancipative impacts on people in disadvantaged positions, feminist perspectives and experiences can be cultivated to fruitful benefit.

The second section of the book delved further into the two examples of practice and application: digital violence and surveillance. Both examples are essentially discernible in multiple thematic subareas of digital policy and therefore lend visibility to their entwinement.

Digital violence illustrates not only a shift in how public spheres are comprehended in relation to the private sphere but also reveals the potential for structural discrimination in areas where access is an issue.

The technological means to disseminate sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, homo- and transphobia, to name but a few of the structures of discrimination and violence, present a regulative society with new challenges. Spam mails and bots determine public culture. Murder and rape threats, which primarily affect women, Women of Color, Black women, LGBTIQ+ persons, and people in other minoritized positions, have not only intensified but also transformed in terms of the quality of such threats: compressed into 140 characters, distributed through algorithms, at times randomly directed.

A community-based approach (Chapter 6.3.1) that seeks to combat digital violence not through legislative norms but by applying jointly negotiated rules restricted to the platform in question greatly depends on who is a member of such a community and the structuring of power there. The example of Wikipedia shows that a community extensively comprising well-educated, white males (Doyle 2009) will not necessarily aspire to wanting to critically analyze the patriarchal knowledge structures. But market economy interests also prop up patriarchal heteronormative values, as the example of Facebook illustrates.

As I have also exemplified, this predicament has since been acknowledged by legislators and addressed through the Network Enforcement Act (Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz). That being said, this legislation promotes the increasing privatization of the enforcement of laws, which must be viewed critically from a feminist perspective, as it will, at the very least, be in close keeping with market economy logic.

From a feminist perspective, it would therefore be expedient to consider collectivizing legal mobilization and the enforcement of laws and to kickstart it through political initiatives. In this context, this means the right to pursue representative action (Verbandsklagerecht) and the possibility of pursuing class action. Class action is currently not permitted in Germany but would enable those affected by digital violence to shoulder the not inconsiderable resource burden involved in civil cases across multiple participants. The structural nature of digital violence would furthermore become apparent. Representative action would give rise to the possibility of ending structural discrimination.

Rights- and community-based approaches must work hand in hand in order to bring this struggle to a successful conclusion. In spite of everything, the fact remains, for the time being, that the cited groups endure structural discrimination and violence. This generates exclusions that can potentially entail the loss of work, mental illness, or even self-imposed exclusion from the internet. For a democratic, social society, this represents a process that is beyond dangerous as it actively excludes people from participation. After all, democracy means participation.

The second extensive practical example is surveillance, which, through the technological developments of the past 50 years, has undergone a shift from entirely person-based surveillance to context-based surveillance. Surveillance primarily serves to safeguard patriarchal, white masculinity. It must not be allowed to become an end in itself or the standard for governmental action. Today, every individual is potentially subject to surveillance, but the impact on each person is very different. Here, too, prevailing discrimination and racialization structures play a significant role. The examples taken from various areas and used in this book exemplify just how extensive the arsenal of surveillance possibilities is. Accordingly, whilst it is certainly meaningful to examine and/or expound this from the perspective of the right to privacy, this should not remain the only one. At the same time, we see that both the state and private enterprises continue to repeatedly undermine the right to informational self-determination. This specifically impacts those with a particular need for protection, such as refugees or social welfare recipients. This is where feminist digital policy can and must be employed, as the right to privacy is universal and any heightened dependency on the state must not be allowed to be turned into an abuse of power in this area.

The surveillance of social media by the state, platform operators and by users illustrates how widely cast their net has since become. On social media in particular, there are indications of the close correlation that exists between surveillance and digital violence for some, especially women and those in marginalized positions. Because this is the space where feminist activism

takes place and equally where it is subjected to an increased level of surveillance and violence (Nakamura 2015).

Not to forget that we frequently volunteer up our personal data on the internet, which then becomes part of the much-discussed big data pile. We need to be aware that this data is evaluated with the help of algorithms and, in some instances, new associations created which, in turn, can impact our lives. Will we get that apartment or loan? How high will my health insurance premium be in the future if the insurance company learns how often I purchase food online that is classified as unhealthy?

Algorithms create norms and rules that are initially based on (outdated) data, which is riddled with discrimination of all kinds. As a result, it tends to exclude and discriminate against people in certain positions, such as (BIPOC) women, LGBTQIA+ persons and Blacks. Calls for transparency and ethics when designing algorithms should also be a matter of interest to feminists. Here, a feminist perspective on digital policy can identify the consequences of these forms of discrimination on persons affected and the impact that they will have for the future. But it can also enrich the debate by providing solutions such as anti-discrimination legislation for algorithms.

Ultimately, feminist digital policy must make the case for turning the internet and its associated technologies into an enabling space with equal rights for all. Discrimination, exclusion, surveillance, and digital violence must not be allowed to be the default setting for some and thus the standard. Feminist digital policy has solutions to offer. On the one hand, this must involve combating digital violence using the instruments of the rule of law. To this end, instruments such as class action or the right to representative action must be vested and challenged with intersectional feminism in order to counter structural inequality relations that exist in the enforcement of legislation. On the other hand, we should shape digital communication using a feminist perspective and transform it through the ways in which it is used. Approaches are offered in feminist communications studies (Dorer & Geiger 2002; Drüeke & Klaus 2014; Schachtner & Winker 2005; Susemichel, Rudigier & Horak 2008). In regards to surveillance, a field which, in parts, is closely associated with that of digital violence, it is vital that we realize whose security is being expanded and who must expect greater intrusions into their privacy and informational self-determination in return for such security. A society that aligns its security needs to white, patriarchal structures goes beyond merely countenancing the exclusion of women and other marginalized groups. Rather, it also deprives itself of the opportunity for a blueprint for society based on inclusions and equality. An intersectional feminist perspective must therefore lead the way in highlighting perspectives for a new, discrimination-free coexistence.

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