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Trottier, Daniel, Polak, Sara

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Ethical Implications of Onlife Vitriol

Katleen Gabriels and Marjolein Lanzing

Abstract
This chapter explores onlife vitriol from an ethical perspective. Traditional offline/online dualisms hinder in-depth understanding because online and offline violence are deeply interconnected, hence onlife. We discuss three cases of onlife vitriol: revenge rape and slut shaming, body shaming, and cyberbullying. Onlife vitriol opens up unprecedented forms of harm enabled, and often amplified, by the technology. We argue that this form of violence is currently inadequately addressed. Existing legal measures are not (yet) effective for preventing or ensuring sufficient reparation in cases of onlife vitriol. Societal debates about how to handle onlife vitriol lag behind despite implicit acknowledgement of its harmful effects. Greater media literacy and more research concerning the boundaries of monitoring are needed now that it has become increasingly easy to surveil, coveil, and sousveil.

Keywords: online vitriol, onlife vitriol, surveillance, coveillance, sousveillance, violence

This chapter explores ethical concerns related to onlife vitriol. Online vitriol can be narrowly conceived. The Cambridge Dictionary for instance, defines vitriol as ‘violent hate and anger expressed through severe criticism.’\(^1\) We, however, take a broader approach by suggesting that instances of online vitriol can be conceptualized as onlife violence: violence that transgresses and affects both the offline and online world. While there is not a clear-cut, all-encompassing definition of violence,\(^2\) we conceptualize violence as the intentional physical or psychological, including reputational, harm inflicted on a person and/or

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2. See Vorobej, *The Concept*.

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their property. In this conception, specific instances of hate speech can be understood as onlife violence because of their actual impacts, such as causing psychological harm. We discuss a number of cases that we consider as violent forms of onlife vitriol. Cases we zoom in on include revenge rape and slut shaming (cf. the 187 exposed snitches & bitches case), body shaming (cf. the Dani Mathers case), and cyberbullying (cf. the Amanda Todd case).

Our chapter draws upon the claim that traditional offline/online dualisms hinder our understanding of online violence exactly because online and offline violence are deeply interconnected, hence onlife. Modern information and communication technologies tether actions committed in the offline world to the online and vice versa. Both online and offline acts of violence are part of one experienced and ongoing reality. The acts of violence at stake in our cases of vitriol cannot be reduced to virtual harm or regarded as separate from the offline realm. We argue that online vitriol is a new dimension of real violence that is ethically problematic because it opens up unprecedented forms of harm enabled, and often amplified, by the technology. Moreover, we argue that this form of violence is currently not adequately addressed in our society. As we will illustrate, existing legal measures are not (yet) effective for preventing or ensuring sufficient reparation in cases of onlife vitriol. At the same time, we argue that the societal debate about how to handle onlife vitriol lags behind even though there is implicit acknowledgement of its harmful effects.

Nowadays, the technological features of mobile computing facilitate new manifestations of surveillance, such as coveillance (peer monitoring), through new technological possibilities for immediate, cheap, and long-term recording.3 One of the first cases and an example of how peer monitoring can become a pernicious form of visibility and Internet vigilantism is the infamous Dog Poop Girl case from 2005. Photographs – taken with camera phones – of a young woman who refused to clean up after her dog had defecated on the subway train, were shared online after which the woman was harassed and threatened relentlessly.4 A second interesting case of the perniciousness of an online memory is the one of the late Ilse Uyttersprot, former mayor of the Belgian city Aalst, who was secretly recorded while having sex in a public space. Four years later, she was confronted with the material, which had spread like wildfire across various social network sites and websites, compromizing her position as mayor.5 New technological
features problematize acts of violence in a worrying way. Technologies allow victims to be haunted and (repeatedly) harmed by violence in perpetuity, which affects their off and online lives.6

We will unfold our arguments in the following way. First, we elaborate on our basic conceptual assumption that offline/online dualisms hinder our understanding of online violence (and vitriol) by drawing from the literature.7 Second, we propose that modern ICTs provide a new, ethically problematic dimension to violence because their features allow ongoing repetitive violence. Users carry their camera-equipped smartphones with access to online platforms with them and can instantly upload photos, films, and other data to millions of users.8 In so doing, we introduce and discuss three specific cases of online vitriol. First, the case Amanda Todd (2012), a Canadian girl who was severely cyberbullied and bullied at school, and eventually committed suicide. Second, the case Dani Mathers (2016) on body shaming: Mathers posted a nude picture of a woman showering at her local gym online, which subsequently went viral. Finally, the case on 187 exposed snitches & bitches (2017-2018) on slut shaming and revenge rape.

All cases have female victims, which is not to say that men cannot suffer from online vitriol. In fact, awful cases of online vitriol, including the suicide of Tyler Clementi in 2010, who was filmed with a webcam, installed by his roommate, while exploring his gay sexuality, happen to men as well. While online vitriol affects many different user groups – becoming a victim of online vitriol can happen to anyone – we recognize that some user groups are more vulnerable because of their gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. One such user group consists of (young) women, who are particularly vulnerable because of their gender and (sometimes) intersecting ethnicity.9

We conclude that new ICTs have given rise to online vitriol: a form of violence that transgresses and affects both the offline and online world. We advocate for greater media literacy among users but also for more research into questioning and regulating the boundaries of monitoring now that it has become increasingly easy to surveil, coveil, and sousveil through our smartphones and connected online platforms.10 Not only can companies and governments track and watch consumer or citizens behaviour from

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6 Fox et al., ‘Perpetuating Online Sexism’.
8 Blanchette and Johnson, ‘Data Rentention’.
9 Fraser, ‘Sex, Lies’; Dugan, ‘Online Harrassment’.
10 Citron and Franks, ‘Criminalizing Revenge Porn’; Huff et al., ‘Virtual Harms’; Marwick and Miller, ‘Online Harassment’.
above, or surveil, but new technologies enable coveillance, that is, the multidirectional type of peer monitoring found on social network sites. They allow users to watch each other’s posts and re-share or copy them. Moreover, new technologies enable users to sousveil: to track and watch those in power from below, for instance, by using mobile or wearable devices to record protests or police action. When we discuss monitoring throughout this chapter, we mainly focus on coveillance since this form of monitoring is particularly interesting from the perspective of vigilantism.

Onlife vitriol: Coveillance and pernicious memory

In this first part, we address the conceptual underpinnings of the notion onlife and its specific repercussions for online vitriol and harm. Because online acts of vitriol are likely to have actual-world impacts, such as psychological harm, we emphasize the reality status of online settings, which fall within the scope of ethical consideration. It is important to underscore the hybridization of online and offline, among others in terms of identity and sociality.

In the early days of the World Wide Web, the first-generation theorists of the 1990s approached the online-offline relation in terms of an ontological dualism rather like a mind-body split, hereby emphasizing how the virtual is radically divorced from the real. The Internet was looked upon as a walled-off space where actual-world rules did not apply and where people could leave behind their emotional embodied selves. A dualism was at play between “virtuality”, which is associated with information, the mind, and fantasy, and “reality”, which is associated with materiality and the body.

At the end of the 1990s this ontological dualism was gradually disproven by empirical research and phenomenological approaches, showing more of a merging between online and offline identities. An interesting example is Markham (1998) who started from a clear-cut dichotomy in her empirical study. She eventually destabilized the dichotomy when her findings revealed that users conceive virtual experiences as real ones and do not operationalize a dualism. People do not start their online lives from a blank slate, as they are always rooted in autobiographical, social, moral, and cultural contexts. Both online and offline experiences are part of one continuous everyday reality.

11 Mann et al., ‘Sousveillance’.
12 Ess, ‘Self, Community’.
13 Schultze and Rennecker, ‘Reframing’, p. 337.
14 Markham, ‘Life Online’, pp. 119-120.
It also became clear that crossing moral boundaries in online settings could have actual-life impacts. A seminal text, based on a true event, in this context, is ‘A rape in cyberspace’.\textsuperscript{15} Julian Dibbell chronologically reports on how Mr. Bungle raped Legba and Starsinger in the text-based social virtual world LambdaMOO. The victims reported to be distressed by the events, such as crying behind their computer screen. Many residents supported the victims and condemned Mr. Bungle’s actions. They argued to decide on what would be a proper punishment for the wrongdoer. As there were no explicit rules against rape, the community gathered for a public meeting in the online environment of LambdaMOO. Although community members had deviating views on the severity of the incident, many of them believed that the harm-doer could not escape sanctioning. This event revealed that LambdaMOO was a meaningful environment for its residents, and that online practices are enacted within a moral framework. This way, they fall within the consideration of ethics. Online harm should not be easily dismissed with arguments such as: ‘it only took place online’ or ‘just go offline, shut down your computer’. Dibbell’s depiction of the online rape also forced Internet researchers to acknowledge the reality status of online experiences. In Buchanan’s phrase, ‘this incident was seminal in pushing the boundaries of online experiences into human subjects research.’\textsuperscript{16}

Virtual space has to be understood as an embodied space in which actual-life selves, practices, and norms continue to exist. Subsequently, dualist views in terms of virtual versus actual selves were deconstructed and brought about a view on virtual selfhood in terms of an extension, rather than a disruption of actual self. This turn in conceptual thought led to new notions of the self as an onlife self,\textsuperscript{17} to highlight the hybridization of both selves, and a smeared-out self to emphasize that the self is distributed across multiple communication networks.\textsuperscript{18} The self stretches out over the online and offline world: these worlds are interwoven, instead of distinct. Online and offline forms of social, moral, and cultural life mutually influence each other and are deeply interwoven. Therefore, dualisms hinder our understanding of online vitriol. In the next section we discuss three cases of onlife vitriol that we subsequently build on to further develop our theoretical perspectives.

\textsuperscript{15} Dibbell, ‘A Rape’.
\textsuperscript{16} Buchanan, ‘Internet Research Ethics’, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{17} Floridi, ‘The Informational Nature’.
\textsuperscript{18} Ess, ‘The Embodied Self’.
Cases of onlife vitriol

Vitriol in online settings is a new dimension of real violence that opens up unprecedented forms of harm that are enabled, and often amplified, by the technology. Technological features play an important role in mediating and shaping the violence and its impact. The immediacy, speed of dissemination, the scope (scale), the easiness to share and copy the information inherent to many new ICTs give rise to new feature-related practices such as coveillance, which can turn into social policing or even vigilantism.

A good example of onlife vitriol is bullying. Classical bullying was confined to face-to-face settings. Nowadays, bullying moves between online and offline contexts. The impact has worsened because, among other things, an anonymous (invisible) audience can witness the bullying. Even though more research is needed on the effects and impacts of cyberbullying versus in-person bullying, there is evidence that technology has amplified the effects of classical bullying in the case of cyberbullying.19

An example of bullying that shows the onlife impact on victims’ lives is the case of the Canadian teenager Amanda Todd. Between 2009-2010, a picture of her breasts was circulated online after she was blackmailed. As a result, Todd was bullied at school and online. Despite the decision of her family to move several times, Todd could not escape the onlife vitriol because the information that harmed her was disseminated online. Eventually, in 2012, Amanda posted a YouTube video in which she disclosed the harassment and how this harmed her. A week after, she committed suicide.

The second case of onlife vitriol we discuss is the Dani Mathers case. In 2016, Dani Mathers, a former Playboy model, publicly posted a picture that she made with her smartphone of a 70-year-old naked woman showering at her gym in Los Angeles on Snapchat, with the words ‘If I can’t unsee this, then you can’t either.’ Mathers also posted a selfie with her hand before her mouth, depicting herself in mock shock. The picture subsequently went viral and several newspapers and (news) websites published it (although partly blurred) as well. People worldwide criticized Mathers for body shaming. Mathers was charged with invasion of privacy and eventually sentenced in 2017 to thirty days of community service and a probation period of three years.20 This case is a good illustration of onlife vitriol, though there was, just like in the aforementioned example of LambdaMOO, no actual physical harm. The victim’s privacy was violated and she was humiliated in front of

19 See among others, Campbell, ‘Cyber Bullying’; Kowalski et al., ‘Bullying’; Yar, ‘The Novelty’.
20 See Hauser, ‘Dani Mathers’.
the world’s eye. Although it is debatable that Mathers could foresee that her picture went viral, she intentionally uploaded it on Snapchat, together with harsh words, and subsequently caused psychological harm to the victim.\textsuperscript{21}

Our final case is ‘187 exposed snitches & bitches’. The Dutch Broadcast Organization (NOS) uncovered and researched slut shaming app-groups on Telegram, a smartphone communication application that is the equivalent of the more popular WhatsApp. These app-groups aim to expose and shame women of Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds who are perceived to have transgressed cultural behavioural norms of sexuality. This ranges from pictures in which a girl is not wearing a headscarf to explicit nudes. One way of proof includes sharing names and phone numbers along with nude photos or videos, including photos of minors. These app-groups are titled ‘187 exposed snitches & bitches’ or ‘headscarfs 18+’ and include thousands of users. The app-groups intentionally aim to harm the reputations of women by exposing their (sexual) behaviour.\textsuperscript{22} The social consequences of being mentioned in these app-groups are extreme, including rejection (of the girls’ family) by the community. Young women whose pictures are shared on these apps are often oblivious and will only later suffer from the consequences of a destroyed reputation and honour. This example of online shaming has been referred to as a form of honour killing.\textsuperscript{23}

New features of ICTs afford new forms of problematic violence, because they allow and facilitate repetitive violence. In the next section we continue our analysis about how these features problematize and amplify acts of violence in a worrying way from the perspectives of pernicious memory and coveillance.

Dustbin to freezer: The importance of forgetting in a world of increasing surveillance

The problem of onlife vitriol stems from a more general problem regarding the continuous visibility of users and the coveillance and pernicious memory that new technological features afford. Until fifteen years ago it would have been a reasonable expectation that one’s history was a personal and private matter. Dredging up and displaying your past behaviour would have cost a great deal of effort and, therefore, would have been highly unlikely. Formerly,
when teenagers would transfer schools they experienced something that most teenagers today perhaps no longer experience: a fresh start. New technologies, such as social network sites, enable the constant recording of one’s personal information, including selfies, YouTube clips, live-streams, Facebook posts, and Instagram posts and tweets. Starting with a clean slate and building a new life can become difficult, because past and current actions are now equally easy to access: ‘Electronic accessibility renders past and current events equally knowable. The very ideas of ‘past’ and ‘present’ in relation to personal information are in danger of evaporating’.24

Following new possibilities of technology, our expectations regarding the privacy of our past have changed accordingly. New technologies mediate our expectations from different social contexts. Information about a person that was once contained to the classroom can now end up at one’s workplace. It has become increasingly difficult to separate social contexts and to control the information that spills over into different social contexts through the use of ICTs. Not reviewing what turns up on Google when you enter your name before going to a job interview or not expecting your employer to review your online presence is now considered to be naïve and even negligent. Yet, distancing ourselves, at the very least from the mistakes, diversions from, or transgressions of the social norm, we wish to put behind us seems a reasonable demand from a psychological, social, and ethical perspective. We first discuss the first two reasons, before raising the underlying ethical rationale.

The psychological function of forgetting

Forgetting has a psychological function. Memories can terrorize one’s life and chill one’s actions. Imagine suffering from hyperthymesia; a condition of perfect autobiographical memory. People who suffer from hyperthymesia are incapable of reconstructing or reinterpreting personal narratives because the memories are unusually accurate and complete.25 One can imagine several mental health hazards that accompany the impossibility of forgetting past experiences such as the inability to process traumatic experiences. Many psychological strategies are aimed at distancing the subject from her experiences in order to move on, to make room for new

experiences, or to forgive themselves or others for past actions.\(^\text{26}\) In the case of Amanda Todd, she was unable to distance herself from her traumatic experiences. This was largely due to the pernicious online memory, but also because her harasser, a (suspected) Dutch man who controlled her information, continued to monitor her actively at a distance. New ICTs enabled him to repeatedly harm her reputation at every new school by posting her nude pictures online and distributing them among her new social contacts.

The fading, reinterpretation, or blocking of memories with the passing of time or specific therapy is necessary for placing distance between the past and the present, for being able to look upon an experience from a more detached perspective. Imagine having to relive the emotions one felt after a past break-up with the same intensity ten years later or imagine re-experiencing the psychological effects of being humiliated, bullied, or shamed on a daily basis.

The victim of the Dani Mathers case experienced severe loss of control when she was humiliated before an international audience. The wide dissemination of the picture is still obvious today, as it can still be found online. Also, people can easily save it to their computer, so it is impossible to estimate how widely the picture was actually disseminated. Going to the gym was a trivial event that nonetheless put the victim before the public eye and made her a news topic. While she expressed that she would like to move on, this has been made impossible. The ability to move past victimhood or trauma largely depends on the ability to forget.

**The social function of forgetting**

The socio-legal perspective on the importance of forgetting is tightly wound up with the psychological value of forgetting and, as we will see, the ethical considerations with regard to the value of privacy and forgetting. The right to be forgotten received special attention. In 2014, Google Spain lost a case against Mario Costeja González, a Spanish citizen who requested the removal of an Internet link. The link led to a newspaper article from 1998 in which the foreclosure of his house was announced, as well as its auction, which was related to a debt he owed at the time. He had since paid off his debt and reasoned that he had the right to have this information removed since all

\(^{26}\) An example is eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) treatment: a therapeutic method for severely traumatized patients basically enables an accelerated process.
matters had been resolved. The European Court of Justice ruled in favour of Costeja González and asked Google to comply with the right to be forgotten and remove the link. Costeja González’s claim set a precedent for 12,000 requests for the removal of personal data on the first day of compliance only.

While the recent court decision regarding the right to be forgotten has sparked international debate, the concept of social forgetfulness is far from controversial. It has been institutionalized in our society as an important value. Examples are policies and legislation including bankruptcy law, juvenile crime records, and credit reporting that protect social forgetfulness and, relatedly, the chance to start over. After all, forgiveness and forgetting are very closely related. Social forgetting may allow people to try again without the constant burden of their past. To be freed from one’s past behaviour and to be granted a clean slate may cause people to feel trusted and to trust themselves again.

While these socially institutionalized forms of forgetfulness are oriented towards perpetrators, the right to be forgotten is interesting also from the perspective of victims of onlife vitriol. For instance, Google has committed to this forgetfulness by removing links to pictures and videos that include revenge rape or revenge porn. Nevertheless, the Dani Mathers case clearly shows how challenging it is to grasp, act on, and control acts of onlife vitriol in order to mitigate its impact on victims. The impact of the viral picture taken by Mathers was amplified because of present-day ICTs. Twenty-five years ago, using a reflex camera, it would have been more difficult to secretly take a picture. Also, the speed to disseminate it online was significantly slower in the early days of the World Wide Web. Mathers’s behaviour was mediated and co-shaped by technology: a smartphone camera, a mobile Internet connection, an account on a social network site, and so forth. All of these were immediately within reach by merely pressing some buttons.

Moreover, Mathers’s behaviour was shaped by shifting norms on sharing information online and coveillance: making and uploading pictures and videos without obtaining consent has become a daily habit. In the past years there have been shocking cases, such as the real-time streaming of murder on Facebook Live and rape on Periscope. While we often discuss

27 ‘Google Spain SL’.
28 Blanchette and Johnson, ‘Data Retention’.
30 McPhate, ‘Teenager is Accused’.
the meaning of privacy in a digital age, there is too little public discussion regarding the consequences of coveillance as a form of vigilantism.

Even though in the Mathers case the perpetrator was legally prosecuted and sanctioned, the human costs remain high. The victim only spoke through her attorney, expressing her wish to leave the case behind her.31 But, as we discussed in the previous section, the psychological harm that the victim suffered from and continues to suffer from due to the fact that her pictures can still be found online today and cannot be removed, is done. From a legal point of view, it is not easy to compensate for all these consequences.

Finally, legal steps against perpetrators generally are incredibly difficult to take. In the Amanda Todd case, the perpetrator was only investigated, identified as a Dutch man and sentenced to prison in March 2017, long after her death. In the ‘187 exposed snitches & bitches’ case, the harassers are anonymous groups of men that are difficult to investigate. The Telegram app-groups that they use are not publicly accessible. One can join only when one is invited and these app groups are exclusive to men. Also, Telegram allows for anonymous participation. This makes it more difficult to do research. Moreover, online revenge rape is a murky legal terrain.32 The police expresses that it experiences difficulty in classifying the victims of onlife vitriol. In the Netherlands, Minister Grapperhaus (Justice and Safety) is working on a modernization of the law regarding revenge rape as a form of onlife vitriol.33

The ethical perspective on forgetting

Granting people the opportunity to start over and not to be burdened by the past is something that we intuitively seem to find the right or kind thing to do, because this opens up space to develop oneself.34 Without forgetfulness, society would become a suffocating place. Allen (2008) argues that new ICTs raise concerns with regard to an everlasting, objective memory and the effect of the continuous possibility of dredging up the past. Burkell (2016) reiterates these concerns, claiming that digital systems that remember everything threaten our personal, narrative identity and human flourishing.

31 See Schladebeck, ‘Woman Body-Shamed’.
32 Pruis et al., ‘Vrouwen online exposed’.
33 ‘Grapperhaus’.
34 Blanchette and Johnson, ‘Data Retention’, p. 37.
Along with Dodge & Kitchin (2007) and Mayer-Schönberger (2009), Burkell argues that forgetting is a psychological necessity and that, therefore, we are in need of an ethics of forgetting.

The ethical importance of forgetting lies in the right to change. The underlying value is autonomy and, more specifically, the ability to express and thus develop the self freely. Self-expression and self-development are inhibited when one worries about being confronted with one's expressions, through image and text, in the future and when one adapts one's behaviour according to a perceived social norm. Often this is referred to as the chilling effect. The chilling effect resonates nicely with Anita Allen's dustbin-freezer analogy (2008). Posting information through new ICTs, Allen argues, should be compared to storing something in a freezer, rather than throwing it out into the dustbin. In the past our behaviour and actions would have been forgotten for the most part; they would have ended up in the proverbial dustbin. Today, however, all information, however briefly present on the web, is instantly and automatically copied, shared, and stored on multiple servers, either by users or by corporations. Whether your actions are offline or online, your behaviour is more likely to be frozen and kept fresh in the digital freezer, ready to be defrosted sometime in the future. The problem that has been exacerbated and, therefore, has become more harmful with new ICTs, is that one can be confronted with a copy of her past or a combination of copies of her past at any given time. While the bits and chunks of information or data posted and stored on the Internet of course do not instantly constitute a memory, we agree with Burkell that a digital record 'constitutes an array of potential memories, the very existence of which may compromise our ability to forget, or move on'. One's digital(ized) behaviour may become an eternal reminder of and potential confrontation with the (bad) choices and actions one once made or became the victim of. This may result in a form of repetitive and ongoing violence.

The possibility of being confronted with one's past behaviour alone has a chilling effect on one's behaviour. Moreover, who is monitored and, consequently, whose information is shared and stored, is susceptible to biases, including gender. For instance, young women express that they should be more careful than their male counterparts about how they present

35 Schneier, *Data and Goliath*.
36 Burkell, 'Remembering Me', p. 16.
37 Monahan, 'Dreams of Control'.

themselves online.\textsuperscript{38} They report that they are judged more harshly. Moreover, as exemplified in the ‘187 exposed snitches & bitches’ case, they are not only vulnerable to social control and onlife vitriol from the perspective of gender but also from the perspective of their ethnicity and corresponding cultural backgrounds.

Coveillance, which has become a normalized practice across social network sites, and pernicious memory enable and increase the impact of behavioural policing or vigilantism. The ‘187 exposed snitches & bitches’ case illustrates this as well. Pictures and videos from the Telegram-apps were also shared on other social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, creating a collective memory with which the victims are confronted every day. One victim, Ouahiba, stated in a video on YouTube that pictures and videos she shared three years ago with a trusted partner, that do not represent her now, were circulated across multiple forms of social network sites every day for three years after and destroyed her life.\textsuperscript{39}

Onlife vitriol impacts career opportunities and personal relationships. Ouahiba stated that her employer was informed about her pictures, which affected her work. She also stated that she lost her friends because of her tainted reputation. Clearly, the fact that this all plays out on social network sites does not mean that the wishes or the trauma and suffering of the victims are less real. One mother posted a heart-breaking message on the NOS news webpage in which she pleads the app groups to delete her daughter’s pictures.\textsuperscript{40} Ouahiba also asks her audience on YouTube whether, even if she deserved social punishment, it is fair and reasonable to punish someone every day for three years in a row.\textsuperscript{41}

The combination of coveillance and pernicious memory enables social policing and vigilantism, which has a detrimental effect on experimentation, creativity, and invention. Taking risks or deviating from the (perceived) social norm may have dire consequences because one’s actions will be saved forever and therefore liable to public scrutiny forever. Importantly, this causes a problem for the free and dynamic shaping of one’s identity. In sum, modern ICTs afford new, ethically problematic dimensions to violence because of their technological characteristics.

\textsuperscript{38} Steeves and Bailey, ‘Living in the Mirror’.
\textsuperscript{40} Pruis et al., ‘Vrouwen online exposed’.
\textsuperscript{41} For the link, see footnote 39.
Concluding thoughts

In this chapter, we sought to broaden the notion of (online) vitriol by conceptualizing it as onlife violence: violence that transgresses and affects both the offline and online world. In doing so, we elaborated on three cases to illustrate how violence has changed with the affordances of new technologies. Both greater media literacy among users and more empirical and conceptual research are required, amongst others on regulating the boundaries of monitoring since it has become increasingly easy to coveil with present-day ICTs. We are never cut off from the network: we are in fact always and already on, making it impossible to log out. In the past, only children born into royal families or children of celebrities grew up in front of cameras and in front of the public eye. Yet, nowadays virtually every child in the West grows up in front of multiple cameras: a baby monitor with a camera at home, surveillance cameras on the street, personal smartphone cameras, dashcams, recreational drones, and so on.

It is our contention that onlife vitriol is a form of violence that is inadequately addressed at the moment in our society. While intuitively we agree that cases of onlife vitriol as presented in this chapter are forms of violence, the means society has at her disposal to combat this violence are limited. This clearly comes to the fore in the Dani Mathers case, in which the victim could not be offered adequate reparation (her photos are still online today); the ‘187 exposed snitches & bitches’ case, in which victims reported to the police but the police did not know what to do with these reports and which only after this case has stirred a debate in the Netherlands about adequate legislation; and the Amanda Todd case in which only after her death the alleged perpetrator (who harassed many other girls at the same time) was arrested. The law is, of course, not the only tool for combatting onlife vitriol. We suggest that a societal debate about the meaning, harm, and solutions regarding onlife vitriol is important in order to raise awareness and to educate users and citizens. Moreover, we are in need of adequate policies regarding onlife vitriol that recognize its dynamic and crossover nature, as well as the actual-life impact of it. We are already always on, but in a society that is increasingly becoming smart (cf. the Internet of Things and smart cities), the ethics of onlife vitriol should be a crucial societal debate.

Although it has been argued that the US and Canada have adequate laws to combat this type of harassment, it has also been argued that the cultural mores prevented the law from being successfully invoked. See also: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-story-of-amanda-todd.
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About the authors

KATLEEN GABRIELS is a moral philosopher, specialized in philosophy and ethics of technology. She works as an Assistant Professor at Maastricht University. Previously, she was an Assistant Professor at Eindhoven University of Technology and she also held a chair at the faculty Engineering Sciences at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). She holds an MSc in Germanic Philology from KU Leuven, an MSc in Moral Sciences from Ghent University, and a doctoral degree in Philosophy and Moral Sciences from VUB. Katleen is an executive board member of INSEIT, a steering committee member and the deputy chair of ETHICOMP, and an affiliate member of 4TU Centre for Ethics and Technology. She is the author of Rules for Robots. Ethics & Artificial Intelligence (VUBPRESS, 2020) and Onlife (Lannoo, 2016).

MARJOLEIN LANZING is Assistant Professor Philosophy of Technology at the University of Amsterdam. Previously, she worked as a post-doc on the ‘Googlization of Health’ within the ERC project ‘Digital Good’ at the Interdisciplinary Hub for Security, Privacy and Data Governance (Radboud University). She finished her PhD-research ‘The Transparent Self: A Normative Investigation of Changing Selves and Relationships in the Age of the Quantified Self at the 4TU Center for Ethics and Technology (University of Technology Eindhoven). Marjolein is board member of Bits of Freedom, an NGO that protects online freedom and (digital) civil rights, and the Amsterdam Platform for Privacy Research.