Destroying the joint and dying of shame? New research explores feminist revitalisation in social media and beyond

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A new paper in *Geographic Research* examines the revitalisation of interest in feminist thought in Australia and around the world, in part through Julia Gillard's misogyny speech and the 'Destroy the Joint' Facebook campaign, inspired by Alan Jones. Through these examples

and more, the paper explores the possibility of studying the 'geography' of feminist thought on the internet.

Authors Jessica McLean (Macquarie University) and Sophia Maalsen (University of Sydney) have identified that since mid-2012, a feminist revitalisation in Australia has emerged, targeting gender inequality in myriad spaces – both political and public.

"It's a challenging task to 'map' and record this revitalisation," says McLean, "as the different spaces in new media are constantly changing through their dynamic networks. It is, nevertheless, a task worth doing."

Destroy the Joint (DTJ) is one focal point of this reinvigorated movement within Australia, a collaborative campaign born on Twitter and growing most sizably on Facebook. Currently there are nearly 34,000 Facebook likes for this group, and about 8,500 Twitter followers. The Destroy the Joint campaign grew from tweets by Jane Caro and Jill Tomlinson, lampooning Alan Jones' criticism that women are destroying the joint in public office around Australia – naming the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Christina Nixon and Lord Mayor of Sydney Clover Moore as chief antagonists.

"In analysing the apparent feminist revitalisation over the past year," said Maalsen, "we found that a multitude of micro-campaigns under the DTJ umbrella have achieved substantive success, in comparison to other campaigns like Kony 2012 – which raised substantial funds but offered limited returns."

McLean and Maalsen refer to examples of DTJ success stories such as the securing of free access to private phone numbers from Telstra for domestic violence survivors and, most significantly, the withdrawal of advertising support for Alan Jones' show on commercial radio.

McLean and Maalsen also identify how modern online feminism faces a paradox of continuing to develop and be remade in social media through Facebook and Twitter's introduction of new regulations to reduce sexist behaviours on their sites.

Feminist action has targeted trolling, and exploitative and violent imagery against women, achieving some success, evident in Facebook's change to its policies to disallow gender-based hate speech and Twitter's introduction across all platforms of the report abuse button.

"Indeed, just as such sites can offer a space to enact feminism, they can also be used to perpetuate sexism and misogyny as the recent twitter rape and bomb threats against female journalists, an MP and a feminist campaigner in the UK has demonstrated," says McLean.

"Gender inequality requires action on diverse fronts, and it is not the only axis of difference that can be renegotiated in cyberspace. To borrow words spoken by Julia Gillard in her final speech as Prime Minister of Australia, gender 'doesn't explain everything, it doesn't explain nothing, it explains some things," says McLean.

More information: McLean, J. and Maalsen, S. 2013, Destroying the Joint and Dying of Shame? A geography of revitalised feminism in social media and beyond, *Geographical Research*.

Provided by Macquarie University