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LEARNING NETWORK

# LearningNetwork Brief 28

## Cyber Misogyny

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## Defining Cyber Misogyny

Cyber misogyny refers to the various forms of gendered hatred, harassment, and abusive behaviour targeted at women and girls via the Internet.<sup>i</sup> It draws attention to the discriminatory nature of this behaviour, which occurs within a context of power and marginalization. In this way, cyber misogyny is a more nuanced term than the more general “cyberbullying”.

Cyber misogyny is most commonly manifested as:

- [“Revenge porn”](#);
- [Cyberstalking](#);
- [Gender-based hate speech online](#);
- [Non-consensual sharing of intimate images](#); and
- [Child sexual exploitation](#)

## The Internet as a “New Frontier” for Misogynistic Hate, Harassment, and Abuse

While the problem of sexual harassment has existed for decades, the rise of the Internet and social media has resulted in new opportunities to engage in harassment and abuse. Social networking websites, for example, make it easier for perpetrators to monitor their targets, obtain personal information, and repeatedly send unwanted messages. The Internet provides perpetrators with anonymity not afforded in real space and a larger platform for the spread of harassment. Online threats of violence against women, however, are often trivialized or minimized by the public, with perpetrators experiencing little or no consequences for their behaviour. Technology therefore facilitates “the proliferation of gendered hate and harassment.”<sup>ii</sup>

## The Consequences of Cyber Misogyny

Cyber misogyny has real, tangible, and often devastating consequences for the safety and security of women and girls. Cyber misogyny also violates women’s and girls’ rights to equality and freedom from discrimination, and contributes to the normalization of violence against women in mainstream culture. Consequences experienced by victims/survivors include but are not limited to:

- Suicide
- Emotional and psychological distress
- Violation of privacy
- Public humiliation and exposure
- Damage to reputation
- Job loss
- Financial losses
- Damage to personal relationships
- Violation of personal dignity and autonomy
- Fear for physical and/or psychological safety
- Identity theft/fraud

## Canadian Legal Responses to Cyber Misogyny

A wide range of strategies are required to address cyber misogyny and its diverse manifestations, and law has a critical role to play.

Some instances of cyber misogyny can be addressed using existing criminal and civil Canadian laws, including laws prohibiting criminal harassment, extortion, intimidation, uttering threats, voyeurism, obscene publications, unauthorized use of a computer, mischief in relation to data, identity theft and identity fraud, false messages, defamatory libel, invasion of privacy, intentional infliction of mental suffering, appropriation of personality, violations of copyright, child pornography, violations of human rights, internet luring of a child, sexual exploitation, making sexually explicit material available to a child, harassing and indecent telephone calls, and advocating genocide and criminal hate speech. Restraining/protection orders may also be available to victims.

However, successfully utilizing these laws to prosecute instances of cyber misogyny can be extremely difficult, and victims face many challenges (e.g. jurisdiction, inability to apply existing laws to specific instances).

In March of 2015, the Canadian federal government passed Bill C-13, the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act. The passing of the Act strengthens legal responses to cyber misogyny cases.

The Act prohibits such acts as the non-consensual distribution of intimate images and grants courts additional powers, such as the ability to order the removal of non-consensual intimate images from the Internet. A full description of the Act's provisions can be found [here](#).

Although the Act is a promising development, there is still much work to be done with regard to legal responses to online gendered harassment, hatred, and abusive behaviours. A list of recommendations for strengthening existing laws can be found [here](#).

It is also important to note that 'even the best laws can only respond to harmful, hateful behaviour after the fact, when much of the damage has already been done'.<sup>iii</sup> Efforts to prevent and ultimately end cyber misogyny must therefore continue in addition to enhancing support services for victims/survivors.

For Additional Resources visit <http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/network-areas/technology-related-violence>

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<sup>i</sup> West Coast LEAF. (2014). #CyberMisogyny: Using and strengthening Canadian legal responses to gendered hate and harassment online. Vancouver, BC: Author.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid, p. 80.