Putting Pain in a Stranger:

A Multi-Level Analysis of Violent Behaviour on Social Media

James Milton

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Abstract

Violence is complex and challenging to research without making definitional and level of analysis choices excluding some of its aspects. Micro-sociology tends to understand violence as direct and physical, leaving indirect, non-physical online violence less visible. In this theoretically focused thesis, I explore if computer-mediated interaction can be understood *as* violence and how it operates across all three levels of analysis. I use Willem Schinkel's theory of violence— and his definition of violence as "reduction of being"—and a variation of his liquidation methodology designed to study aspects of violence from multiple theoretical perspectives to deal flexibly and inclusively with its complexity. A secondary aim of my research is to establish the usefulness of this approach. I outline Schinkel's violence theory and use the theoretical perspectives of Goffman, Collins, and Bourdieu in the analysis underlying my liquidation. I then review approaches to defining violence in the literature. I describe the liquidation methodology and my approach to my qualitative empirical research, a thematic analysis of three somewhat violent online discussions on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Results from the thematic analysis are discussed from the perspective of Goffman, Collins, and Bourdieu, then combined to present a multi-level fractured realist understanding of online violence. Ultimately, I find evidence substantiating the presence of indirect violence in computer-mediated interaction. I find social media is a performance space characterised by aggressive face-work between competing sacred individuals, inflected by rational, individualistic values deriving from the homo economicus of neoliberal capitalism. These individuals bring beliefs, ritual anger, and emotional energy to social media from offline group memberships along interaction ritual chains, where disinhibition enables and amplifies violent online interaction. I also find that flexibility and the ability to deal with violence as a collection of aspects make Schinkel's theory and methodology a useful research tool.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The sociology of violence seeks approaches to violence that define it in ways inclusive of its overlapping, intertwining complexity and that meet it at all levels of analysis and chart its relationships to other elements of the social world (Hartmann, 2017; Schinkel, 2010; Walby, 2013). However, some acknowledge that this striving remains nascent (Hartmann, 2017; Walby, 2013). The field contends against three major obstacles (Hartmann, 2017). The first is definition. Exactly what is violence? Physical harm? Loss of potential? Something in between or more abstract? Second is the micro-macro problem: at what level of analysis is violence best confronted? Is it micro-interactional or a consequence of social structures riddled with inequality? The third is the elusiveness of violence. I examine all three obstacles in chapter three, where I argue that they complicate violence research, cloud perceptions of whose interests are most strongly reflected in approaches to violence, and risk making the definition of violence itself an act of violence. Researchers often look past violence to focus on related concepts such as power or the oppression of particular identity or status groups or to examine its causes, motives, or consequences (Schinkel, 2010). These issues have prevented some violent behaviours from being treated *as* violence, including my principal area of interest, online or technologically mediated violence. Promising theoretical and methodological tools exist in the field to address these issues. Still, some remain relatively untested, such as those put forward by sociologist Willem Schinkel (see chapters four and five). My research approaches violence with these problems in mind, aiming to chart relationships between them and violence that may help resolve them and make violence itself more visible, and lessen the harm that violence does in the world.

This chapter introduces my research by briefly presenting the context, the gap in the research I hope to address, and my research aims and questions. I discuss why my research matters and the limitations constraining its conduct. Lastly, I describe the overall structure of this thesis.

Background

Violence pervades the social world of late modernity. Humans pursue their lives immersed in war, rape as a weapon of war, genocide, global and local organised crime, terrorism, securitisation of refugees, internal state violence, religious, structural, symbolic, and cultural violence, peace-time rape, domestic, intimate partner, anti-LGBTQ, anti-trans, and other forms of gendered violence, and the interpersonal violence usually characterised as crime. Violence fills the news. In just the time occupied by my research, world events include: Russia's war in Ukraine; hundreds of mass shootings in the United States plus racially problematic extrajudicial police killings such as that of George Floyd, riots around the Black Lives Matter movement, and the shooting of some of those protesters by assault-rifle-wielding Kyle Rittenhouse; in Myanmar, brutal state violence as a tool to silence citizens resisting oppression; and, in Australia, the structural and symbolic violence in healthcare systems resulting in the death of young Aboriginal woman Naomi Williams and her unborn child when a hospital denied her treatment, and the intimate partner homicide of Brisbane woman Doreen Langham, burned to death by her ex-partner after, a coroner found, police did nothing to respond to her repeated requests for help. These are a random handful of examples illustrating the continuum of violence represented in media coverage that encompasses countless others.

Paradoxically, those enchanted by Enlightenment views of progress and the pacification inherent to processes of civilisation tend to identify modernity with a reduction in violence (Collins, 1974; Wieviorka, 2009). This contention is supported by data indicating a decline in the overall number of wars, violent deaths, or murders (Wieviorka, 2009). However, such data only highlight the dangers of relying on simple definitions of violence that stress ultimate expressions of physical harm. Internal state violence, deemed legitimate by long custom, is ignored in such claims, as are structural and symbolic modes delivered by means more subtle than bombs, guns, and blades (see chapter two).

Historically (see chapter two), violence research has focused on direct or interpersonal modes of violence, such as state violence and its legitimacy, violent crime as an individual pathology, or as an adjunct to other issues such as identity or status group conflict such as racism, misogyny, or bullying (Hartmann, 2017; Schinkel, 2010; Weber, 2013[1900]). Substantial work has been done in this context. Weber's (2013[1900]) discussion of the role of violence in the constitution of the state and the state's monopoly on legitimate violence is foundational. It informs work by theorists such as Schinkel and Pearce, who feature in this thesis. Bourdieu (2013[1972]) and mid-twentieth century peace researcher Johan Galtung (1969, 1990) have been hugely influential in their theorisation of indirect forms of violence, such as symbolic, structural, and cultural violence, detailed in chapter three. These harm the mind, identity, and justice outcomes as much as they do the body. While these theories of non-physical violence are influential, I will argue in subsequent chapters that they are prone to be used to analyse topics tangential to violence; too few studies have emphasised violence itself or examined its relationships to other social elements (Hartmann, 2017; Walby, 2013).

Recently, this has begun to change with the emergence of violence sociology as a distinct field, with researchers such as Schinkel, Collins, Wieviorka, and Walby centring and redefining violence in carefully developed new theories and detailing its impacts across the

levels of analysis (Hartmann, 2017). Collins is influential. His micro-situational theory of violence, developed from his interactional ritual chain theory—drawing on Erving Goffman's interactionist theories—is strongly represented in the literature (see chapters four and seven). Of the violence theories mentioned so far, each has focused on macro-level analysis and the indirect mode of violence (Bourdieu, Galtung) or the micro-level and direct violence (Collins). Current researchers within violence sociology continue to note the complexity of their topic and the relative newness of their field and recognise the inclination for discussion in the political, public, and social scientific spheres to raise some aspects while omitting others and talking around the subject without addressing it directly—what might be called the elusiveness of violence, and that this remains an issue for the field (Hartmann, 2017; Schinkel, 2010). It is Schinkel whose theory of violence centres and most clearly articulates the need for flexible and inclusive approaches to theorising violence and delineates a methodology for achieving that.

However, in reviewing existing sociological literature relating to violence, it is apparent that few to no researchers—beyond Schinkel himself and a small group of his coauthors—have applied Schinkel's theory and methodology in a significant way. Most who cite him do so briefly in their introductory text to support the idea that violence is complicated or hard to define (Bowman et al., 2015; Shakoor, 2013; Whittington, 2020) or that violence research rarely deals with violence itself (Bowman et al., 2015). Some cite one or two of his assertions about state violence (Pearce, 2017; Uitermark, 2014) or regimes of violence (Hearn et al., 2022; Meissner, 2019; Strid et al., 2021) in support of their own discussions of those topics usually drawing predominantly from other theoretical perspectives. Hartmann (2017) uses Schinkel's work as one of many illustrations of the dynamism of the young field of violence sociology. None use Schinkel's theory or methodology to analyse violence. It is

probable that this thesis is among the very first works to use Schinkel in this way, justifying my judgement that this is a clear research gap.

The Research Problem

Violence—in some of its aspects—is a thoroughly researched phenomenon in the social sciences. Searches on the topic will produce thousands of results across multiple disciplines and subject areas. This reflects the complexity of violence and its pervasiveness in human affairs. Schinkel (2010) argues that violence is a universal characteristic of social interaction, invisible in some situations only because of the way violence tends to be defined. Given the prevalence of violence, it is not surprising that it features heavily in social science research. However, as alluded to above, violence has been the bridesmaid in this research and rarely the bride. Weber's (2013[1900]) description of state violence, as significant as it has been, is concerned with the role of violence in the constitution of the state and the characteristics of the use of state power more than it is about violence per se (see chapter two). Bourdieu (see chapters three, four, and eight) discusses symbolic violence in his theorisation of fields, capital, doxa, and habitus—a consequence rather than a core focus (Schubert, 2008). Galtung's (1969) immensely influential description of structural violence appears in an article about peace as a means of understanding the things that peace is not. To this day, sociology is inclined to dance around violence itself (Schinkel, 2010). When violence appears, it remains sidelined, or scholars define it in ways that obscure or exclude particular forms of violence and those who experience it (Schinkel, 2010).

Moreover, most existing theory locates violence in particular levels of analysis (Hartmann, 2017; Schinkel, 2010). Because many commonsense definitions of violence in the field continue to see it as direct, physical, and interpersonal (Schinkel, 2010), the literature

has rarely touched on violence associated with digital interaction, as the online world is non-physical. Exceptions tend to be cyberbullying (see chapter two)—though it is often addressed as an extension of offline bullying—and the origins, contexts, and outcomes of conflict between identity groups (see chapter two) that are more expressive of various critical theories than of violence theory. Schinkel has addressed the definitional issues that hide some forms of violence from existing violence theory, but his theory and methodology is not well-represented in the literature.

Consequently, I identify three specific subject gaps in the literature. Firstly, multi-level, inclusive studies centring violence itself. Secondly, such studies directed toward online violence. Thirdly, such studies informed by the deliberately flexible and inclusive theory and methodology offered by Willem Schinkel. While many existing theories and methodologies relevant to violence are eminently suitable to particular reflexively designed research contexts, violence sociology is evolving towards more multi-levelled and multi-disciplined approaches that better serve the complexity of violence as a topic. Perspectives based on narrower assumptions about violence—and the studies relying on them—are at greater risk of missing important aspects of violence or harming people who experience certain kinds of violence by excluding them from social and scientific consideration. This is especially true of online violence, given that digital interaction is an increasingly significant part of the human social world and infamously filled with violent self-expression, the harms of which as violence are under-represented in the literature. Given the pervasiveness and impact of violence offline and offline, it seems more than ever urgent to study it with clear eyes and well-developed methodologies concerned able to see violence itself and strip away its elusiveness, making it more accessible both to research and amelioration.

Research Aims, Objectives, and Questions

Given the research gaps identified in the literature described above, my research aims are to utilise Schinkel's flexible and inclusive theory and methodology to explore digitally mediated violent behaviour in the context of violence itself in the hope of gaining insight into online violence, how it operates across levels of analysis, and how it relates to other relevant aspects of the social world. To that end, my research objective is to explore online violence and answer the questions:

- Can certain forms of online interaction be considered as violence, and if so, how?

- What relationships exist between factors at all three levels of analysis and online violence?

- What relationships exist between online violence and other aspects of the social world, such as interaction, identity formation, and group membership?

- Do Schinkel's violence theory and liquidation methodology offer anything of value to the field of violence research?

My work occurs within the discipline of sociology with a specific focus on violence sociology. My research will limit its scope to violence as it shapes behaviour in three purposively selected social media discussions with violent characteristics, one each from social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Though my analysis occasionally leads beyond these platforms and even to the offline world, I do not intend my findings to be generalised beyond these discussions and their participants. For theoretical and methodological reasons detailed in chapters four and five, the primary theoretical analysis will be confined to concepts from Schinkel, Goffman, Bourdieu, and Collins, though, at times, I make minor use of other theories to clarify or elaborate on specific points.

Significance

My research potentially opens up online violence to study *as* violence, using the theoretical and methodological tools available to violence sociology. This addresses an observed research gap and so contributes to human understanding of an aspect of violence that the progress of the digital revolution has made more significant than ever to the human social world. Violence is common, and the kind of everyday digital violence included in my study reflects what ordinary people might expect to encounter online routinely. My work may assist other researchers in bringing important aspects of digitally mediated violence under sociological scrutiny and contribute to lessening the harms of online violence.

In the same way, my research may help narrow other subject gaps described above, adding to the literature a multi-level study focusing on violence itself. Addressing subject gaps contributes new knowledge and strengthens any field, providing expanded opportunities for additional research. Specifically, my work may make visible multi-level or multi-situated relationships around online violence worth more detailed or empirical examination. At the least, it may promote the value of multi-level approaches to violence in general and online violence in particular, continuing and strengthening an existing trend within the field.

My research also contributes to testing Schinkel's violence theory and methodology. Again, this narrows a subject gap. It may also encourage the use of a substantive and comprehensive tool for understanding violence, which in the hands of additional researchers could lead to additional flexible and inclusive studies of violence, improving understanding of an elusive topic and strengthening the field.

Generally, the importance of my study lies in its potential to increase sociological understanding of online violence and how it relates to the social world. Recognising their existence may prove beneficial to those suffering the effects of online violence as violence

itself, which sociology has rarely considered previously. Illuminating the relations of online violence may offer opportunities to intervene in the processes of online violence in ways that reduce its effects. Given that all forms of violence, online or otherwise, give rise to enormous and frequent quantities of physical, mental, social, and even lethal suffering, any hope for reduction seems significant.

My research contributes most to testing and supporting sociological theory and adding to sociological knowledge, benefiting those experiencing violence primarily through applying heightened knowledge to their lives. However, industry is increasingly making use of digital communication tools such as social media to interact productively with their customers and facilitate collaboration among employees. These interactions are not immune from violence, and any improvement in understanding online violence that benefits ordinary Internet users may also help industry avoid or reduce violent incidents that impact their efficient and effective use of digital communication technologies.

Limitations

Given that I am analysing politically charged online discussions, the possibility exists that my progressively-leaning subjectivity might produce bias. Some of the views expressed by participants are distinctly contrary to my own. However, I completed similar research earning my honours degree and have good advisors. I have maintained my awareness of the possibility of bias throughout, ensuring that my analysis focuses on applying my theoretical perspectives to my data in line with my research objectives, which are not remotely political. I have no interest whatsoever in judging the view of my participants, only in understanding them theoretically.

My approach to my research is qualitative. This reflects my tastes, skill-set, and the applicability of qualitativeness to a study intended to chart relationships using human experience as data. While this necessitates not having access to the strengths of quantitative methodologies—and some would say this includes rigour and objectivity—I am content with the strengths of qualitativeness. Moreover, I use Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis for my empirical research, which is designed to increase rigour, and favour Braun and Clarke's view that researcher subjectivity is one of the strengths of the qualitative approach.

Because my thesis is emphatically theoretical, I limit my empirical research to a small, purposively selected sample of online discussion. Empirical data only exists within my research as a focus for my theoretical perspectives. The overarching analysis in my work is not the thematic analysis of the data but the theoretical analysis of the empirical findings. However, during the research design, I did choose purposive sampling and Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis as my empirical methodologies, as they are known to help make the most of limited data.

Likewise, only some theoretical perspectives are used and are further narrowed to particular works or concepts of those theorists. This is a matter of focus, making the best use of time by limiting my theoretical scope to what is possible. Indeed, this is consistent with the liquidation methodology, which is not interested in seeing violence in every way at once; instead, it seeks to see violence as it is when observed in that way—that is, when seen in a particular, chosen way (Schinkel, 2010). Importantly, I must acknowledge that the theorists comprising my selected theoretical profiles—while appropriate to what I wanted to accomplish in this thesis—are exclusively white males from the global north, thereby limiting alternative identity category perspectives available to my liquidation.

Finally, I concentrate on a more everyday mode of violence. That is, I direct my attention to low-intensity violence of the sort that any social media user might encounter in

the course of daily Internet use. Intense violence, including threats of rape and murder—against participants and their families—exists online. There is also a clear tie between what I will argue is online violence and the worst forms of offline violence, such as intimate partner homicide, mass shootings, and hate crimes. Again, omitting these aspects of violence represents a deliberate narrowing of the scope in ways productive for my research.

All of my research is based on reflexive choices made during the design phase. Each choice strengthens the research and makes it achievable within the limitations described. However, because of these limitations, at no time do I suggest generalising my findings beyond my explicitly set boundaries.

Structure of this Thesis

Chapter one introduces the background and context of my research and the research problem, plus the research aims, objectives, and questions derived from it. It also sketches the significance and limitations of my research.

Chapter two is my literature review. I lay out and discuss broad categories of violence-related literature, including critiques of state violence, exploring identity and status group experience of violence, and analysing situational violence.

Chapter three describes how the literature tends to define violence either simply as direct, interpersonal, and physical or in more complex, often indirect and non-physical ways. Drawing on Schinkel, I explain that how violence is defined is critically important as definition itself can be an act of violence, making some subjects of violence invisible.

Chapter four outlines the theoretical framework underlying my research. I summarise key concepts from the theoretical work of Schinkel, who provides my overarching theory and

methodology. I also outline relevant concepts from my three theoretical perspectives: from Goffman, dramaturgy, encounters, and face-work; from Collins, his theories of interaction ritual chains and violence; and from Bourdieu, field, doxa, habitus, symbolic violence, and the law of conservation of violence.

Chapter five describes my core methodologies. I describe my theoretical research as using an adaptation of Schinkel's liquidation—examining an aspect of violence from multiple theoretical perspectives—to analyse the findings of a small empirical study. I also outline my empirical study, the application of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to three violent online discussions, one each from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Chapters six, seven, and eight are my discussion chapters. In them, I analyse my empirical findings from the theoretical perspectives of Goffman, Collins, and Bourdieu, respectively, and discuss how they illuminate online violence at the three levels of analysis.

Chapter nine performs the liquidation of the findings from the discussion chapters to achieve a big-picture, mosaic view of online violence. Highlighted are the multi-level nature of online violence, the relationship between online violence and membership in and interaction within offline groups, and the amplification of online violence by the affordances of social media platforms.

Chapter ten presents a summation of my research, its findings, significance, limitations, and the opportunities it offers for future research.

Chapter Two

Violence in the Literature

In chapter one, I allude to Schinkel's (2010) argument that there is a tendency for researchers to decentre violence itself in studies about violence, and throughout this thesis, I develop the idea that even well-regarded sociological perspectives dealing with non-physical forms of harm—such as Bourdieu's—can be seen to focus beyond violence itself to tangential matters such as power or identity formation. In this context, *violence itself* is what remains when a violent incident is stripped of its causes and background, the subjectivity of its perpetrators and victims and the meanings it has or makes for them, its consequences, the statistically supported patterns structuring its appearance and execution—all the things that are "about violence" without touching the intrinsic core of what violence *is* (Schinkel, 2010, p. 6). It is the ontological purity obscured within ontic manifestations of violence—the distinct thing itself that drives the punch in the nose without being the punch in the nose (Schinkel, 2010, p. 46). When Walby (2013, p. 96) says, "Violence has often been seen as reducible to or contained within other categories, especially as an instrument of other forms of power", she describes the problem under consideration here but also illustrates it—violence itself is the object that pre-exists efforts to reduce or contain it. As implied, violence itself is often left an unopened door at the corner of the eye of sociological research. However, none of this is to say that violence is wholly missing from the literature: it certainly is not. In this chapter, I report on a review of the sociological literature concerning violence, briefly discussing some of the more common ways violence features there. Along the way, this chapter will point towards the existence of multilevel research into violence itself as one of the research gaps delineated in chapter one, and highlight the need to critically examine the process of defining violence, as discussed in-depth in chapter three.

Violence is an almost impossibly complicated topic. Countless research projects, books, and academic papers delve into permutations of its equally innumerable aspects of violence. It is simply that, until recently, these many writings reflected the mid-twentieth-century fragmentation of violence within sociology into a mere adjunct of research into violent deviance or inter-state conflict (Walby, 2013). Only with the rise of theoretical approaches that incorporated and centred the experiences of marginalised or silenced individuals did sociology begin to seriously consider other forms of interpersonal violence and their connectedness to the institutions of the broader social world (Walby, 2013). For example, the development and application of feminist theory is needed to reveal the iron fist of the patriarchy within the velvet glove of the normative husband and provider and the system that places him at the head of the domestic sphere. Once progress was made in charting these new understandings of violence, a true sociological subfield, the sociology of violence, grew around attempts to unify analysis of the many kinds and scales of violence (Hartmann, 2017; Walby, 2013).

As the sociology of violence is a nascent subfield, much of the writing belonging to it is theoretical, attempting to position violence within useful definitions or to articulate meaningful ways of understanding its essential nature. Consequently, while studies addressing violence are numerous, few empirical articles explicitly identify themselves with the subfield. Articles, instead, often position themselves within another subfield or consider violence as an accessory to some other topic. The articles pertaining to violence described in this literature review drew from studies using various levels of analysis, often focused on the causes/precursors, experiences, and consequences of violence. Most fell within six very broad categories.

- Meta-discussion of the field of the sociology of violence itself.

- Theoretical developments of violence designed to open it up to examination within the sociology of violence (described elsewhere in this review and in chapter four).

- Critiques of state violence.

- Charting relations between violence and aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, and religion.

- Exploring violence by and against young people, often in the context of Internet use and all but conflating online violence with cyberbullying/stalking.

- Dissecting situational violence to reveal pathways between the motivation to violence and the commission of violent acts.

As the first two categories are addressed at length through the thesis—most particularly in chapter three—the rest of this chapter focuses on the final four categories: state, identity-based, youth, and situational violence.

Legitimate State Violence

The literature about state violence often takes for granted Weber's (2013[1900]) position that modern states can be defined by their unique ability, relative to other organisations, to deploy violence in pursuit of their ends legitimately—that is, the debate about a violent state act focuses on legitimacy even when authors question whether the assumed legitimacy of particular acts is genuine, for example (Barbalet, 2021; Baron et al., 2019; Carls, 2019; Giroux, 2019; Hearty, 2019; Scheper-Hughes, 1997). State violence as "legitimate" and a central dynamic of building and maintaining the state was introduced by Weber (2013[1900], p. 78) and quickly became a commonsense understanding of how the state should function (Barbalet, 2021; Hartmann, 2017, p. 1). In this view, state violence ceases to be violent and becomes a kind of public good—protection of citizens from the

inherent aggression of themselves and various threatening others—contrasting the manifest evil of private, interpersonal violence (Schinkel, 2010). Barbalet (2021) acknowledges violence in politics and its possible legitimacy but cautions against seeing the connection between violence and the state as inevitable, as violence often undermines politics as a means of getting things done. Additionally, Schinkel (2013) accepts the legitimate/illegitimate binary in order to break down how it works and how legitimate state violence is used to legitimise some citizens and delegitimise others.

However, the idea that violence could be either legitimate or illegitimate considerably predates Weber. It reaches back several centuries to the coining in several European languages of words for violent acts which depend upon either power/force—*potestas*, legitimate, often executed by the state—or those that are purely violent—*violentia*, illegitimate, and the domain of the wildness of nature, the undisciplined passion of the individual, or of society as distinct from the state (Schinkel, 2010). In modernity, Weber would formalise this separation and argue that a monopoly on the use of legitimate violence within its borders was the defining characteristic of the state (Weber, 2013[1900]). However, in the medieval period, European states had no such monopoly; they shared legitimate use of force with a powerful Church that extended well beyond their borders and with the nobles of a feudal system who retained control of their own capacity for violence on their own lands and as part of their duty to rally to defend the state (Schinkel, 2010). It was only with the decline of the Church as a political power in the late middle ages and after concerted efforts to rein in the violence of the nobility that the state acquired a real monopoly on legitimate violence (Schinkel, 2010).

While noting it was early conceptions of legitimised state violence in Europe that opened the floodgates for the manifold acts of violence of the era of colonisation, Schinkel (2010) argues that the seventeenth-century Peace of Westphalia—which ended the Thirty

Years War and liberated European states to police violence within their expanding imperial borders—cemented the divide between private violence and the actions taken by the state to rein it in. As states evolved away from monarchy towards modernity, violence, as a phenomenon distinct from the state's own use of force, became one more thing to be measured and regulated to discipline populations (Schinkel, 2010).

The legitimacy of state violence brings several layers of meaning to the word violence as it is generally used. Legitimate violence is an instrument for enforcing the social contract which protects humans from their own base nature; it is civilising, a belief strengthened by the West's history of using force to bring a certain kind of civilisation to global Indigenous populations deemed savage (Schinkel, 2010). As a civilizing influence—in accord with the Enlightenment association of civilization and reason—legitimate state violence is framed as rational and ordered, while violent acts not sanctioned by the state become irrational and chaotic (Schinkel, 2010). Legitimate violence is good, moral, and desirable, while illegitimate violence is bad, immoral, and in need of obliteration (Schinkel, 2010). Although, the immorality here—in alignment with the class-oriented liberalism of the nineteenth century that lingers in the values of neoliberalism—is the immorality of the socioeconomically disadvantaged. Violence becomes seen as what the poor do, while the ruling classes prune and discipline, preserve order and protect without requiring critical examination because they are, after all, legitimate. This is symbolic violence (see the description later in this chapter), and it is a key element of allowing the state to preserve the legitimate/illegitimate dichotomy inherent to the commonsense late modern definition of violence (Schinkel, 2010). Legitimate violence legitimises those who enact it (Schinkel, 2010), while illegitimate violence renders its perpetrators not just illegitimate but deviant, irrational agents of chaos, loathsome and savage denizens of an underclass necessitating, even deserving, the use of force to uplift them or, at least, to bring them under control.

As Western societies made great shows of moving towards freedom and equality, the violence Weber (2013[1900]) identified as constitutive of the state provided the excuse of protecting freedom and equality as a curtain behind which oppression and inequality could proceed as usual (Schinkel, 2010). The disciplined majority accepted the punishment of the deviants among them and became exploitable fodder for the burgeoning industrial revolution (Schinkel, 2010). As the twentieth century arrived, the idea that the state used legitimate force while private individuals perpetrated violence became common sense—an implicit part of how violence is defined (Schinkel, 2010).

From the mid-twentieth century, critical theorists began to question the ramifications of theorising violence—particularly violence in the hands of the state—along lines of legitimacy and illegitimacy (Barbalet, 2021; Baron et al., 2019; Pearce, 2017; Schinkel, 2013). Some resist ontologically conjoining the state and violence at all, arguing that accepting as common sense that violence and the state are inextricably linked means state violence can never be reduced by human action (Pearce, 2017). Critiques of state violence tend to fall within the parameters of critical sociology or criminology, depending on whether the author views the violence as socially structured symptoms of inequality or more as a crime-like collective pathology. In the 21st century, the smokescreen of violent legitimacy has allowed hegemonic neoliberal capitalism to excuse its violence from critical examination and transfer responsibility for it from structurally embedded social problems to individual failings within the private sphere (Schinkel, 2010). This manoeuvre is at the heart of securitisation, hyperincarceration, and pacification—violent processes by which a state reframes vulnerable groups as inherently dangerous and persuades citizens of the legitimacy of violent social control measures directed against the unruly.

Securitisation is a state response to the increasing fluidity of borders in a globalised world where the mobility of individuals and materials has been increasing alongside pressures

on populations to move in order to escape oppression, wars, natural disasters, and the effects

of global warming (Hodge, 2015). In response, states frame themselves as enclaves of peace

and civility in a troubled world and movement toward their borders as an attack (Hodge,

2015). Examples are easily located in Australia's public discourse around this topic, as when

Home Affairs minister Peter Dutton told journalists asylum seekers held in offshore detention

on Nauru were of "bad character" and accused raped asylum seekers of requesting abortions

in Australia as a "ploy" to foil border security (Davidson, 2019). Here, swelling mobility

meets and merges with the social science concept of "crimmigration" that associates

movement—however legitimate under international law—with criminality, a sentiment that,

in Australia, is as old as the White Australia Policy (Hodge, 2015; Kaladelfos & Finnane,

2018). In recent years, crimmigration has manifested in Australia through political discourse

incorrectly labelling asylum seekers as "illegal arrivals", imposing strict laws on asylum

seekers explicitly to control their inevitable disorderly behaviour, and indefinitely

imprisoning asylum seekers offshore—all in the name of security for the Australian state and

its citizens (Hodge, 2015, p. 125). Hammering the illegality of certain groups of immigrants

in their discourse allows politicians their perennial favourite tough-on-crime stance but also

serves to normalise violence against asylum seekers to justify it as Arendt (Gines, 2013)

argues genuine use of legitimate state power never requires.

Hyperincarceration refers to a post-war US shift in the treatment of vulnerable—

particularly poor and black—communities from providing a welfare safety net to managing

perceived bad behaviour through the criminal justice system (Wacquant, 2014). In the US,

two-thirds of prisoners come from backgrounds where their annual income was less than half

the poverty line, and 70% of them are black or Latino people—increasing from 30% in the

1940s (Wacquant, 2014, pp. 43, 50). The overall rate of incarceration increased six times in

the decade of the 1980s, as did the rate of people living under parole or probation between

1980 and 2000 (Wacquant, 2014, pp. 36-37). Post-war America has seen massive increases in incarceration, parole, and probation for poor people of colour not connected to similar increases in offending (Wacquant, 2014). Given that at least one recent study has tied incarceration to long-term increases in mortality for non-Latinx people of colour versus no increase in mortality for incarcerated white people (Bovell-Ammon et al., 2021), hyperincarceration can be understood as a form of state violence doing real physical harm to vulnerable populations.

A similar issue exists in Australia, though Australia and the US have different historical antecedents for an association between race and incarceration. Indigenous people comprise 3.3% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Nevertheless, in Australia, the imprisonment rate is thirteen times higher for Indigenous people than for Australians in general, representing a doubling of the Indigenous incarceration rate since 1985 to a point where 2.5% of Indigenous adults are in prison (Leigh, 2020). In Western Australia, a thirty-year-old Indigenous man is three times more likely to have been arrested than a non-Indigenous man; First Nations people are more likely to be imprisoned than African Americans or First Nations peoples in other Western democracies (Leigh, 2020). As in the US case, increasing Australian incarceration has occurred against the backdrop of a falling crime rate (Leigh, 2020).

What is common across the US and Australian experiences—and in the tendency to detain asylum seekers described earlier in this section—is the drive of neoliberal democracies to bring populations deemed problematic under the purview of the criminal justice system and, therefore, under social control (Wacquant, 2014). It is a response to social change posing a threat to the "established ethnoracial hierarchy guaranteeing an effective monopoly over collective honor to whites" intended "to curb the social turmoil generated at the foot of the urban order by the public policies of market deregulation and social welfare retrenchment that

are core building blocks of neoliberalism" (Wacquant, 2010, pp. 209-210). In the process, black or foreign bodies become discursively synonymous with criminality, and that equation stands as justification for state and symbolic violence directed against those populations (Kaladelfos & Finnane, 2018; Schinkel & Van Houdt, 2010; Wacquant, 2014). Some researchers have established that in the US, the majority automatically imagine criminals as black, and racial hatred is the leading reason the US public wants punitive responses to crime (Unnever & Cullen, 2010). Others find that white study participants are more likely to consider police violence legitimate and, if violence is proved illegitimate, are most likely to support compensation for white women and least likely to support compensation for black women (Israel-Trummel & Streeter, 2022). Considered in light of the finding in the same study that white people are more likely to support compensation for victims of police violence on the basis of how they perceive the blameworthiness and criminality of victims (Israel-Trummel & Streeter, 2022), that black women are the least likely to be seen as deserving of compensation further supports the idea that white people consider black people to be more deserving of state violence. Legitimate violence illegitimises its subjects and makes them responsible for anything the state may do to exert social control over them and removes the need to consider the role of structural inequality in their suffering. Discussion of Australian examples of how this plays out as historically embedded symbolic violence with potentially lethal consequences can be found in chapter eight.

Wacquant appears to be describing indirect—structural and symbolic—violence enforced at its unruly boundaries by direct—physical, coercive—violence. However, Baron et al. (2019) and Kienscherf (2016) analyse the history of social control in both the global south and the Western democracies to identify a category of violence beyond indirect and direct: pacification. Pacification is state violence, presumably legitimate and yet substantially invisible. It is the deliberate creation of a political order permeated by violence in subtle ways

that impose peace (Baron et al., 2019). To live pacified is to live in a world rarely troubled by direct violence but in the shadow of walls, gates, CCTV cameras, drones, guards, and militarised police forces who act, when they must, with terrifying and deadly ferocity (Baron et al., 2019). Violence becomes a presence woven into the social fabric, often unseen, but structuring behaviour through fear of attack from whatever the walls and gates are keeping out or fear of deviating from the norm sufficiently to become the subject of the security apparatus (Baron et al., 2019). Legitimate violence is now indistinguishable from the social world entire, and to critique it is to oppose the clear social good of maintaining social order; it is to be anti-peace, anti-safety. This, in turn, contributes to processes of pacification structuring late capitalist society to obey the state from fear of violence without the need for the state to risk delegitimising itself using more visible violence (Baron et al., 2019; Kienscherf, 2016; Schinkel, 2004). However, pacification can be a more multi-dimensional violence than oppressing entire populations using the various technologies of pacification. For example, Håndlykken-Luz (2020) investigates the experiences of Brazilian residents of favelas—urban districts similar to ghettoes—subjected to explicit policies of pacification administered by police. They find a version of pacification focused on non-white subgroups within the Brazilian population, maintained by direct police violence as well as urban securitisation technologies such as surveillance, and allied to a broader drive by the government to "whiten" the general population (Håndlykken-Luz, 2020, p. 349). In another example, Gohdes (2020), analysing government violence against protesters in Syria in 2011, finds that surveillance technologies often associated with pacification enable state violence to be more targeted and more oppressively effective when it does escalate to physical violence.

Elsewhere in the literature, some studies engage with state violence in terms of criminal pathology. Hearty (2019) analyses state discourses surrounding human rights abuses in terms of criminologists Sykes and Matza's description of neutralisation techniques

criminals use to reframe and excuse their offending. Similarly, Soares, Barbosa, and Matos (2018) conduct interviews with serving police officers to illuminate the ways police morally disengage themselves from their own violent behaviours in order to commit morally questionable acts of violence while preserving their view of themselves as highly moral people. The perception of state violence as legitimate is relevant here because one method of moral disengagement involves associating a violent act with an abstract ideal (Soares et al., 2018), such as the inherent legitimacy of violence that constitutes and maintains the state for the good of the citizenry.

The literature of critical sociology also examines state violence. Examples include Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk's (2016) analysis of calls to 911, the US emergency telephone number, which found that well-publicised cases of police violence eroded people's trust in the police to the extent that 911 received fewer calls. Victims of police violence in the US are disproportionately black, and black communities are most impacted by a loss of trust in the police and its consequences (Desmond et al., 2016). People of colour in the US are also more inclined to believe any incident of police violence is illegitimate, less likely to blame the victim, and more likely to support financial compensation for the victim (Israel-Trummel & Streeter, 2022). That is, the perception of state violence as legitimate does not guarantee equality of application, and misuse of that violence may constitute the state in ways that interfere with the functioning of the state. Weber (2013[1900]), of course, saw a state as constituted within a territory bounded by the reach of its legitimate violence. Hodge (2015) studied images and discourse surrounding incoming asylum seekers stopped by Australia's border patrol and imprisoned in offshore detention camps. Rendering visible the symbolic violence of discursively constructing asylum seekers as inherently criminal outsiders, as threats to the Australian state who will never set foot on its soil, Hodge (2015) reveals state violence unequally applied but also intentionally and strategically deployed to cloak

questionable acts of violence in legitimacy. Moreover, he argues this manoeuvre recreates the vulnerable figure of the asylum seeker as Agamben's *homo sacer*, a figure displaced beyond the protection of the law whose body, whose bare life, may be broken or destroyed at the state's pleasure (Hodge, 2015)..

Still, these theoretical approaches and studies above do not address violence itself. They continue to focus on violence as an instrument of the state or, in the case of pacification, its fabric. Only two articles discuss violence itself in the context of a recognisable sociology of violence. Firstly, Schinkel (2013)—in an extract from the book laying out his theory of violence—discusses violence itself as a legitimising tool of the state. Secondly, in a theoretical paper revisiting Weber, Pearce (2017) argues that recent advances in the sociology of violence and other fields allow social scientists to question the entanglement of violence and the state. If Weber is correct that the state and violence are inseparable, an ontology is implied wherein violence is an integral characteristic of human being, and consequently, it is beyond the reach of human or political agency to reduce (Pearce, 2017). However, Pearce (2017) draws on recent work within the sociology of violence and in interdisciplinary work involving fields such as biology and psychology to distinguish aggression, which is innate, from violence itself, which is socially constructed and endowed with meaning. If this indicates violence is a product of human construction rather than human biology, then state violence is not legitimised by society's need to control human brutishness, and it may be possible to reduce the hold of violence on the social world (Pearce, 2017). A little more is said on this topic near the end of chapter three.

While Pearce's is a hopeful interpretation of state violence, the view is not a common one in discussions of state violence. Pearce (2017) notes Weber's contention that belief in the legitimacy of state violence is what makes that legitimacy real, and it is difficult to look at the world as it is and unsee the violence in the state and the presumption of justification in how

that violence is wielded against citizen and interloper alike. Certainly, Weber continues to dominate the literature on state violence, and so violence continues to be treated as an instrumentality of the state rather than as violence itself, reduced to a handful of characteristics such as legitimate/illegitimate or direct/indirect to assist in analysing some other topic.

Identity-based Violence

As noted in the previous section, violence can be understood as an integral component structuring the social world in ways corrosive to the agency of social actors and constructive of their subjectivities. Literature critiquing state violence—such as Wacquant's (2014) delineating the use of violence to enmesh unruly populations within mechanisms of control—suggests violence performs its structuring of the social world along fault lines of inequality, so violence disproportionately impacts marginalised or vulnerable identity groups characterised by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, or religion. Sociology has worked extensively to chart relations between violence and aspects of these vulnerable identities or the identities of perpetrators of violence. However, though immense, the literature on violence and identity—as with that of state violence—has tended to emerge from subfields other than the sociology of violence and so to treat violence as ancillary to some other topic.

For example, Smångs (2016b) analyses existing data for lynchings of black people by white people, carried out in Georgia and Louisiana, 1882-1930, to expand the dominant view of Jim Crow-era lynchings as a tool for imposing social control. He suggests the prevalence of lynchings in areas where white groups were most internally fractious points to lynchings playing a role in establishing white solidarity (Smångs, 2016a, 2016b). Moreover, through

situational analysis of lynchings, he finds the motivations of perpetrators to be more complex than generally assumed (Smångs, 2016a, 2016b). In a concurrent paper based on the same data, Smångs (2016a, 2016b) additionally finds that violence between members of unequal groups differs depending on whether the violence is interpersonal or collective. In situations where the violence is interpersonal and the perpetrators feel their superior status has been devalued, even relatively minor disputes may be amplified to deadly levels (Smångs, 2016a, 2016b). This was far less likely to be the case with collective violence, such that Smångs (2016a, 2016b) again cautions against simplifying the motives and dynamics around the act of lynching while adding that status competition between racial groups is a clear motivator of interpersonal violence.

Similarly, Venäläinen and Virkki (2019) evaluate the role of violence in the reproduction and maintenance of white male identity in Finland using a sociology of value perspective that sees moral judgement as an underlying aspect of the use of power. Analysis of online discussion of violence performed by women and migrant men uncovers a process whereby white males frame female and migrant males as morally inferior in order to revive the flagging fortunes of white masculinity (Venäläinen & Virkki, 2019). Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, and Sanghera (2016) draw on Bourdieu and data from a Swedish study that interviewed women who had suffered physical, sexual, and psychological abuse to show how processes of symbolic violence make abusive violence normal and legitimate and less visible even to its victims. That is, giving and receiving violence become normalised and embodied in masculine and feminine identities such that violence is part of their definition of the world (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016). However, researchers such as Walby, Towers, and Francis (2014) categorically reject the notion that symbolic violence makes women somehow complicit in or less aware of the violence deployed against them by men or patriarchal social structures. They argue sociology has tended to view violence as something men are motivated

to do by various social forces or individual pathologies while disregarding the frequently female victims of this violence—though they note this is changing due to the interdisciplinary turn in social research which is also a characteristic of the emerging subfield of the sociology of violence (Walby et al., 2014). Utilising UK crime statistics to analyse violence against women *as* violence—for example, the stripping away definitional issues that render some violence as merely domestic incidents or rape as merely a crime—to reveal violence against women in statistics that are not separated by gender, they show that violence against women is overwhelmingly more common than often perceived, makes up a significant percentage of violence generally, and perpetrators are mostly known to victims (Walby et al., 2014).

All these articles contribute important analyses of different kinds of violence in the lives of social actors belonging to various identity groups. However, again, violence is not central. Smångs offers violence primarily as a means of explaining and differentiating between different acts of racial status competition, contributing to the sociology of race and identity. Venäläinen and Virkki consider violence as an instrument whereby white males strengthen their identity group status by devaluing other identity groups as immoral. Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, and Sanghera explore the relationship between different types of violence, but only as a means to show how violence becomes a less visible embodied norm for feminine and masculine gender identities. Walby, Towers, and Francis are not concerned about violence itself so much as making violence against women visible to the eyes of theorists. While they come closest to proposing the value of their work to a new and more clear-sighted sociology of violence, in the end, they still offer up their findings to scholars of existing sociological fields or criminology. Again, literature relating to violence and identity is common, but violence remains tangential, and there is no explicit link to a separate sociology of violence.

Numerous studies have examined the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people in the context of violence. Calton et al. (2016), in their review of LGBTQ experiences of intimate partner violence, find that LGBTQ people want to seek help to escape the violence but face difficulties accessing support around issues of ignorance and stigma—resulting in an additional burden of symbolic violence. Another study, by Flaherty and Wilkinson (2020), explores the feelings of Australian gay men toward the debate surrounding a 2017 postal ballot run by the Australian Government on the issue of same-sex marriage. The study finds symbolic violence permeated the ballot itself and the debate surrounding it, but the result affirmed the importance of recognising LGBTQ love as part of allowing LGBTQ to participate in the full range of human rights and human being. However, in a recent book, Stanley (2021) argues that the apparent progress in society's acceptance of LGBTQ people conceals the violence of the state establishing gender-conforming categories of homonormativity that make violence of all kinds against the gender non-conforming less visible and more acceptable. These examples cover the range of topics and general approach of studies surrounding LGBTQ people and violence and again demonstrate that violence itself is rarely centred.

Youth and Violence

Youth is often perceived by scholars and the public as a time of recklessness that spills over into violence and criminality—until adulthood brings self-control and responsibility (Lohmeyer, 2018). That is, youth is a temporary status group, and violence is a characteristic of a relatively brief developmental stage unless something else goes wrong. As a status group, young people are divided into many of the same identity groups as adult society and are

subjected to similar patterns of intergroup violence. They are both victims and perpetrators of physical and non-physical peer violence (Corboz et al., 2018), most often considered in the form of bullying, predominantly in-person but also in online spaces such as social media (Payne & Hutzell, 2017). Young people may also aggregate into gangs whose interactions shape identity—in complex ways—towards more serious inter-gang and criminal violence (Bubolz & Lee, 2018). Perception of the pervasiveness of youth violence and the need by authorities to govern it in order to guide the young towards properly self-controlled adulthood (Lohmeyer, 2018) has given rise to a large body of sociological literature exploring the topic.

Bullying has been analysed extensively in the sociological literature. Bullying is a relatively common experience among schoolchildren globally. In the US, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, at least half of all children report that they have been bullied. Corboz, Hemat, Siddiq, and Jewkes (2018) analysed interviews and questionnaires from 770 Afghan children in pursuit of data on personal bullying prevalence and risk factors. Their (2018) findings reflect the US data: that young people bully and are bullied—intermittently taking on both roles—as a normalised part of their existence. Additionally, for Afghan children, food security and being subjected to violence or corporal punishment at home or school are predictors for experiencing or committing acts of bullying (Corboz et al., 2018). Noting the contribution to bullying made by everyday violence rooted in Afghanistan's ongoing internal and external strife, Corboz et al. (2018) suggest a complex, multi-pronged approach to reducing bullying. Likewise, young people's experience of relationship violence is relatively common. Using a national (US) household survey, Taylor and Mumford's (2016) study found that 69% of adolescents had suffered relationship violence in their lifetime, and there was a significant correlation between being a victim and being a perpetrator—to the extent that they recommended preventative interventions should avoid a categorical victim/perpetrator divide.

As there is still a tendency for the social sciences to treat the Internet and social media as both newer and less real than interaction in the offline world, attention has been given to comparing offline (or personal) bullying with online (electronic) bullying (Payne & Hutzell, 2017). For example, Payne and Hutzell (2017), noting that a great deal of research has been carried out on personal bullying but very little on the electronic variety, utilise comprehensive data from the US National Crime Victimization Survey: School Crime Supplement to compare the two modes of bullying in reference to prevalence, risk factors, and victimization and avoidance behaviours. They find personal bullying to be three times more common than the electronic form (Payne & Hutzell, 2017). Though risk factors are similar, there is a gendered difference: girls are more often subject to indirect personal or cyberbullying, while boys are more prone to direct personal bullying (Payne & Hutzell, 2017). Among all genders, young people bullied in either mode are more likely to avoid school than those who are not bullied (Payne & Hutzell, 2017).

Race is also a complex and important factor in digital bullying, though Edwards et al. (2016), in the preamble to their literature review examining this topic, observe that up to that point, researchers had focused primarily on the experiences of white young people. Their findings indicate that young people of colour are less likely to have access to digital communication tools and are less likely to use the digital tools they do have as their main means of interacting with friends (Edwards et al., 2016). Young people of colour are less frequently cyberbullied than their white peers, possibly because of issues with access to devices (Edwards et al., 2016). However, they are more likely to engage in bullying, which may be linked to societal expectations that people of colour are generally more violent (Edwards et al., 2016). When young people of colour *are* bullied, they tend to experience exactly the same harm as white youths (Edwards et al., 2016).

Young, Miles, and Alhabash (2018) also note that social science centred on electronic peer violence has concerned itself mostly with prevalence and prevention and rarely with the content of violent communications. They seek to remedy this through discursive analysis of posts made by adolescents on a prominent social media site with a view to uncovering patterns of power and strategies of interaction between perpetrators, victims, and bystanders (Young et al., 2018). Perpetrators use discursive strategies to elevate their power and status relative to the victim, while victims and bystanders deploy discursive tools—including returned hostility—to cancel out differences in power or status (Young et al., 2018).

Researchers also consider the impacts of electronic peer violence on its victims. McHugh, Wisniewski, Rosson, and Carroll (2018) analyse diaries of online experiences kept by seventy-five young people over a period of two months. They demonstrate that young people who are subjected to cyberbullying and explicit behaviours and images may develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, while those who have their privacy breached do not (McHugh et al., 2018). Those who are victimised tend to introduce coping mechanisms after the fact rather than taking precautions to reduce the chance of victimisation (McHugh et al., 2018). Similarly, Begotti & Acquadro Maran (2019) analyse questionnaires relating to cyberstalking given to young adults at an Italian university and find that almost half of all respondents have been cyberstalked, and those who have suffer depression in greater numbers than students who have not. Again, students are more likely to employ coping mechanisms—such as seeking help—once cyberstalking has begun or in instances where there are multiple types or instances of stalking (Begotti & Acquadro Maran, 2019). The Edwards et al. (2016) literature review described above similarly finds that victims of cyberbullying develop issues with schooling and self-esteem, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and experience suicidal ideation. The litany of reported harms from cyberbullying tends to support the view that online violence may be indirect and non-physical but is not harmless.

However, the impacts of online violence need not be purely destructive. Rost, Stahel, and Frey (2016) analyse comments on a major German social media site and argue that collective online antagonism, exacerbated by the enlarged audiences and lack of consequences characteristic of social media, is frequently used to shape or maintain societal norms. Similarly, DeCook's (2018) investigation of how the Proud Boys, a violent alt-right movement for young men, deploy Instagram hashtags finds the group uses violent symbolism to build solidarity and establish and strengthen their collective identity.

While concern over the prevalence of bullying—particularly its apparent role in young people's online interactions as Internet access has spread—drives researchers to focus on that aspect of youth violence, societal obsession with law and order creates a parallel interest in researching violent youth criminality (Jackman, 2002), mostly commonly gang violence. For example, Bubolz and Lee (2018) analyse life history interviews with self-identified former gang members from an identity theory perspective to identify the complexities of the relationship between young gang members, commitment to the gang, and use of violence. Those with a socioemotional commitment to the gang use less violence than those without, while those with a cognitive commitment use violence to gain status and then put violence aside once they are satisfied with their status (Bubolz & Lee, 2018). In their review of literature related to youth violence, Patton et al. (2014) observe that, in common with other forms of violence in the Internet era, gang violence—whether planning, recruiting for, or perpetrating it—has begun to infiltrate online social media. They recommend that future studies correct the dearth of research into the ways electronic violence can mediate personal violence (Patton et al., 2014).

That said, Lohmeyer's (2018) study based on interviews with Australian young people asked to reflect on their experience of violence provokes him to dismiss the traditional view of young people as inherently violent as an inevitable stage in their development towards

adulthood. Drawing on Giroux and Foucault, Lohmeyer (2018) argues young people are immersed in violence and constantly governed—discussed, measured, and subject to the dictates of expert knowledge regarding how to minimise or redirect their violence—in ways that encourage them to embody violent norms associated with their adult role in neoliberal society. That is, young people are no more inherently violent than adults; they are simply not yet disciplined to accept and participate in the types of violence appropriate for adult citizens of neoliberal capitalist democracies. Similarly, a recent book edited by Bühler-Niederberger and Alberth (2019) engages multiple authors in a discussion of violence by or involving children and finds that sociology has largely ignored it but that it has a pervasive influence on how children everywhere develop, experience agency, and are perceived by society.

In any case, the literature described in this section clearly discusses violence towards and by young people, in person and in the domains they inhabit online. However, as in earlier sections, violence is presented as an aspect of youth and measured for its prevalence, consequences, and prevention, but rarely the central concern of research and never as a topic pertaining to a discrete sociology of violence.

Situational Violence

Situational approaches to violence operate at the micro-level of analysis, seeing violence as an aspect of the dynamics of interactive situations—what Goffman might term an encounter (Collins, 2008). The dominant figure in this literature is sociologist Randall Collins, who is one of the theoretical profiles used in this thesis and whose work is described in more detail in chapters four and seven. His theory of violence centres violence in situations and dismisses the impact of social structures as external and irrelevant to what occurs between

social actors in the moment and so whether violence does or does not occur (Collins, 2008, 2011a). While he acknowledges macro-scale structures and institutions may motivate an individual towards violence, that motivation is not enough to cause an individual to *be* violent, or everyone with similar motivation would be violent, and they are not (Collins, 2011b). Rather, drawing from his extensive empirical research, Collins (2008, 2009, 2011a) argues that the strongest determinant of whether an individual commits an act of violence is whether that individual can overcome the confrontational tension and fear (ct/f) experienced by humans at the threshold of violence. The struggle with ct/f makes perpetrating violence far harder for humans than generally supposed, to the extent that violence often does not occur or is ineffective unless situational dynamics offer a route around fear (Collins, 2008, 2011b). There are four major pathways around ct/f: the presence of a weak or emotionally vulnerable victim, an encouraging audience, the ability to attack from a sufficient physical or psychological distance, and the opportunity to attack suddenly from hiding (Collins, 2011b).

Collins (2008, p. 24) intends his work to present violence in a practical, physical-harm-centred way opening it up to empirical observation and research. Consequently, it gives rise to empirical work by other researchers. Some develop sociological understanding of situational violence itself, such as a study by Willits (2019) that analyses the results of a survey asking respondents their view of several hypothetical situations and finds individual characteristics of participants in a violent situation matter, but situational dynamics such as the presence of provocation and the support of an audience are more significant predictors of whether violence will occur. In another example, Gross (2016) employs Collins' theory and approach analysing interviews with residents of townships surrounding Johannesburg to gain insight into the situational dynamics of overwhelmingly violent vigilantism there. Likewise, Bramsen (2017) examines video recordings of the Arab Spring uprisings, combined with analysis of interviews with activists, politicians, and journalists, to argue violence in that

situation falls into amplifying patterns of action and reactions. Conversely, Naepels (2017) attempts to expand Collins' approach by applying a historical understanding of violence in New Caledonia to interviews with participants in a particular violent situation to gain a deep understanding of a single murder, which he concludes results from the victim's connection to multiple structures, institutions, and histories. In another study ultimately querying Collins' work, Liebst et al. (2021) investigate Collins' assertion that a perpetrator's emotional dominance over a potential victim increases the probability of violence. They analyse fifty recordings of robberies in progress and find that emotional dominance decreases violence, suggesting a revision to Collins' theory to acknowledge that the role of emotional dominance is another variable of situational dynamics (Liebst et al., 2021). The focus in most of these works is the situation and how internal dynamics forestall or enable violence—violence itself remains elusive.

Violence touches almost every aspect and level of human existence in innumerable ways. Sociology has not neglected such a pervasive element of the social world. Rather, sociological studies around violence are common, and the body of literature reporting on them is densely populated. However, present violence research still too often sticks to its roots in twentieth-century sociology centred on violence as either an individual pathology related to a topic without ever being the topic or as a constitutive element of the state and an instrument of state power. The literature described above predominantly deals with physical violence and treats it as something external which intrudes upon peaceful normality. They take no account of violence as an omnipresent reduction of being, potentially constructive, pushed towards physical harm depending on how a violent situation evolves (see chapter four) and may thus omit important aspects of violence. The rise of critical theories dedicated to illuminating how

various groups experience violence opens the door to examining new forms of violence and, ultimately, the study of violence itself in a relatively new-formed but evolving sociology of violence.

Already, a body of theoretical literature has emerged from researchers in violence sociology, around which a limited body of empirical literature has coalesced. However, much of the violence literature remains abstracted from violence itself. Instead, violence is presented as an accessory to studies of state violence, identity, and youth. Very little empirical literature explicitly associates itself with the sociology of violence. The exception may be the empirical work growing up around Randall Collins' (Collins, 2008) micro-situational violence s, which he developed, in part, with the intent of offering a theory that deliberately narrowed its violence definition to provide a clearer research referent.

Even so, empirical literature based on Collins' work remains relatively limited. While it is arguable—as I do argue in chapter three—that progress has been made, the sociology of violence continues to be a field in search of its subject. There is a need for more research that centres on violence itself and explores the role of such centralised violence in various aspects of the social world, including the expanding, rapidly universalising space of online social interaction. As this chapter suggests, a strong first step in that direct is developing a reflexive approach to defining violence in ways that are flexible and aware of how power inflects the act of definition, as discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Definitions of Violence

An ongoing issue in violence sociology is how to define violence in a way that incorporates as much of its complexity as possible. In this chapter, I briefly examine why these definitional difficulties matter and how they contribute to gaps in existing research. Specifically, I point to the role definition plays in making violence itself elusive, resulting in a relative scarcity of research with violence itself as its focus. Thereafter, I discuss how defining violence has been handled in the literature and the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches. I acknowledge the need for the most inclusive and flexible definitions if some forms of violence and the people who experience them are not to be lost. Integral to this is the risk that the act of definition will itself become a violent act shaped by the needs and powers of the state. Finally, I select the approach of sociologist Willem Schinkel as best-suited to my research.

The Micro-Macro Problem

Where is violence? Inherent to questions concerning the fundamental nature of violence is the issue of where in the social world violence is located—at what level of analysis should it be studied? As will be described later in this chapter, the work of theorists such as Weber (2013[1900]), Galtung (1969), and Bourdieu (2013[1972]) see violence as inhabiting the level of structure and fields, whereas Alexander (2004) sees it erupting in ways that culturally traumatise whole populations or failing to capture the public imagination and

quietly losing meaning until it becomes barely visible. Collins (2008) finds it at the micro-level in situations and interactions. Scheper-Hughes (1997), Bourgois (2001), and Reychler (2006) describe it as flowing back and forth from micro, through meso, to macro, and back again, in an endless cycling fabric or continuum. Alternatively, Schinkel (2010) conceives of it as a vast sprawl present in every social situation and intersecting every level of analysis, each a potential aspect accessible to study. Conversely, Betz (1977) and Collins (2008) are profoundly wary of accepting macro explanations for violence, particularly rejecting symbolic violence? Finally, some researchers treat the level of analysis as a zero-sum game: violence is found at the micro-level or macro-level but never both.

Inflexibility regarding the level of analysis is the micro-macro problem, described by Hartmann (2017, p. 1) as a "persistent programmatic divide" bedevilling the sociology of violence.

The micro-macro problem exists throughout the social sciences (Collins, 2011a, p. 1; 2011b, p. 1; Fine, 1991, p. 161; Hartmann, 2017, p. 7; Wieviorka, 2014, p. 52; Wiley, 1988). Common social scientific methodology divides the social world into levels of analysis—whether a phenomenon is embedded in and caused by large-scale structures or smaller-scale subjectivities and interactions. Levels of analysis are part of the DNA of sociology. Durkheim suggested five: physical, chemical, biological, psychological, and social (Wiley, 1988, p. 255). Modern sociology commonly considers three: micro, individual action and interaction; meso, the social group; and macro, society and its structures (Jaspal et al., 2016, p. 265).

Levels can be a useful tool for conceptualising a question, organising research, and theorising causes. They become a problem when researchers or policymakers display overly reductive reliance on a single level of analysis, missing important, relevant processes occurring at the other levels or cursorily noting them without explaining how the levels interlink to produce an outcome (Hartmann, 2017, p. 1; Jepperson & Meyer, 2011, pp. 54-55).

For example, theories of crime that reductively locate offending at the micro-level of individual failure may identify punitive deterrence as a solution, overlooking the extent to which macro-level structural inequality contributes to criminality. Conversely, treating violence as merely embedded in the structured structuring of Bourdieu's field and habitus risks denying the power of individual and community agency. Whether it is even possible to satisfactorily explain a social phenomenon using only a single level of analysis remains a contentious issue within the field (Jepperson & Meyer, 2011, pp. 54-55), suggesting single-level methodologies should be approached with awareness and caution.

The micro-macro problem is particularly acute within the sociology of violence, where violent interactions must be studied in the micro realm but are often reduced to side-effects of macro-level social patterns without showing how the levels are linked (Collins, 2011a, p. 1; Hartmann, 2017, p. 7; Wieviorka, 2014, p. 52). Hartmann (2017, pp. 7, 1-2) proposes the micro-macro problem as the "main challenge" facing contemporary violence research, doing material harm to the field by splitting it between macro-focused theoretical aspects of violence and micro-focused empirical research, preventing integrated approaches that would allow violence to be examined as a subject in its own right. Even Collins (2011a, p. 1), whose theoretical work is avowedly micro-sociological, agrees that violence sociology must find ways of bridging the divide between "micro-events" and "macro patterns". Wieviorka (2009, p. 165; 2014, p. 52) refers to the micro-macro problem as a "major dilemma" that is central to answering sociological questions posed by violence.

Fine (1991, pp. 161-162) dismisses the micro-macro problem as a false dichotomy, arguing that it is a fashionable concern of recent researchers that fails to acknowledge the ways classical sociology always implicitly blended levels of analysis. For example, he points to Durkheim's acknowledgement of agency operating within the constraints of structure and to conceptions in Weber, Mead, and the work of early symbolic interactionists, that society

both constitutes and is constituted by micro-level interaction (Fine, 1991, p. 162). Indeed, Stryker's (2008, p. 19) structural symbolic interactionism explicitly enlarges the role of macro-level structures in the formation of micro-level processes of identity formation to magnify the explanatory power of Mead's foundational work on the self. However, those who identify problematic micro-macro reductionism within sociology are not claiming the micro-macro divide is absolute, as Fine implies by suggesting that a bit of agency in Durkheim or Weber is enough to refute them. Rather, they argue that one level is often merely an accessory to another or that greater effort must be made to delineate linkages between processes of different levels that give rise to a social phenomenon. That said, Fine's (1991, p. 162) claim that his critique only calls for recognition "that macro and micro approaches are and must be informed by each other in developing seamless knowledge of the world" is not dissimilar to Hartmann's (2017, pp. 7-8) call for an integration of the levels of analysis in order for the sociology of violence to advance—the disagreement here seemingly not whether the micro-macro problem impacts sociology, but whether the response to it should be implicit or explicit.

However, Schinkel (2010) observes that the act of locating violence in a primary cause—at whatever level of analysis—automatically moves sociological attention away from violence itself to external processes native to whichever level is preferred. He notes the complexity of violence and the challenges of tracing particular acts of violence to specific causes, and that this exemplifies Weber's distinction between researchers pursuing *Erklären*—explanation—and *Verstehen*—understanding (Schinkel, 2010). Desiring to explain violence in terms of processes outside itself is an approach Schinkel (2010, p. 15) identifies as the principle approach of the social sciences to violence, and he calls it determinism, noting that it ascribes the meaning of violence to externalities and therefore "explains violence away". He calls for the introduction of a balancing formalism—or aesthetic—of violence,

which accepts that something intrinsic to the nature of violence itself may account for violence (Schinkel, 2010, pp. 15-17). Violence may be autotelic—its own reason, goal, and justification. And the nature of violence itself may be explored (Schinkel, 2010, pp. 15-17). In the present context, it is arguable that the micro-macro divide—which takes for granted that the explanation of violence rests in one or another of the levels of analysis—favours determinism and therefore *Erklären* and perpetuates the omission of *Verstehen* by diverting research from violence itself. Developing a formalist approach to violence may offer hope of balancing violence sociology and reducing the micro-macro problem.

Ultimately, it seems inarguable that the micro-macro problem is real in its effects on the sociology of violence, at least leading to a sharp division between theoretical examinations of violence and empirical analyses of the micro-interactions constituting violence. In the next section, I discuss how the confluence of the two problems so far examined—that of the definition and location of violence—complicates efforts by modern sociologists of violence to focus on violence itself.

The Elusiveness of Violence

As touched on in chapter two, violence itself is what is seen when an observer stops concerning themselves with causes and explanations outside of violence and focuses on understanding the form and aesthetic of violence, when violence itself is seen as its own basic reason for being (Schinkel, 2004, p. 6). And yet, as described in chapter two, sociological research and literature have tended to focus on those topics to which violence is a mere accessory. Violence hovers at the edge of research into war and crime. It is seen as a key feature—though not the sum total—of building and maintaining nation-states. It is recognised

as behaviour that bubbles over in toxic performances of race, gender, and other identity categories. It is one of many aspects of bullying, which has been analysed almost exclusively in terms of causes, prevention, and consequences. Even Collins—whose theoretical approach is devoted to making violence accessible to empirical research so he and others can relentlessly scrutinise ontic violence and delineate its qualities—sees violence itself in the context of the dynamics of social situations. Violence itself remains an infrequently opened door at the corners of the eye of sociological research, rarely scrutinised in its own right and, therefore, at best, only partly understood. It is this I refer to as the elusiveness of violence.

The Act of Defining Violence

If the sociology of violence struggles to locate violence within the levels of analysis or in the obscuring mist of all things that are about violence without being violence itself, it is arguable the field has an issue with how violence should be defined. After all, to some extent, to define is to locate and vice versa. In the section that follows, I argue that this is a significant problem in violence research.

The Significance of Defining Violence

Defining violence contributes to the elusiveness problem in numerous ways. Consider the tautological nature of the descriptions of *violence itself* offered earlier. That violence itself is what remains when what is merely about violence is removed says little more than *it is what it is*. This is perilously close to leaving the question to the common-sense belief that the

nature of violence is obvious. Tautology and reliance on common sense are both inevitable when the object of a field of research lacks a developed definition. Yet, how can an undefined or loosely defined object *be* centred in a piece of research? To define too naively is to grab the elephant's tail and say, "This is an elephant." Overly inclusive definitions risk standing in the elephant pen shouting, "Everything is an elephant!" Both approaches lack precision, and either way, some aspects of violence itself and its victims may be eclipsed by what is only associated with the topic.

Exclusion is an unavoidable consequence of definition, which is an act inseparable from power. Defining a thing raises a border wall between *what is* on one side and *what is not* on the other (Schinkel, 2010, p. 33). Violence removed to the far side of the wall disappears— along with those who experience it—from the sociology of violence, for it no longer counts.

Perhaps the best example of this—discussed in detail in chapter two—is the way the state defines its violence as legitimate and an expression of power in contrast to interpersonal violence, which can be framed as the only real violence, often criminal in nature, warranting the state's use of power to control it (Schinkel, 2010). This is particularly interesting when viewed using noted violence scholar Hannah Arendt's differentiation between power and violence and legitimacy and justification. Arendt argues power and violence are intrinsically separate and mutually incompatible (Gines, 2013). Power is cooperation among many to achieve an end, while violence is an imposition that disperses cooperation; violence is the failure of power, and power disappears when violence arises (Gines, 2013). Where Weber talks about the state's monopoly on legitimate violence, Arendt sees legitimacy as a characteristic of power arising as a group organises itself to cooperate, while justification derives from an action's intended purpose (Gines, 2013). As power has legitimacy, it does not require justification; as violence ends power, violence can never be legitimate and therefore does require justification (Gines, 2013). From this perspective, when the state defines its

violent actions as the legitimate use of *power* and interpersonal violence as *violence*, it claims legitimacy and establishes that it is justified in using its power in violent ways to control disorderly individuals and populations, even society itself using techniques of pacification if the potential for violence can be established convincingly enough (Baron et al., 2019; Schinkel, 2010; Wacquant, 2014). All of this is accomplished by the act of defining violence, shifting what is and is not violence and positioning participants in this type of violence relative to who is or is not violent, legitimate, or justified. It supports Schinkel's (2010) argument that researchers who define violence incautiously can find themselves working in the interests of the state.

The Violence of Defining Violence

Contemporary southern voices in sociology critique assumptions that modernity is a historical moment in which the saviour-state has driven violence from society's normative core out to a savage and deviant hinterland of marginalised others (Walby, 2013). They argue against any singular idea of modernity in favour of a multiplex conception of alternate modernities existing for each of the many ways dominant and oppressed groups experience the present (Walby, 2013). Why assume a wealthy man in the global north and a homeless woman in a war-torn city of the world's south occupy the same modernity when one lives in a futuristic age of plenty and the other starves in ruins? This suggests other ways of seeing the relationship between legitimate and illegitimate violence, including that the dividing line need not be between state and non-state actors or between citizens of the centre and those exiled to the margins. It also enables Pearce (2017) to question the perception that legitimate violence

is needed because humans are inherently and incurably violent, opening the door to alternative, peace-based forms of governance.

In this vein, violence should also be viewed as multiplex, as being profoundly inflected by who is giving and receiving it. Between *let them eat cake* and the guillotine flows a world of slippery and mutable, utterly subjective lived experience shaped by power. The difference between governance and insurrection illustrated in the preceding sentence is purely definitional, decided by the meaning of words and who gets to set those meanings. Drawing on the argument in Bourdieu's work that power over language is a key element of symbolic violence, Schinkel (2010, p. 33) identifies the act of choosing words to delimit categories of violence as a "continuous power struggle", ensuring "the definition of violence will therefore always be coloured by violence itself". To express what violence *is* unavoidably separates what counts from what does not count. How the state deploys words like *legitimate* to frame its own violence and the experiences of those subject to it is discussed in chapter two and is one example. Another is the way the common definition of violence as physical harm done by one person to another amputates from consideration structural and symbolic violence and all those whose lives are blighted by them. There is distinct violence in promoting definitions of violence that exclude some forms of harm and some categories of people who experience them from symbolic existence, not to mention from the practical realm of amelioration, justice, and simple acknowledgement. For social scientists researching violence, the moment of definition is the moment when some people are deemed worthy of inclusion in the processes of human knowledge-making, and some are not. As commonsense definitions of violence align with efforts by the powerful to separate state violence from interpersonal violence, making one legitimate use of power in the public interest and the other crime, researchers who do not think carefully about definition risk acting in the interests of power rather than knowledge (Schinkel, 2010).

This section has discussed the importance of defining violence carefully when making it the focus of study. Reasons include precision (the issue of centring a thing when you don't know what shape it is or where and at what level of analysis it is located), avoiding common sense and its associated risks of perpetuation symbolic violence or cooperating with the powerful's cultivation of common sense narratives of legitimacy, and minimising the violence of language itself (the issue of creating harmful exclusion by ignoring the relationship between power and language). Implicit here is the significant role played by the act of definition in the micro-macro problem and the elusiveness of violence, as both grow from proceeding with insufficiently precise or inclusive definitions.

Approaches to Defining Violence

Sidestepping and Simplicity

Violence operates both in and via words, deeds, beings, objects, institutions, and structures incorporating violence at multiple levels of analysis, involving modalities as diverse as physical, mental, structural, cultural, symbolic, and economic harm (Schinkel, 2010, p. 3; Wieviorka, 2009, p. 3). Violence researchers may struggle to find definitions encompassing all that the object of their research can be and seek a solution in simplicity or abstraction with limited real-world usefulness. For example, Garver classically describes violence as a "violation" of an individual's rights that are fundamental to their human body or dignity (Garver, 1968, as cited in Betz, 1977, p. 340). But what constitutes "violation"? Which rights, if any, are fundamental? What is dignity, and when is it violated? Who decides? And, if violence is a matter of rights, what about the stateless or those living in Agamben's

state of exception, who have been specifically denied rights and legal protections and stripped to the bare existence of their physical body (Schinkel & van den Berg, 2011) as an act of state violence? In another classic definition, Galtung (1969, p. 168, emphasis added) initially sketches violence as "present when human beings are being influenced so that their *actual* somatic and mental realizations are below their *potential* realizations". However, this is arguably too broad; it could easily apply to Netflix reducing personal productivity by enabling binge-watching or reducing recreational opportunities by enforcing binge-watching time limits.

Given the difficulties, social scientists sometimes sidestep formal definition, instead presenting lists of things readily described as violence as if assuming this creates an impression of what violence *is* (Schinkel, 2010, p. 16). It may be a slap, a war, a quarrel, gas chambers, soldiers in combat, torture, rape, murder, ritual execution, sport, action movies, and news reports (Collins, 2008, p. 1). Wieviorka (2009, p. 3) offers "delinquency, crime, revolution, mass murder, riots, war, terrorism, harassment", ending "…and so on", as if it may be taken for granted any reader could complete this catalogue themselves. Other writers on the topic simply remain silent, eliding definition on the—often reasonable—assumption readers bring with them a sufficient common-sense understanding of violence (Schinkel, 2010, pp. 17, 32, 34). For example, Bramsen (2017) provides a detailed analysis of Arab Spring uprisings in Syria, Bahrain, and Tunisia and reaches a conclusion about the nature of violent processes without needing painstaking definition; her focus is on the micro-situational dynamics of unambiguous physical violence.

A third approach applies the Procrustean solution of reducing violence to a simple statement of physical harm: "The use of force toward another that results in harm" (Henry, 2000, p. 17). Violence is "behavior by persons against persons that intentionally threatens, attempts, or actually inflicts physical harm" (Reiss & Roth as cited in Jackman, 2002, p. 389).

Physicality, "the fascinating lure of this directly visible 'subjective' violence…performed by a clearly identifiable agent" (Žižek, 2009, p. 8), is strongly emphasised: Social philosopher Joseph Betz takes this approach when critiquing fellow social scientist Newton Garver for a violence definition Betz finds too inclusive.

> There is no psychological or covert violence, I would claim, except by analogy and extension, simply because all violence is necessarily and by conventional definition overt or physical… Ridicule can defeat one's aim to be happy, and fraud can violate one's right to hold property; but neither involves forces which impinge on its victim's body, and so neither is violent. (Betz, 1977, pp. 342, 345)

There is an almost Cartesian separation of mind and body in such simple definitions:

> "Doing 'psychological violence' to a person would be something like pushing his soul down the steps… Violence occurs to living bodies which, of course, behave in ways we call psychological and are explained through the notion of the soul; but what affects the psyche directly and not through the body, though it may be wrong, is not violence." (Betz, 1977, p. 345)

> Randall Collins is a leading violence theorist and one of the theoretical profiles for this thesis. His (2008) is arguably the most powerful voice raised in favour of simpler conceptions of violence based on direct physical harm. In chapter seven, his views on this topic are detailed in the context of my argument that they misrepresent the importance and potential for harm contained in symbolic and other indirect modes of violence. Those views may be summarised here as the valorisation of direct physical violence as "real violence", giving researchers "a clear core referent, which we can study using micro-situational observations (Collins, 2008, p. 24). However, throughout this thesis, and particularly in chapter seven, I argue that insisting on the direct physicality of violence encourages the perception of violence as an act—done by one body to another—and loses sight of it as the process it needs to be to

incorporate dispersed forms such as the structural and symbolic (Schinkel, 2010). Something important can be lost when unreflexively applying micro-sociological analysis to violent situations. Collins (2008) explicitly defines violence as whatever pathway a perpetrator finds to bypass their fear of committing a violent act (see chapters two and four). Without the pathway—something akin, for example, to an audience cheering them on—violence would not occur (Collins, 2008). Therefore, violence considered situationally is simply a cross-section of the violent process at the moment in time when the pathway around fear reveals itself. Physical harm is only a culmination of a prior process and a prelude to consequences extending well beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the situation. Narrow definitions may be useful for particular research purposes; Collins (2008) has no need to reach further when delving into the specific physical dynamics of violent situations. However, when the intention is to research the broader concept of violence itself, a clear need exists for a more abstracted and encompassing, ontological definition that sees the process of violence and connects to almost any ontic form violence may take (Schinkel, 2010).

There are other reasons to accept violence as demonstrably more than just physical harm. For example, studies have found adolescent victims of online bullying—ridicule occurring, by definition, in the absence of the victim's physical body—are twice as likely as non-bullied youngsters to self-report that they have attempted suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 216). Moreover, the rate of suicide attempts within this group is lower for white participants (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 216), indicating a heightened impact of symbolic violence on non-white victims. The simple, strictly common-sense definitions above would deny the status of violence to the act of cyberbullying. Thus, they would divert the sociology of violence from experience common to as many as one-third of all students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 208). Nor would those definitions know quite what to do with the

differential impact of online bullying across racial identity groups, which likely has its roots in forms of structural and symbolic violence that Betz and Collins explicitly rule out.

No list of violent acts will encompass close to the totality of the nature of violence. Additionally, the focus on physical harms inflicted by intentional social actors makes invisible unquestionably real forms of non-physical violence delivered by social structures or enacted against marginalised populations (Schinkel, 2010). Doing justice to violence and those impacted by it requires sociology to learn the *lesson* of Procrustes: not to find the best way to trim violence to fit the bed but to seek out a bigger bed.

Expanding Definitions of Violence

Definitions of violence reaching beyond common sense are certainly possible, and sociology has explored them. At their most basic, expanded definitions may just add an awareness of power to discussions of inflicting physical harm. For example, Weber (2013[1900], p. 78) begins by equating violence with "physical force" but immediately expands to encompass legitimacy, arguing that a nation-state "is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory". For some, this means definitions of violence must differentiate between state violence as a legitimate use of power or force—therefore not violence at all—and real, interpersonal, illegitimate violence (Betz, 1977, pp. 346-347; Schinkel, 2010, pp. 30-32). Critical theorists and those analysing violence from feminist, racial, or queer perspectives incorporate power into conceptions of violence to highlight how historically simple and common-sense definitions have excluded violence against those groups (Walby, 2013, p. 101). Analysing power at the level of governance allows Foucault to observe a shift in state

violence from the use of overt physical force to the deployment of biopower, in which
regulation and discipline induce populations to internalise and embody the demands of the
state (Dean, 2010, p. 132). This is the realm of biopolitics, the ordering of the social world, its
structures and institutions, in pursuit of the "administration of life" to the greatest benefit of
the general population (Dean, 2010, p. 128). This necessarily involves discerning within that
general population "the criminal and dangerous classes, the feebleminded and the imbecile,
the invert and the degenerate, the unemployable and the abnormal" and the implementation of
"attempts to prevent, contain or eliminate them" for the common good (Dean, 2010, p. 129).
The dark side of biopolitics is far distant from definitions of violence suited to diagnosing a
punch in the nose. It requires social science to expand those definitions even further, to
include structural and symbolic violence.

Structural violence, a term coined by Johan Galtung (1969), considers modes of harm
beyond the purely physical. Galtung (1969) puts forward six "distinctions", binary tensions
describing violence: whether violence is physical or psychological; whether its presence is
used to influence behaviour by punishment or its absence used to reward; whether it is
directed against an object; whether someone acts to inflict the violence; whether it is intended
or unintended; and whether it is manifest or latent—that is, whether the violence is visible or
only exists as potential. The fourth of these, "whether there is a subject (person) who acts", he
identifies as the most important, labelling violence in the absence of a person who acts as
"structural"—located within a social structure organised around unequal access to power,
synonymous with social injustice (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). The harm done by structural
violence may be done to an individual's physical self through denial of essential resources
such as food or clean drinking water or to their potential to make choices that will improve
their wellbeing and life chances throughout their life (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). Structural
violence can be devastating to entire groups of marginalised people, leading to large-scale

social trauma such as the hyperincarceration of people of colour and First Nations people, detailed in chapter two

Symbolic violence is addressed in more detail in chapter four—where Bourdieu's key concepts are summarised—and as an integral part of the Bourdieusian analysis of my data in chapter eight. Briefly, it is a frequently-used sociological concept describing another form of indirect, non-physical violence (Schubert, 2008). When dominant groups structure social institutions around their own values, subordinate groups struggle to meet standards that are alien to them but that the dominant groups find straightforward and comfortable (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Schubert, 2008). Over time, both groups mistake the consequences of structural inequality for symptoms of natural superiority (of the dominant) and inferiority (of the subordinate). Where subordinate groups are stigmatised (see chapter six) for who they are and blamed as personally responsible for the disadvantage, which is also denying them access to systems they need to thrive as human beings, the result is symbolic violence. Noting the tendency of symbolic violence to justify the oppression of the subordinate by the dominant, Schinkel (2010) connects symbolic to structural violence, arguing that the former is the latter in circumstances where the structures supporting symbolic violence are accepted as legitimate.

Building on the sociological turn towards studying violence as an object in its own right rather than just an exercise of coercive force or a physical side-effect of power (Hartmann, 2017, pp. 1-3; Walby, 2013, pp. 96-97, 101-106), more recent theorists have leaned into its complexity and the need for inclusiveness to take more ontological approaches to definition. Attempting to end Weber's conflation of state and violence and to make violence more subject to ameliorative efforts, Pearce (2017) reframes violence as ontologically distinct from human being. As touched upon at the end of this chapter, humans may be innately biologically aggressive, but this is separate from violence, which is

aggressive social behaviour constructed by, filled with, and even making meaning (Pearce, 2017). The meanings around violence are social and not innate (Pearce, 2017). We are aggressive; we choose to be violent for symbolically charged reasons. Consequently, state violence loses its legitimacy derived from the need of the state to control humankind's violent nature—and there may be some hope of reducing state and related forms of violence(Pearce, 2017).

Walby (2013, p. 101) calls for the development of an ontology of violence that rises to the challenge of definition and charts the relationship between violence and the rest of the social world. Collins attempts this by beginning at the micro-interactive level of the situation and incorporating macro-scale structures and institutions as patterned concentrations of micro-interactions (Collins, 2009, p. 17; Walby, 2013, p. 106). However, this is little more than handwaving in the direction of structure, as Collins (2004) refers to aggregated interaction ritual chains possibly forming macro-level patterns but proceeds no further, except to shy away even from using the word structure in his context.

Arguably, Willem Schinkel's (Schinkel, 2010) theory of violence is the most thoroughly developed recent work, both advocating for the centring of violence itself and offering a methodological roadmap for how that can be accomplished (see chapter five). In his 2010 book *Aspects of Violence: A Critical Theory*, Schinkel (2010, p. 45) defines violence as "reduction of being" (as detailed in chapter four). Briefly, human identity is comprised of *aspects*—possibilities for being or facets of their identity (Schinkel, 2010). Someone's aspects are always with them as elements of their *aspect horizon*, and, in a given situation, one or more aspects might be *actualised* or brought into play (Schinkel, 2010). Walking in on a patient in an examination room, someone's *doctor* or *professional* aspects might be actualised, for example. In social interaction, situational dynamics and behaviour of the interactants inevitably restrict which aspects of themselves participants may actualise

(Schinkel, 2010). In the doctor's office, someone may be constrained to their *patient* aspect and may even feel that they are not seen as a fully realised human being by the doctor in that circumstance. Their options for being have been reduced, and that is violence (Schinkel, 2010).

Seen in this way, violence is necessarily everywhere, as roles, expectations, and strategic exchanges reduce being and are a universal characteristic of social interaction (Schinkel, 2010). As a definition, this includes commonsense definitions of violence as direct and physical (Schinkel, 2010). Violence is always present in a social situation, but as it comes to dominate, as the aspects of participants become more sharply restricted, it becomes increasingly direct and physical (Schinkel, 2010). However, Schinkel's definition is flexible enough to encompass indirect violence as well, and not just non-physical forms of harm but even the possibility that violence as reduction of being may be constructive and not harmful at all (Schinkel, 2010). Reduced to their patient aspect, a patient may likely be cured. By Schinkel's clear intent, the flexibility and inclusiveness of this definition—including, as it does, all violence, including constructive forms barely considered elsewhere—addresses the elusiveness of violence and the possibility of definition itself being an act of violence.

Continua of Violence. It can seem the tapestry of violence grows larger and more packed with disparate elements with each expanded definition. This is one reason defining violence can be contentious within the social sciences. Framing violence as inclusive of non-physical harms "is to lose the ability to distinguish violent from nonviolent wrong, to include too much in the category of violence, and to dilute hopelessly the condemnatory power of the concept" (Betz, 1977, p. 346).

Alternatively, some organise the multifarious complexity of violence as a continuum linking everyday interpersonal violence, structural and symbolic violence, war, and even genocide (Bourgois, 2001, pp. 28-29; Reychler, 2006, p. 2; Scheper-Hughes, 1997, pp. 471-

472). From this perspective, everyday violence has its roots in structural and symbolic violence, and the continuous presence of violence so pervades society and becomes so normative that it gives rise to the worst excesses of state violence—torture, war, and genocide (Bourgois, 2001, pp. 9, 28-29). The continuum of violence transcends the state, taking in global patterns of destructive governance, crime, oppression, and trade, so ruinous to human life at the local level they add fuel to the fire of everyday violence, reproducing the cycle (Reychler, 2006, pp. 2-3). Bourdieu goes so far as to propose a violence conservation law under which violence suppressed or silenced in one section of the continuum is not destroyed but simply manifests elsewhere on the continuum—as when curtailing worker rights creates stress that manifests beyond the work sphere as intimate partner violence (Schinkel, 2010). Expanding the definition of violence to this ultimate extent does not dilute it, as Betz feared, but gives it the power to chart the grip of violence on human life from the most intimate of micro-interactions at the local level out to global relations in a world-state riddled with oppression, corruption, crime, inequality, and porous borders.

Definitions Used in this Thesis

This chapter set out to detail the complexity and elusiveness of violence as a topic and the onus this places on researchers to define violence carefully, with precision and inclusiveness. Otherwise, researchers risk reproducing the violence of exclusion by ignoring some experiences of violence or unintentionally supporting power structures that conceal the violence of the state. They might run afoul of the micro-macro problem, focusing on a single level of analysis and missing important aspects of violence located at other levels. And they may unintentionally neglect violence itself for things that are only related to it, amplifying the

elusiveness of violence and making it subject to contestation. Such contestation is apparent in the range of approaches to defining violence examined in the latter half of this chapter.

To avoid these dangers myself, I think it prudent to clearly state here how I am defining violence in this thesis. In this chapter, I have presented a case for defining violence flexibly and inclusively. The definition of violence that most closely meets this standard—and, therefore, the one I am using—is Schinkel's (2010, p. 45) "reduction of being". Violence as a reduction of being is described at length in chapter four. However, it may be summarised as anything that limits a person's options for being (Schinkel, 2010). This ranges from subtle reductions, such as a teacher imposing the role of student upon a child, to more familiar and obvious physical assaults, which may begin by reducing an individual to an identity group category perceived as justifying the violence and culminate in further reducing the individual to a victim of violence. These examples highlight another aspect of violence as reduction of being: it exists in every social situation (Schinkel, 2010). When people interact, there are always roles, expectations, and situational dynamics that foreground some aspects of being and diminish access to others. As in the case of a child in class confined to the role of student, violence is, therefore, often constructive; it facilitates the achievement of productive goals (Schinkel, 2010). Direct interpersonal violence begins to appear in a situation as reduction of being becomes more important and begins to dominate a situation and as the possibilities for being of the participants become more sharply curtailed (Schinkel, 2010).

In this thesis, I frequently discuss violence that is indirect and delivered by means other than the immediate actions of a person, such as structural violence and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Galtung, 1969). As noted earlier in this chapter, the most vocal critic of the idea of indirect violence is Collins (2008), who, in his writings, often dismisses forms of indirect violence in social situations as only aggression or bluster that approach but fall short of violence. However, it is my intent in this thesis to deal with indirect

violence *as* violence (see chapter eight). For that reason, I am using a definition of aggression suggested by Pearce (2017). That is, aggression is the push towards potentially harmful behaviour that resides in human biology, whereas violence is those behaviours couched in, making. and reproducing meaning. (de Zulueta, 2006, as cited in Pearce, 2017). From that perspective, men in my data critiquing the basic humanity of feminists (see chapters six through eight) are not merely blustering aggressively, for what is at stake is not simple biological lashing out but the meaning of womanhood and who sets that meaning, rooted in historically constructed understandings. It is violence. However, there is one exception to my use of this definition of aggression. Throughout, and particularly in chapters four and six, my use of the phrase *aggressive face-work* intends for *aggressive* to be understood as Goffman uses it—as a characteristic of contentious, strategic interaction designed to benefit one interactant and harm another.

Chapter Four

A Multi-perspective Theoretical Framework

The core aim of this thesis is to engage theoretically with a particular form of violence: online violence when it is considered *as* violence. For this work, I draw heavily on Willem Schinkel's violence theory and liquidation methodology (see chapters three and five). My adaptation of the liquidation methodology involves analysing my data using three additional theoretical perspectives at three different levels of analysis: Goffman (micro-level), Collins (meso-level) and Bourdieu (macro-level). This chapter will introduce the key concepts from the works of Schinkel, Goffman, Collins, and Bourdieu with which this thesis engages. Additional information on liquidation can be found in chapters five (the methodology), six (Goffman), seven (Collins), and eight (Bourdieu).

Schinkel's Aspects of Violence

One of Schinkel's (2010) most important themes is the complexity of violence and how that has made violence difficult to define and therefore study without perpetuating violence or upholding the interests of dominant groups who have the power to determine what are the common-sense definitions (see chapter three). He emphasises two main problems with this. Firstly, there is a tendency for researchers to rely on common sense views of violence because definition is so challenging (Schinkel, 2010). Secondly, there is the linked issue of researchers analysing violence from a single monolithic, inflexible theoretical perspective that sees violence in one way and no other, ensuring that only a subset of violence consistent with that perspective's definition will be investigated (Schinkel, 2010). His solution includes, *inter*

alia, acknowledging the complexity of violence and choosing to deal with it as a collection of aspects rather than a single object and rejecting singular monolithic theory for a more fluid approach he calls liquidation (see chapter five).

   Aspects. It has been said often in this thesis—and in violence literature in general—that violence is an exceptionally complex topic. It may be given or received—or both. It may be delivered by a person, a structure, or a symbol. The harm it does may be any combination of social, physical, mental, or ontological. Similarly, the preconditions for its existence and the consequences of its infliction may occur at any combination of the micro-, meso-, or macroscopic levels of analysis. Reasons for it may be situational, identity-based, historical, or some other thing entirely, or it may be autotelic violence without justification beyond itself (Schinkel, 2010). Consequently, violence researchers struggle to define the object of their research, and a methodological divide exists between those who insist violence is either physical or non-physical or that it should be studied at a particular level of analysis (see chapter three). The whole concept of violence is contentious.

   Contentiousness and complexity make it difficult to uncritically accept that a single theory or perspective on violence can be taken as complete or final in its description (Schinkel, 2010). There is also the risk that various theories and perspectives might solidify into common sense understandings that obscure the view of what violence really is (Schinkel, 2010). For example, the physicality of violence and its harms is arguably the most pervasive of commonsense beliefs about it, publicly and in the literature (see chapter three). However, an investigation of violence that centres a theoretical perspective taking direct physical violence for granted—such as the micro-situational violence theory of Collins (2008)—might overlook otherwise painfully clear examples of symbolic violence in a data set. Conversely, analysing a case study for signs of Galtung's structural violence might note physical violence in the situation without seeing the situational dynamics that allowed the violence to erupt.

Schinkel's (2010, p. 10) violence theory and methodology deal with complexity by seeing violence not as one thing but as a mass of "aspects" which may be usefully studied in their own right from any number of relevant theoretical points of view. To understand everything about a tree would be difficult for a painter intent only on colour, light, and form. Add investigation of the tree's biology, ecological role, chemistry, taxonomic relationships, symbolic meaning to the people around it, and its history—each of these things an aspect of the tree—would produce a broad and deep understanding of the tree. Understanding that much in the world is too complex to entirely know requires making an implicit selection in any situation regarding which aspects of a thing are relevant in a particular situation. (Schinkel, 2010). For a painter painting a tree, the aspects colour and form are most salient and may be enough. Someone bringing their axe to collect firewood may only need to know hardness, diameter, and probable direction of fall. Similarly, the complexity of violence may be somewhat tamed by deliberately selecting aspects of the whole for analysis. For this purpose, an aspect is "a continuous characteristic of an object" or "the selective highlighting of a certain relational identity" pertinent to the object (Schinkel, 2010, pp. 8-10). This sounds complex but only refers to characteristics of an object persisting across different instances regardless of shifts in perspective. Two people, each observing a different tree, will both see *a* tree owing to their recognition of assembled aspects such as root system, trunk, branches, foliage, and certain colours and textures.

Aspects of violence are not distinct from violence taken as a whole. Schinkel (2010, p. 6) adapts Wittgenstein's concept of "seeing something as that which it is, when it is seen as such". Violence is not physical or non-physical: it is both, depending on who is looking and what they are looking for. Each is an aspect, and neither is the full truth. However, each, when actualised and analysed using a relevant theoretical perspective, illuminates the same object in distinct and useful ways. When Collins (2008) declares non-physical conceptions unviable

compared to his situational micro-sociology of violence, he is neither wrong nor right but merely actualising the situational aspect of violence and subjecting it to a theoretical perspective suitable for understanding that aspect. (This seemingly contradicts the statement above that an aspect persists despite changes of perspective. However, the belief in only physical harm does not cause symbolic violence to cease existing but only eclipses it.)

Borrowing from Husserl, Schinkel (2010) adds that an object carries all its aspects with it even when only one of them is actualised. Other aspects continue to exist on the object's "aspect horizon", subtly colouring experience of the object and ready to be actualised as required (Schinkel, 2010, p. 9). When a tree is seen as tall, its deep roots do not disappear, and the observer is not unaware of their existence, but while seeing the tree is tall, tallness is the relevant aspect, and deep roots reside, unactualized, on the tree's aspect horizon. Sociologically, this can be exemplified by briefly considering Naepels' (2017) analysis— drawing on Collins' theory of situational violence—of a New Caledonian murder (discussed in chapter three). The murder proves impossible to understand without stepping away from the situational aspect of events to apply Foucauldian historical analysis of the victim's position within his society (Naepels, 2017). The historical aspect lurked on the horizon of the situational aspect, unseen but significant, until Naepels actualised it within their analysis to arrive at a more rounded understanding.

To summarise, violence is a complex array of aspects—or persistent characteristics, each of them present on violence's aspect horizon, and each able to be independently actualised and studied from different theoretical perspectives. Approaching violence in this way helps to ensure violence research does not become locked into commonsense ways of seeing violence that simplify out important aspects of the topic.

Profiles. What is seen when studying an aspect is particularised by who is looking and what it is they are looking for. An aspect is not objectively real and defined by set, objective

characteristics: it is bounded by perspective. The mad beauty of Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* is not an astronomical photograph—it is an artistic perspective of the aspect colour of the object night sky. Therefore, I describe aspects of violence above in terms of yielding themselves up to relevant theoretical perspectives: aspects are what they are when a theoretical perspective looks at them in the way that perspective sees and understands them (Schinkel, 2010). A useful example provided by Schinkel (2010) concerns an object's function being an aspect when the object is examined through the lens of functionalism. Alternatively, symbolic interactionist scrutiny of the same object might see its symbolic or relational aspects. Both exist on the object's aspect horizon regardless, but each perspective actualises aspects relevant to themselves.

A theoretical perspective that has the potential to actualise some aspect of an object for analysis is called a "profile" of that aspect (Schinkel, 2010, p. 10). Description alone of an aspect does not constitute a profile, but only theories "to which such description adheres" (Schinkel, 2010, p. 10). As with aspects, objects can be said to have a horizon of profiles available to them that might be useful in any given analysis (Schinkel, 2010, p. 11). An aspect may be actualised and studied using any profile on its horizon, but the selection brings to the fore details of the aspect relevant to that profile and de-emphasises what matters to others (Schinkel, 2010). Again, it is a matter of recognising that complex objects cannot be seen entirely but are best observed through an intentional selection of profiles and aspects.

Selecting an aspect of violence and observing it in accord with a theoretical profile does not, by itself, constitute a complete analysis. For that, Schinkel (2010) requires the addition of liquidation, a methodology that uses a theoretical profile to study multiple aspects of violence from which the researcher assembles a multi-dimensional, big-view of some aspects of violence. A variant of liquidation is the theoretical methodology governing this

thesis. Consequently, liquidation is described in more detail in chapter five, the methodology chapter.

    Reduction of Being. Integral to Schinkel's theory and methodology is the deceptively simple but nuanced and inclusive definition of violence as the reduction of being. (2010, p. 45). Schinkel's (2010) conception of violence begins with the difference between what a thing is and what it may be when it is not an objective thing *being* in the world. He borrows Heidegger's notion that *being* is necessarily a quality of *a* being and that the being of the being precedes its objective—real or ontic—manifestation as various forms of *a* being in the real world (Schinkel, 2010). The example he provides is that of him walking. His walking is an ontic manifestation of the walking itself, walking as it exists before a being makes of itself a being walking (Schinkel, 2010). Likewise, violence. Violence itself precedes the punch in the nose, precedes all possible punches in the nose, and each fist against each face is a single ontic manifestation of an ontological violence comprised of all possible punches in the nose understood together (Schinkel, 2010). In Schinkel's (2010) definition, therefore, violence is a reduction of being—the reduced being of *a* being that bursts into the real world as specific reductive violence applied to the range of aspects available to a specific being.

    Schinkel (2010) uses *aspect* to denote discrete collections of related characteristics that themselves comprise the objective whole of a being. Because human perception is too limited to observe all aspects of an object simultaneously, the object is perceived in a simplified manner—relatively few aspects at a time (Schinkel, 2010). However, when an object is seen as a subset of all its aspects, the unperceived aspects are not lost but simply withdrawn to the horizon of that object's possibilities, its *aspect horizon*, from which any may be retrieved any time something highlights that aspect (Schinkel, 2010). Violence, therefore, has a horizon of aspects that researchers may choose from (Schinkel, 2010). Human beings each have a horizon of aspects made up of all their potential for ontic being, of all that they

might *be* in the world (Schinkel, 2010). Here, his (2010) use of *aspect* continues to draw from Husserl's use of the word to describe perception. But Schinkel (2010) strongly emphasises he uses the term differently when talking about the role of violence in reducing being, where *aspect* becomes that part of something which is selectively highlighted or acted upon through action. When a social actor takes on the role of vigilante from the choices available upon their aspect horizon, their act brings forward and temporarily reduces them to that aspect. If that vigilante then commits a violent act of racial hatred against someone, their act highlights *victim* and *race* on their victim's aspect horizon, reducing them, for at least the duration of the violence, to a sliver of their full potential for being. Where *aspect* is used elsewhere in the text to indicate something necessarily curtailed by limited perception, violence makes of it a reduction enacted through practice, through action (Schinkel, 2010). The punch in the nose highlights itself and consigns other possible actions to the aspect horizon when it is thrown. The punch makes a victim when it lands. The interaction between perpetrator and victim then constitutes a violent situation which is itself a reduction from a horizon of potential situations, and the victim is reduced to who they are within that situation (Schinkel, 2010). The utility of all this for working with violence itself is the way it offers the broadest possible definition at the ontological level while refraining from the violence of absolute definitions at the ontic level, where any violence not included in a particular act of research is not permanently removed but only allocated to the aspect horizon, available to be brought forward and analysed as needed using an appropriate theoretical perspective and empirical definition.

There is no escaping violence in this sense of reduction of being. Schinkel (2010) borrows from Heidegger the idea of human beings, on the ontological level, comprising the totality of all their unrealised potential for being. As the social pre-exists the individual human, a human being in the world always exists in relation to other human beings in a push and pull of influence such that to *be* is to *be-with* (Schinkel, 2010, p. 49). Yet, to *be-with* is to

be reduced in being as it is the nature of the social world to constrain and shape the self in line with prevailing norms and away from its infinite ontological potential (Schinkel, 2010). Reduction of being—violence—is, therefore, everywhere, in every social situation (Schinkel, 2010). It is integral to being in the world, integral to and even constitutive of the social since to remove the reduction of being from social interaction is to remove the interaction (Schinkel, 2010).

At this level, violence is not purely harmful or destructive; it is simply a process of selection whereby a being or situation is this, not that (Schinkel, 2010). Two people who meet as friends are constrained to their friendship, not enemies, not indifferent, not any number of things potentially existing on each of their aspect horizons. Their ontological being is reduced; violence, of a sort, is present but has only constrained the complexity of the world to a manageable simplicity through the selection of some aspects and the deselection of others (Schinkel, 2010). However, if everything social is violence, what differentiates exchanging pleasantries with the baker while buying bread from the punch in the nose that is how violence is predominantly perceived? Schinkel (2010) argues for seeing violence as a sliding scale, from polite interaction barely touched by violence except to constrain social roles as humans do business with one another to grievous eruptions of violence in the form of assault, murder, and the most depraved somatic violations imaginable. Violence is with us always, but its exact ontic form depends acutely on the precise degree to which violence is activated within the situation (Schinkel, 2010). The degree of activation is governed by the extent to which the interaction denies participants access to alternative aspects from their aspect horizon and the extent to which violence dominates other situation dynamics (Schinkel, 2010). While the participants are able and willing for each other's aspects to change, violence remains weakly activated (Schinkel, 2010). The more participants are denied access to other aspects, the emptier of potential their aspect horizon becomes, the more violence dominates

the situation, and the greater the intensity and destructiveness of the violence constituting how the situation unfolds (Schinkel, 2010). This perspective allows for expanded definitions of violence. Structural violence can be seen as macro-level assumptions about what a group's ontological range is and weaves them into social structure to constrain options for being. Symbolic violence is a contested application of power to the defining social actors so they are persuaded to embody particular ontological possibilities and thereby reduce themselves.

In some respects, all this simplifies understanding the violence in a situation. There is no need to explain how violence enters the situation, as it was always there, shaping the participants and their interaction. There is only the need to understand why the degree of activation of violence begins sliding towards forms of hurtful, action-driven reduction that most would recognise as commonsense violence. For Schinkel (2010, p. 52), the strength of this approach is that it gives a "substantial criterion" for differentiating between violence's many forms and makes it possible to define the beginning of a violent situation as the moment violence ceases to be weakly present and begins to "define the situation". I would add an additional advantage of this perspective is that it resists the temptation to see a situation and make easy inferences about which participants are perpetrators and which are victims. Beginning with the violence itself means looking at the inception of a violent situation and asking, *how is violence already here?* Attention is drawn to the relationship between the participants, to the ways they are already reducing the potential of each other's being and to the ways that reduces the range of interactive options available to them. This relational view is not intended to encourage victim-blaming; it only lends clarity to aspects of the situation that come before meaning-laden labels such as *victim* and *perpetrator.* My intent—articulated in one of my research questions—is to explore the relationships between violence and other aspects of the social world, and I believe this way of seeing violence as a field of varying

strength permeating every social situation, sometimes weakly but constructively, sometimes spiking towards physical harm, will serve my intent with useful precision

Additionally, this thesis and its associated research draw heavily on Willem Schinkel's liquidation methodology, as described in chapter five. Briefly, liquidation rejects monolithic theory as a useful tool for studying complex objects. Instead, it considers multiple aspects of an object from a relevant theoretical perspective or profile and merges results into an imperfect, flexible description capturing more of the object than would consideration of any single aspect. In this thesis, I apply a variation of the liquidation methodology, viewing online violence as an aspect of violence from three different theoretical profiles, one for each level of analysis. At the micro-level, I use Irving Goffman, particularly his concepts of the sacred individual and aggressive face-work (see chapter six). For the meso-level, I use the interaction ritual chain and situational violence theories of Randall Collins (see chapter seven). To represent the macro-level, I apply Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic violence, social field, and habitus to my analysis (see chapter eight). This chapter provides a brief introduction to these profiles.

Theoretical Perspectives Used in this Thesis

Goffman. Erving Goffman was a foundational American sociologist—born in Canada—whose work remains influential in the field to a degree it would be difficult to overstate. He emerged in the 1960s as part of the sociological turn away from monolithic, all-encompassing theory that began a few years earlier, in works such as Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* (Best, 2005). Goffman built his career around micro-sociology, studying the ramifications of small-scale interactions among individuals and between them and society's larger-scale structures and institutions. Goffman's micro-sociology is part of a theoretical

perspective known as symbolic interactionism, within which Goffman was—and continues, through his writings, to be—a leading theorist. In the paragraphs that follow, I summarise key concepts from Goffmans' work. These concepts are all discussed at length in chapter six.

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective in the social sciences that sees society and the human self as producing and being produced by each other through symbolically charged social interaction (Burke & Stets, 2009). This cycle is often summed up as society shaping self, shaping behaviour, in turn shaping society (Stryker et al., 2005). An important aspect of symbolic interactionism in Goffman's work is the way an individual's identity is shaped through interaction, as each social actor presents themselves to their audience of fellow interactants and their self adapts to their perception of audience response (Stryker et al., 2005). For example, someone who elicits disgust from significant others in their life for smoking cigarettes may stop smoking and give up that aspect of their identity. Quitting and not smoking are behaviours, and if other social actors behave in the same way following similar interactions, then society itself is changed to make smoking less normatively acceptable.

Encounters. In his work, Goffman (1983) analyses what he calls "the interaction order", the micro-level domain made up of all that happens when two or more humans interact when sharing co-presence—that is, within each other's "response presence". Specifically, he often deals with social actors interacting within small groups, and he calls these interactions *encounters* (Goffman, 1961). Encounters may be unfocused—having no shared purpose—or focused, in which case the group assembles with a purpose in mind, and participants think of themselves in terms of the group "we" rather than their individual "I" (Goffman, 1961, p. 13). The shared purpose need not be grandiose—two people having a conversation suffices (Goffman, 1961), and participants gathered in my sampled online discussion threads would certainly count as small groups sharing a focused encounter.

Goffman (1961) takes care in his writing to distinguish between a group and a gathering. A gathering exists for the duration of a particular encounter and then disperses, whereas a group may gather periodically but separates between encounters (Goffman, 1961). From Goffman's (1961) perspective, this emphasises that it is the interaction within the encounter that needs to be studied rather than the characteristics of the group. The distinction makes sense in this thesis, where Internet anonymity makes it difficult to know anything about the participants in my empirical research with certainty, but their interactions—their discussions—are readily available for analysis. Focused gatherings are goal-focused and structured around the obligations and expectations of participants regarding what is to be achieved, how it is to be achieved, and how difficulties and disagreements will be dealt with. Generally, these group values eclipse existing individual statuses, attainments, and values for the duration of the encounter. Indeed, the world outside is irrelevant to the encounter, allowing the development of "mutual engrossment", or shared fascination with a goal and its pursuit, and intrusions are policed by the group (Goffman, 1961, pp. 87-88).

        The Dramaturgical Perspective. Goffman's work famously treats ordinary human interaction as if it were a staged dramatic performance, which is often referred to as the dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959). Interactants are referred to as social actors, adopting roles in society and performing for an audience of other interactants who are also performing (Goffman, 1959). Social actors become attached to their performances, and over time roles become a genuine part of their identities to the extent that identities may be harmed if performances fail (Goffman, 1961). Failure in a role is possible because the purpose of a performance is to *give an impression* of themselves to the audience, but it is possible to *give off* an unintended and even contrary impression (Goffman, 1959). The steps an actor takes within an interaction to create creditable impressions or defuse discreditable ones constitute *impression management* (Goffman, 1959). Performances and impression management are

organised around frontstage—any space visible to the audience where performance occurs—and backstage—contexts inaccessible to the audience, where masks are lowered, performances set aside, rehearsals take place, and sets and props lending legitimacy to particular roles are prepared or stored (Goffman, 1959). Roles and the expectations associated with them are a key repository of society's normative values, and studying roles and performances is an important way researchers understand the workings of socialisation (Goffman, 1961).

Face-work. Social actors who achieve positive value by successfully meeting audience expectations with a performance are said to acquire *face* (Goffman, 1967*).* Performances that violate expectations or which blur the lines between frontstage and backstage, or otherwise give off a negative impression, result in the loss of face (Goffman, 1967). As suggested above, roles can be integral to an actor's identity, which can suffer real harm if loss of face is the outcome of a role performance (Goffman, 1967). Behaviour designed to create or repair face comprises one of Goffman's (Goffman, 1967) major concepts: face-work. Generally, face-work is a cooperative enterprise between all participants in an interaction, as everyone is attempting to earn or maintain their best face, and success is in the best interests of all as it minimises social disruption (Goffman, 1967). Drawing on Durkheim (see chapter six), Goffman notes that the social actors are sacred individuals: they hold their identity and the identity of others as sacred, but, through loss of face, identities may be profaned and can only be repaired by a corrective interaction ritual (Goffman, 1967). Corrective ritual exchanges—like any other face-work—are generally cooperative (Goffman, 1967). However, some actors understand the unwritten rules of face-work so well that they abandon cooperation and use them strategically to elevate their own face at the expense of the face of others, behaviours known as aggressive face-work.

Stigma. With stigma, Goffman (1963, p. 5) takes an existing social scientific concept—a status possessed by "the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance"—and elaborates it into one of the best-known and enduring sociological terms. Social actors are committed to playing certain roles in their interactions, and their performance is judged by their significant others against socialised expectations for a given role (Burke & Stets, 2009; Goffman, 1961). A badly failed performance discredits the performer, sometimes beyond the possibility of social recovery, producing a ruined identity—and, in this context, stigma is the fact of that ruined identity and the collective visual markers of its existence (Goffman, 1963). For example, a recent study found that adolescents with obesity are aware of their size as a discreditable and stigmatising visible attribute drawing negative attention and behaviour towards them and that this correlates with reduced academic performance relative to other adolescents (Langford et al., 2022). Drawing negative attention and behaviour is a characteristic of stigmatising attributes, and stigma is often seen—even by the bearer of stigmata—as justification for discriminatory behaviour towards the stigmatised person (Goffman, 1963). Those suffering from stigma are aware of their outcast state; in common with all social actors, theirs is a looking-glass self, built on and easily damaged by their perception of how significant others in their social world perceive them (Burke & Stets, 2009; Goffman, 1963). For those who accept the significance of indirect and non-physical harm, the damage done by stigma to identity marks it as a form of violence.

Collins. Randall Collins (2004) has been, for many years, one of the leading theorists within the field of the sociology of violence. His work is situated within the symbolic interactionist tradition and has Goffman as a clear foundation, though it soars far beyond. His perspective is, therefore, micro-sociological, concerned with social interaction, and places the nearly self-contained situation—what Goffman would call an encounter—at the heart of sociological analysis (Collins, 2004).

In a long and distinguished career, Collins has produced numerous works and contributions to sociology. Of interest to me here are his interaction ritual chains and microsociology of violence, which I briefly summarise below and discuss in far greater detail in chapter seven.

Contrasting Goffman, who placed the encounter at the centre and glancingly described behaviour within encounters as ritualistic, Collins focuses on the rituals and the ways varying degrees of commitment to them explain patterns of social behaviour (Collins, 2004). For Collins (2004), the encounter is structured by the extent to which participants share focus and emotional entrainment, and when these elements become self-reinforcing, the encounter becomes a significant emotional experience and a place where culture—and the symbolic content comprising it—is produced, maintained, or critiqued, and disseminated across society.

Interaction Ritual Chains and Entrainment. Rituals and emotions alike are entraining; they produce feelings of solidarity among participants in the encounter and constrain behaviour in normative ways (Collins, 2004). Breaking rituals or disrupting entrainment produces anxiety and discredits those responsible, who may be punished or resort to ritual means of compensating for their infraction (Collins, 2004). In this view, situation dominates structure because, in a situational interaction, participants become so overwhelmed by their entrainment that it governs their behaviour (Collins, 2004).

Further, the shared focus and emotional entrainment produced by interaction rituals within a situation produce emotional energy which resides in a participant and modulates their behaviour (Collins, 2004). Emotional energy persists and filters actors towards subsequent encounters with those of similar emotional energy or shapes outcomes of encounters where emotional energy differs (Collins, 2004). Collins (2004, p. 12) goes so far as to describe social structure as the outcome of "an ongoing process of stratifying individuals by their emotional energy". These broad patterns of situationally confined interaction rituals linked by

emotional energy and shared social resources are what Collins (2004) refers to as interaction ritual chains.

Collins and Violence. Collins's empirical examination of images, film, and first-hand accounts of violent situations led to his development of a micro-sociology of violence locating violence firmly with the situational context of any given violent act. Just as Goffman notes the world outside an encounter is generally irrelevant to the behaviour within the encounter, Collins (2004) sees situational dynamics as largely self-contained. Structural issues or identity conflict may broadly influence whether someone finds themselves in a violent situation, but only the dynamics of the situation will determine whether violence occurs (Collins, 2004).

Key to his (2008) conception of violence is his determination that humans find violence difficult and are not particularly good at it. When interacting, humans are prone to entrainment, as described above, and violence disrupts entrainment so thoroughly that it produces crippling anxiety in the form of ct/f, or confrontational tension/fear (Collins, 2008). Violence will not occur unless something within a situation provides a pathway around ct/f (Collins, 2008). Major pathways include fighting as a sport, emotional unity with a supportive audience, vulnerability to emotional domination in the victim, attacking from a distance, deception, and focusing on the methodology of delivering violence (Collins, 2008; 2009, p. 570). Even then, ct/f may compromise the competence of the resulting attack (Collins, 2008).

Bourdieu. Pierre Bourdieu was a twentieth-century French anthropologist and sociologist with a strong interest in how scientific research is conditioned by the values of the society in which it is embedded and the artificial separation it maintains between objective observers and the objects of their observation (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]). His classic and highly influential 1972 book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* sets out to establish an approach to doing sociology that comes with reflection on research itself built-in (Nice, 2013). This work

also explored concepts that are now, if not universally accepted, certainly fundamental to sociology: fields, habitus, doxa, and—of greatest relevance to this thesis—symbolic violence, plus his law of the conservation of violence, all of which will be briefly defined below and in more detail in chapter eight.

Field, Capital, Habitus, and Doxa. These are closely related concepts and are too complex to express thoroughly and succinctly. A social field can be thought of as a bounded social space in which social agents compete for advantage (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Thomson, 2008). That advantage is often capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—resources that enhance an agent's competitiveness in the field (Bourdieu, 2002, 2013[1972]; Thomson, 2008). Interacting in the field, individuals and groups internalise beliefs originating from the nature of their experiences there, and these internalised beliefs comprise their habitus, a set of dispositions governing not just how they behave but what behaviours they think of as possible in a given field (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Maton, 2008). When, over time and with repetition, beliefs in the habitus are accepted as common sense and become preconscious—able to shape the behaviour of an agent without the agent's conscious awareness—these beliefs become doxa (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Bourdieu & Nice, 1980; Deere, 2008).

Symbolic Violence. Success in the social field depends upon access to relevant forms of capital and accrues capital to successful social agents (Bourdieu, 1974, 2002, 2013[1972]; Bourdieu, 2020). Capital is unequally distributed among social groups, tending to accumulate around dominant groups, who thus earn access to the field of power and consequently the power to structure the social field to reflect the values and knowledge to which they have ready access (Bourdieu, 2002, 2013[1972]; Bourdieu, 2020; Thomson, 2008). Subordinate groups, not raised to those values or that knowledge, who lack relevant capitals, may then struggle to succeed in the field (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Thomson, 2008). When the difficulties and failures experienced by subordinate groups come to be accepted not as the

consequence of structural issues but as symptoms of the inherent inferiority of the subordinate group, the result is symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Schubert, 2008).

Conservation of Violence. Violence can be erased in a variety of ways, including defining it to exclude certain kinds of violent action (Schinkel, 2010), assigning legitimacy to some violent agents—for example, the state (Schinkel, 2010; Weber, 2013[1900])—assigning illegitimacy to some groups who may then be hurt without consequence (Hodge, 2015; Schinkel & van den Berg, 2011), and through the tendency of symbolic violence to exist as unexamined common sense (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Schubert, 2008). However, Bourdieu argues that violence is conserved: it cannot be erased or made invisible because it will crop up elsewhere in another form (Swedberg, 2011). For example, forbidding workers access to unions to prevent strike actions only hides anger at unsustainable working conditions, and so the missing violence of the strike may crop up in violence to the self, interpersonal violence, and intimate partner violence.

To summarise, this thesis employs the liquidation methodology of Willem Schinkel (see chapter five). The key concepts of theorists Erving Goffman (see chapter six), Randall Collins (see chapter seven), and Pierre Bourdieu (see chapter eight)—representing micro-, meso-, and macro-perspectives—are used to separately analyse data concerning violent online behaviour derived from social media posts. Those analyses are liquidated: combined to produce useful insights into online violence while deliberately avoiding the formulation of a new homogeneous and all-encompassing theory (see chapter nine). How this will be done, specifically, will be explored in chapter five, dealing with my methodology.

Chapter Five

Liquidation and Thematic Analysis: Methodologies For Complexity

The focus of my thesis is theoretical. I present a theoretical examination of online violence spanning multiple levels of analysis. I use multiple theoretical perspectives, overarchingly the violence theory of Willem Schinkel (2010), which includes a methodology for theoretical analysis of violence that Schinkel calls liquidation. Also employed are theoretical concepts from the work of Erving Goffman, Randall Collins, and Pierre Bourdieu, representing micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis, respectively.

However, for the liquidation methodology to work, my theoretical perspectives need something to analyse. To that end, my research includes limited empirical research to produce just sufficient findings to fuel my theoretical analysis. Because theory is my focus, and I am not attempting to generate new theory, limited empirical research is appropriate. To that end, I purposively select as my sample a small number of online discussions taking place over a relatively short span of time, one each from social media sites Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. These publicly available discussions are analysed as texts to gain some insight into how violence manifests online and how it relates to other aspects of the social world. The findings from the textual analysis are then analysed using each theoretical perspective, and the theoretical findings are liquidated, as described later in this chapter.

This chapter details my main theoretical methodology—a variation of Schinkel's liquidation. I present my qualitative empirical methodology based on Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) approach to thematic analysis and, in line with that approach, my research design decisions. I then lay out my data collection, coding, analysis, and the themes obtained from the data.

Schinkel's Liquidation Methodology

In chapters three and four, I introduced the violence theory of sociologist Willem Schinkel. At its most basic, the theory acknowledges the complexity of violence and argues a tendency for social science to define violence incautiously, even to the extent of doing violence by excluding some experiences of violence from consideration (Schinkel, 2010). Instead, the theory offers reduction of being as a flexible and inclusive violence definition (Schinkel, 2010). It also lays out a methodology for choosing aspects of violence to study using theoretical perspectives—profiles—relevant to the chosen aspects (Schinkel, 2010). Schinkel (2010) calls this methodology liquidation. A variant of liquidation is the overarching theoretical methodology for my research and this thesis. I describe it more fully below.

Liquidation. If it were only a matter of reducing violence to a single aspect viewed through a single profile, there might be little big-picture advantage to the method. Nuances of violence invisible to the selected profile would be as readily lost as when researchers attempt to encompass all of violence within a relatively simple perspective that ignores its complexity. Whether someone uncritically chooses Collins' micro-situational theory of violence as a profile and omits macro-causes of violence or Bourdieu's symbolic violence and loses micro-causes, some subsets of relationships and causes are lost.

Schinkel's (2010) liquidation methodology is designed with this in mind; it only begins with profiles and aspects. Liquidation assumes no theory can be taken as complete or final in its description of a complicated object (Schinkel, 2010). The world itself—and complex objects in the world—are too vast and multifarious to be fully comprehended through monolithic theory but can be encompassed piecemeal by deploying a profile to analyse an aspect (Schinkel, 2010). While a single profile's view of a single aspect may risk being simplistic, a profile may be applied to multiple aspects and the findings combined—or

liquidated—to offer a big-picture mosaic capturing more detail than would any unbounded single-aspect study (Schinkel, 2010). Of necessity, any cobbled-together picture will assemble imperfectly, but liquidation rejects the need for a single, perfect theory of violence: the goal, as the name suggests, is fluidity (Schinkel, 2010). This accounts for his use of the term *fractured realism*—the outcome is a mosaic-view of reality comprised of tiles of profile and aspect, each showing some detail particular to it, to achieve an imperfect but comprehensible image rich in emergent dimensionality (Schinkel, 2010). What is not intended is the creation of a new total, essential, final definition or understanding of violence. Again, liquidation assumes doing so would be impossible. The aim is an assembled description of violence that communicates truths about the topic but not all truths and not for all time. Thus, Schinkel (2010, p. 9) constructs a methodology of examining violence that avoids excessive simplification while "eluding the trap of epistemological relativism" and "one-sided absolutism and endless conceptual dissemination".

My research aims and questions required a methodology that was flexible and inclusive and would allow me to centre online violence as violence itself, for which liquidation was ideal. However, it was also my aim to produce a multi-level analysis of online violence in order to achieve a multidimensional view of the processes and relationships of online violence across the levels of analysis. This meant that my study would involve only a single violence aspect—online conflict understood as violence—but would require multiple theoretical perspectives, one per level. Liquidation, as delineated by Schinkel (2010), takes the opposite approach of subjecting multiple aspects to a single profile. Still, one point of liquidation is to avoid overly rigid applications of theory (Schinkel, 2010); it seems reasonable to apply this idea to liquidation itself. I believe analysing a single aspect using three theoretical profiles representing the three levels of analysis and conducting a liquidation still results in a broader, multi-dimensional, fractured-realist view of my aspect created by

changes in perspective rather than changes in aspect. In any case, my research provides an opportunity to test the usefulness of my variant approach along with the applicability of Schinkel's theory in general. Therefore, when referring to my use of liquidation throughout this thesis, I refer to my variant version.

It is worth clarifying here that in this thesis, my chosen theoretical profiles are applied to my chosen aspect of violence in chapters six, seven, and eight. These can give the impression of having stepped away from Schinkel and liquidation to focus specifically on the theoretical perspectives of Goffman, Collins, and Bourdieu. However, this is in accord with the liquidation methodology, which calls for each theoretical profile to analyse the aspect in its own terms, as that perspective, by itself, sees that aspect(Schinkel, 2010). Liquidation occurs when those profile-specific analyses are blended in chapter nine to present a fractured realist understanding of online violence.

Liquidation and Phenomenology. Phenomenology is an approach to understanding behaviour that focuses on human experience of the phenomena comprising existence rather than attributing what humans do to some external, objectively knowable reality(Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Researchers employing a phenomenological methodology analyse and interpret language—written or spoken texts—to bring out what people have experienced in a context and what it means to them (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Social interaction is viewed as a process of meaning-making that both draws from the social world constructed by previous interactions and contributes to the maintenance or ongoing reinvention of existing constructions, and a phenomenological perspective grants insight into those processes.

Liquidation is explicitly a phenomenological methodology. It seeks out violence itself in how people experience violence they receive and give and what violence means in those interactions. The act of liquidation is intended to blend analyses of an aspect of violence to arrive at an approximation of the aspect's meaning rather than to totally theorise an objective,

externally real violence (Schinkel, 2010). Even Schinkel's (2010, p. 45) definition of violence, "reduction of being", is about violence as a phenomenon that reconstructs a victim's social world in ways that curtail their existence, that literally remove from reality their ability to experience some aspects of their life-world.

Violent Online Behaviour as an Aspect of Violence

The aspect of violence I have chosen to study is online violence. By this, I mean my focus is harmful interaction between users of Internet social media which could be characterised as an aspect of violence when viewed using Schinkel's violence theory and defining violence as reduction of being, as explained at the end of chapter four.

It must be acknowledged that some theorists would dismiss online violence as an oxymoron: worse, an oxymoron demonstrating a fatal misunderstanding of violence and presenting for study an object so ill-defined as to be beyond the purview of meaningful empirical research. For example, Collins (2008, p. 24). insists only direct, physical violence inflicted within an interactive situation is real, while analysing indirect, non-physical violence is "vacuous" and mere "wordplay" based on "gross misunderstanding". Similarly, Betz (1977, p. 345) dismisses non-physical violence as the equivalent of shoving someone's "soul down the steps", adding that harm not done directly to the body "may be wrong" but "is not violence". By these standards, the concept of online violence seems to fall at the first hurdle. Online interaction is, in its most basic nature, non-physical. Someone participating in a social media discussion can threaten violence in message after message, but without bodies sharing a physical space, it is all just a collection of Betz's unembodied souls sparring without consequence.

But those who insist on direct physical harm as the fundamental characteristic of violence are not alone in attempting to theorise violence. As I explain at length in chapter four, theorists such as Bourdieu (2013[1972]) and Galtung (Galtung, 1969, 1990) have produced extensive, frequently-cited work on indirect modes such as symbolic, structural, and cultural violence that do mostly non-physical harm in the short term while reducing people's life-chances in ways that do extensive somatic—even lethal—harm in the long term. These are forms of violence that harm Pearce's (2017, p. 2) "social body", the human body acting within, acted upon, and embodying its social context, "vulnerable to physical, emotional and psychic harm." Every victim of online bullying who ever took their own life—and victims of online bullying may be twice as likely to try (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 216)—testifies to the ability of non-physical harm to harrow and break the social body and take the physical body with it, and therefore to the appropriateness of speaking of and studying online violence.

On these grounds, I argue online violence is neither an oxymoron nor a hollow excuse for muddy research by those bereft of understanding of how violence works. Rather, it is an aspect of violence in need of study and useful for testing and clarifying understandings of violence offered by existing theoretical perspectives.

Qualitativeness as a Suitable Empirical Methodology

As stated in this chapter's introduction, this is a theoretical thesis structured by an overarching theoretical methodology. My empirical research exists to generate findings analysable by my chosen theoretical perspectives, to gain theoretical insight into online violence and to test the utility of Schinkel's theoretical methodology, liquidation. My empirical research is deliberately and appropriately limited in scope precisely because it is not my primary purpose. However, because it is limited in scope, I approached my empirical

research design reflexively to ensure that I got the most out of it. I was also mindful of the oft-noted complexity of violence, to which the sociology of violence has responded by trying to capture it from almost as many theoretical perspectives as there are sociological theories and at every level of analysis. However, the diversity of theoretical approaches to violence has tended to a sharp Boolean dichotomy—violence *is* this, *not* that—resulting in what Schinkel (2010) has identified as a violent act in its own right, defining only certain experiences of violence as legitimately violent and silencing others. Silverman (2017) advocates for selecting an approach that supports the underlying epistemology of the planned research. With this in mind, the ideal methodology for my empirical research needed the theoretical flexibility to focus multiple perspectives and levels of analysis on my sampled data. It needed among its strengths the capacity to illuminate how violence is experienced and how interaction constructs understanding of violence, behaviour around it, identities shaped by it, and the relations between violence and the broader social world in which it is embedded, so that my theoretical research could engage with those topics. A qualitative approach is an ideal approach to meet the needs of my research as outlined.

Firstly, it is consistent with the phenomenological ontology behind the theoretical methodology of liquidation I am adapting from Schinkel (2010). That methodology emphasises violence as a subjective experience of being rather than an objective, quantitatively knowable reality. Positivist approaches insisting on locating causes of violence—with their deterministic assumption that external causes trump free will—may find patterns in what is around violence but struggle to locate the meanings structuring and arising from violence itself (Schinkel, 2010). Qualitative research, however, is quite comfortable delving into meaning and experience and, therefore, how violence itself unfolds in the real social world of human interaction (Silverman, 2017). Secondly, qualitative research supports the multi-theoretical version of Schinkel's liquidation that I am using. One of the core

strengths of qualitative research is the range and variability of its methodologies, many of which may be applied regardless of a researcher's theoretical position or adopted epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, Silverman(2017, p. 41) notes that qualitative research is useful for "understanding…social interaction in real-life…e.g. social media…how people perceive things or respond to situations…processes" and "studying sensitive or complex issues which may be difficult to study in depth using quantitative research…" This is because qualitative methodologies assume a world constructed by the intricate and subjective interactions of those experiencing it (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). The characteristics of qualitative research listed above ideally suit my study of the complex and sensitive topic of violence as it is constructed and experienced in processes of online social interaction.

Of course, those who favour positivist approaches to research can be critical of qualitative methodologies because of a perceived lack of rigour and objectivity and reliance on secondary data (Nowell et al., 2017; Silverman, 2017). However, in this, I agree with Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), who argue persuasively for acknowledging researcher creativity and subjectivity as valuable resources that strengthen qualitative studies, and that rigour is achievable through deliberate and reflexive research design. Moreover, Silverman (2017, pp. 39-40) highlights the value of document analysis since, from the qualitative perspective, texts are primary "events" amenable to in-depth study without fear that participant awareness of the researcher distorts the data, as it can with interviews and other forms of person-to-person data gathering. That is, I view the critique of qualitative approaches as either subjective—and therefore irrelevant to its usefulness in my specific research—or remediable through the decisions I made during the design phase of my research.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Online Violence

Of the numerous options available, the best qualitative methodology for my limited empirical research is Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019). Thematic analysis—the process of iteratively coding data to identify themed patterns that analysis and interpretation can weave into rich and meaningful accounts of human experience—is one of the fundamental tools of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). It is known for its flexibility and its freedom from dependence on any particular theoretical perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). That thematic analysis is a familiar, no-frills but clearly productive standard with well-established processes makes it the best choice for small-scale research like mine, where there is a need for the empirical work not to overshadow the theoretical and yet still accomplish a lot with a little. The theoretical flexibility of thematic analysis makes it a perfect tool to support the liquidation methodology's use of multiple theoretical perspectives to analyse a single aspect of violence.

Reflexive thematic analysis is an attempt to formalise thematic analysis to address some of the critiques of both qualitative research and thematic analysis itself—such as accusations that it lacks rigour and is too subjective—without bending qualitativeness towards some epistemologically inconsistent pseudo-positivism (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). Again, Braun and Clarke (2019) herald flexibility and subjectivity as a strength and not an intrinsic flaw of qualitative research. However, they acknowledge that hasty or careless research design can lead to mismatches between the epistemological and ontological aspects of a researcher's theoretical perspective and TA, producing results that are dubious or hard to verify (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). For example, a grounded theory study might use some other overarching theory to analyse the data rather than drawing theory from the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2019, pp. 591-592; Silverman, 2017, pp. 199-200). One

remedy for this is to follow an established process for executing a thematic analysis, encouraging consistency in how the data are approached (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). Another—the central tenet of Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive approach—is to build into research design a deliberate thinking-through of the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the researcher's standpoint and theoretical perspective, consciously choosing these so that the research is internally consistent. The point of these solutions is not uncritical rule-adherence (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Rather, it is to report on the reflexive process, the assumptions identified, and the choices made when writing up the research (Braun & Clarke, 2019), to demonstrate what they call *knowingness*.

> By knowingness, we mean evidence—in the writing—of research being treated as a deliberative process, one that involves decisions related not just to design and method, but ontology, epistemology and methodology, and rationales for these, individually and collectively. Knowingness demonstrates engagement with research as a thought-out adventure, rather than simple 'recipe following' activity… (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 591)

The reflexive progress produces rigour, and the careful reporting of it creates transparency which allows readers from outside the study to assess that rigour for themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

As one of my research goals is to test the applicability of my theoretical methodology to the field of violence, transparent rigour is essential to my process so that my results can be judged by others in the field. It also reflects my personal epistemological standpoint. Therefore, I have selected reflexive thematic analysis as my empirical methodology, and this chapter briefly outlines the reflexive choices I made during the research design phase and provides my rationales for each.

My Ontology and Epistemology

The ontology and epistemology best suited to answering my research questions and achieving my aims are, respectively, phenomenology and constructionism. Given the value Braun and Clarke (2019) accord researcher subjectivity, it is no surprise that a strong reason for my position here is that these perspectives resonate with my personal beliefs. However, there are additional reasons, and they are outlined below.

Phenomenology. Several things contribute to my having taken a phenomenological perspective in my overarching theoretical research and my limited empirical research. Firstly is phenomenology's focus on how humans experience phenomena, which has obvious benefits for my study's attempts to understand the experience of online violence. As noted earlier in this chapter, liquidation and the definition of violence as the reduction of being both reflect a phenomenological understanding of violence. Likewise, my empirical methodology, reflexive thematic analysis, reflects the interpretive phenomenology described above, in which the use of language in a text is analysed to discover the meaning it attaches to some phenomenon. Finally, phenomenology explores how social behaviour is ordered by—sometimes unseen—phenomena within the life-world. This makes it useful for illuminating tenebrous forms of violence such as pacification, where an apparent peace is structured and maintained by violence (Baron et al., 2019). Considering these elements, adopting phenomenology as my ontology creates a strong ontological unity within my work.

Constructionism. In common with phenomenology, constructionism views the world as an outcome of human sociality. Broadly, constructionism argues that what humans believe the world is, what they tell each other the world is, *is* what the world is (Elder-Vass, 2012; Kukla, 2000). Human behaviour is shaped by these beliefs and serves to maintain or reorder shared reality (Elder-Vass, 2012; Kukla, 2000). Constructionism claims that objects in the social world derived, however tangentially, from human choices—e.g., gender, economics,

nationalism, clothing styles, food preferences, scientific theories—are not natural or inevitable or even necessary, even if common sense dictates that they are (Kukla, 2000). Rather, they are products constructed of human belief and behaviour and entirely open to critique and change (Elder-Vass, 2012; Kukla, 2000). In its most extreme form, "very strong constructionism" insists that the entirety of reality is socially constructed because the nature of everything is at least partly determined by interpreted human perception (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 25). Methodologies may be considered constructionist if they are applied purposively from the perspective that knowledge is a product of social construction, that they seek from the data non-generalised, non-essentialist patterns of meaning, and that the findings prioritise usefulness over objective, overarching truth (Neimeyer & Levitt, 2001).

Critical realists object to constructionism as an epistemology because it reduces social facts to a catalogue of subjective descriptions without acknowledging the enduring nature of some structures and institutions that give them, for all intents and purposes, substance (Botterill, 2014). Further, it neglects the constraints physical existence imposes independently of any human beliefs about reality (Botterill, 2014). Gravity is not a social construct for those who step off a cliff. Paperwork cannot characterise bureaucracy if paper does not exist. For critical realists, what is constructed is only a small subset of the social world and the physical world in which it is embedded (Elder-Vass, 2012).

However, the divide—seen often in the literature—between constructionism and critical realism need not be absolute, as moderate forms of each perspective acknowledge that both social construction and independent physical existence have a role to play in human experience of the world (Elder-Vass, 2012). I believe that both perspectives have value and which to use in a research project should be determined by which is most useful in that research context rather than which is, in some grand way, Right or Wrong.

In the case of my research, I need the ability of constructionism to chart the meaning-making surrounding participation in violent situations online and how this violence is constituted by and constitutes the reality in which violence so pervasively flowers. Moreover, my research questions and theoretical methodology all require me to expand my definition of violence far beyond conventional definitions that focus on physical harm. If I were to adopt a critical realist perspective here, it would be difficult to convincingly expand my analysis to the indirect, non-physical, and even non-observable forms of violence, which are essential to successfully complete my research. Provided that I am mindful not to generalise my findings or mistake them for objective truth—which would be contrary to liquidation and unnecessary for reflexive thematic analysis, constructionism is also highly compatible with my theoretical and empirical methodologies. However, I acknowledge that a subsequent, more realism-oriented study might usefully map the relations between non-physical violence and physical/enduring objects, structures, and institutions. Ultimately, personal preference and useful intrinsic characteristics justify my selection of phenomenology as my ontological and constructivism as my epistemological perspectives.

Roadmap for the Research

In accord with Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis, I considered possible approaches to my research, selected the most suitable, and recorded my decisions in this chapter to maximise the transparency and internal consistency of my work. When that was done, I proceeded with the thematic analysis itself.

My roadmap is drawn from Braun and Clarke's (2006) classic paper offering a formalised but still accessible and flexible guide to deliberative, consistent, and valuable

thematic analysis. The process comprises data collection, becoming familiar with the data, coding, identifying patterned themes in the codes, checking that the themes do work with the data and refining them as necessary, developing an overarching, meaningful narrative from the analysis, and writing up the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In this context, *coding* is the process of tagging segments of the data with *codes*, meaningful words or phrases identifying what is significant about the item tagged (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, a participant's comment that they hate violence might be coded *violence* and/or *disliking violence*. Codes are the raw material for recognizing *themes*, which are named categories into which the codes are sorted to identify meaningful patterns that are then subjected to analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This stage of the analysis is an iterative one, involving multiple passes through coding and theming to ensure a good, genuinely meaningful fit with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With theming complete, the analysis turns to using the themes to describe, usually interpret, and tell the story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). What does it *mean* that the participants emphasise some aspects of their experience over others? What does it communicate about the relationship between their experiences and other elements of their social world? Once this narrative account of the data is ready, it is written up for inclusion in whatever report the researcher will make of their research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Of necessity, my research design adapts the pure process offered by Braun and Clarke, which assumes thematic analysis as the end goal. In my case, thematic analysis is only the precursor to my theoretical methodology of liquidation. Liquidation examines an aspect of violence from multiple theoretical perspectives and combines them into a single, big-picture view of the aspect (Schinkel, 2010). My thematic analysis, therefore, proceeds to the point of establishing the themes, but then the themes and dataset are collectively analysed three times, once for each of my theoretical profiles—Bourdieu, Collins, and Goffman—to develop a distinct narrative perspective on the data at each level of analysis. The three narratives derived

from this analysis are then liquidated or meaningfully combined (see chapter nine) to present my overarching theoretical findings. The emphasis of my findings reflects both the meaning of the data for online violence and the usefulness of liquidation as a method for dealing with online violence sociologically, as per my research questions and aims.

Data Collection

As described below, data were collected according to the selection criteria I set to reflect my research question and aims. I selected three complete public social media discussions, each with fewer than one hundred and fifty entries. Limiting my sample size allows me to maintain an appropriately small scope for my empirical research so that it is useful to my primary theoretical research without overwhelming it. Qualitative methodologies can accomplish a great deal with small data sets (Silverman, 2017). Additionally, I do not attempt to generalise my findings to a population and do not need a sample size big enough to ensure representation (Silverman, 2017).

Discussions were selected using theoretical sampling. They were picked for their potential to contain messages showing characteristics interpretable as violence, as the aim is to subject those specific qualities to theoretical analysis. Choosing data to theoretical purpose is appropriate where the point of the research is not whether the data are typical of a human population but whether it is "typical of the broad class of phenomena…to which the theory refers" (Bryman, 1988 cited in Silverman, 2017, p. 394). Again, there is no need to make data representative because theoretical sampling generalizes to "theoretical propositions rather than to populations or universes" (Bryman, 1988, as cited in Silverman, 2017, p. 393).

One discussion was selected from each of the three social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. This ensured I would avoid overly site-specific findings. The Twitter thread focuses on debate surrounding an online media critic's opinion of an animated movie, *Raya and the Last Dragon*. The critic states that the movie is derivative of the US animated television series, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. As the latter is a US property utilising tropes associated with Asian mythology and literature, and the former has Asian creatives associated with it and explicitly draws on Asian themes, many discussion participants accuse the critic of offensively speaking as if Asians do not matter. Participants point out multiple times that erasing Asian creators is particularly egregious as, around that time, anti-Asian violence was escalating, and eight Asian women had been murdered in the US city of Atlanta (Dhingra, 2021, March 9). The critic suggests the offended are ungenerous in their interpretation, which some participants take to be victim blaming. A war of words around these basic points ensues, resulting in the critic's withdrawal from participation in public social media spaces.

The Facebook conversation takes place in the comments thread of an open 7News Australia page, responding to the murder of a volunteer basketball coach in Melbourne. The news story includes a photograph of the victim, who is African Australian. Some participants assume the photograph is of the alleged murderer. Discussion ensues about the savagery and criminality of immigrants in general and Africans in particular, including the assumption that they bring violence to an otherwise civilised Australia, that the criminal justice system is too soft on them, and that weak, mostly progressive and left-leaning politicians are to blame.

Finally, the YouTube comments address feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian's opinion of women's armour worn on the TV show *The Mandalorian*. This revolves around costuming choices colloquially known as 'boob armour'—defensive armour worn by women characters on book covers, in comic books, and on television and in movies, that offers little

protection but reveals the women's bodies to the male gaze (see figure 3). Boob armour has a long history of contention in criticism of genre media. However, Anita Sarkeesian is herself a controversial figure, having been central to the somewhat infamous 'gamergate' battle over the representation of women in gaming that resulted in an anticipated game release being cancelled. The chosen YouTube thread is attached to a video ridiculing Anita Sarkeesian's position on women's armour in *The Mandalorian*, with reference to her gamergate history. In the comments, substantially male participants attack Sarkeesian, feminists, and progressives as irrational, joyless, inauthentic attention seekers. In passing, they discuss what constitutes a normal or acceptable woman, rationalise form-fitting armour for women, complain that women are less obedient than they used to be, and decry the injustice of women degrading themselves but considering it offensive when men do it.

Thematically, the discussions are diverse but linked by their potential to highlight aspects of violence across the micro-, meso-, and macro levels of analysis. Moreover, their level of violence has an everyday quality, avoiding the trap of treating violence as an exception, always obvious and characterised by intentional physical harm. Focusing on everyday violence—which may occur in symbolic or invisibly normative ways—makes sense when it is considered as a component of the continuum of violence, originating in but also constitutive of grander, more pronounced, and destructive modes of violence (Scheper-Hughes, 1997). I picked discussions less than six months old at the time of selection to provide currency while allowing time for robust textual exchanges to develop.

Lastly, taking privacy and consent into account, I sought discussions in public areas of their respective platforms from groups with between 300,000 and 2,400,000 followers. Before commencing data analysis, I transcribed the discussions into an Excel spreadsheet where the bulk of the analysis takes place. All transcribed data is anonymized, with all identifying participant information reduced to identification numbers. While there is some concern in the

social sciences about using online data without seeking participant consent (Costello et al., 2017; Kozinets, 2015; Silverman, 2017), consent is still commonly considered unnecessary for online, non-participatory investigative where messages used are wholly public and efforts are made to protect anonymity (Janta et al., 2012). A researcher who has considered their consent obligations may take online data as the equivalent of a publicly available published text rather than human research and ethically proceed without consent (Kozinets, 2015).

Familiarisation and Coding

Transcribing the data into an Excel file proved an excellent opportunity to familiarise myself with the data, as it required close and repeated reading. Once the transcription was complete, I read through the whole data set several times to ensure I was thoroughly familiar with it to facilitate coding.

Coding is a common qualitative technique in which a unit of data is assigned a description reflecting some aspect of its nature—a code (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz, 2015). When all the data are coded, the codes may be organised, categorised by theme, and used as the basis for analysing the data and locating patterns of meaning (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz, 2015). I chose line-by-line coding, where data—in this case, individual social media messages—are considered line-by-line and assigned one or more codes to capture everything present in the line (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). Line-by-line coding is intensive and produces a great many codes from even relatively small amounts of text, so it was ideal for my need to make the most of limited empirical data. I chose to code the entire data set in pursuit of a "rich thematic description" because my research is intended to explore the nature

of online violence and assess the entirety of what I find from multiple theoretical perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

In line with the roadmap earlier in this chapter, I coded iteratively, making several passes through the data to ensure the fewest possible potential codes were missed and so that new codes could be tested against earlier data. When reading the data yielded no new codes—a state known as theoretical saturation (Taylor et al., 2015)—I stopped the coding process, which had produced several hundred codes.

At this stage, I refined the codes by sorting them into rough, high-level categories and combining similarly worded codes into one consistent code. The intention was to reduce the number of individual codes without loss of meaning to facilitate more efficient analysis. When this was finished, 336 unique codes remained, sorted into 29 rough categories.

Developing Themes

Drawing in a limited way on the thematic network approach to thematic analysis outlined by Attride-Stirling (2001, p. 388), I iteratively contemplated the final list of codes and compiled them into thirty-three categories comprising the lowest level premises discoverable in the data: my "basic themes". I then analytically reflected on the data, codes, and basic themes to assemble the basic themes under eleven "organising themes", representing a more abstract summation of the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388). The organising themes point toward bigger picture concerns such as dominant and emerging norms, relations between identity groups, and managing or legitimising violent online behaviour.

Figure 1. Mind map of organising and basic themes.
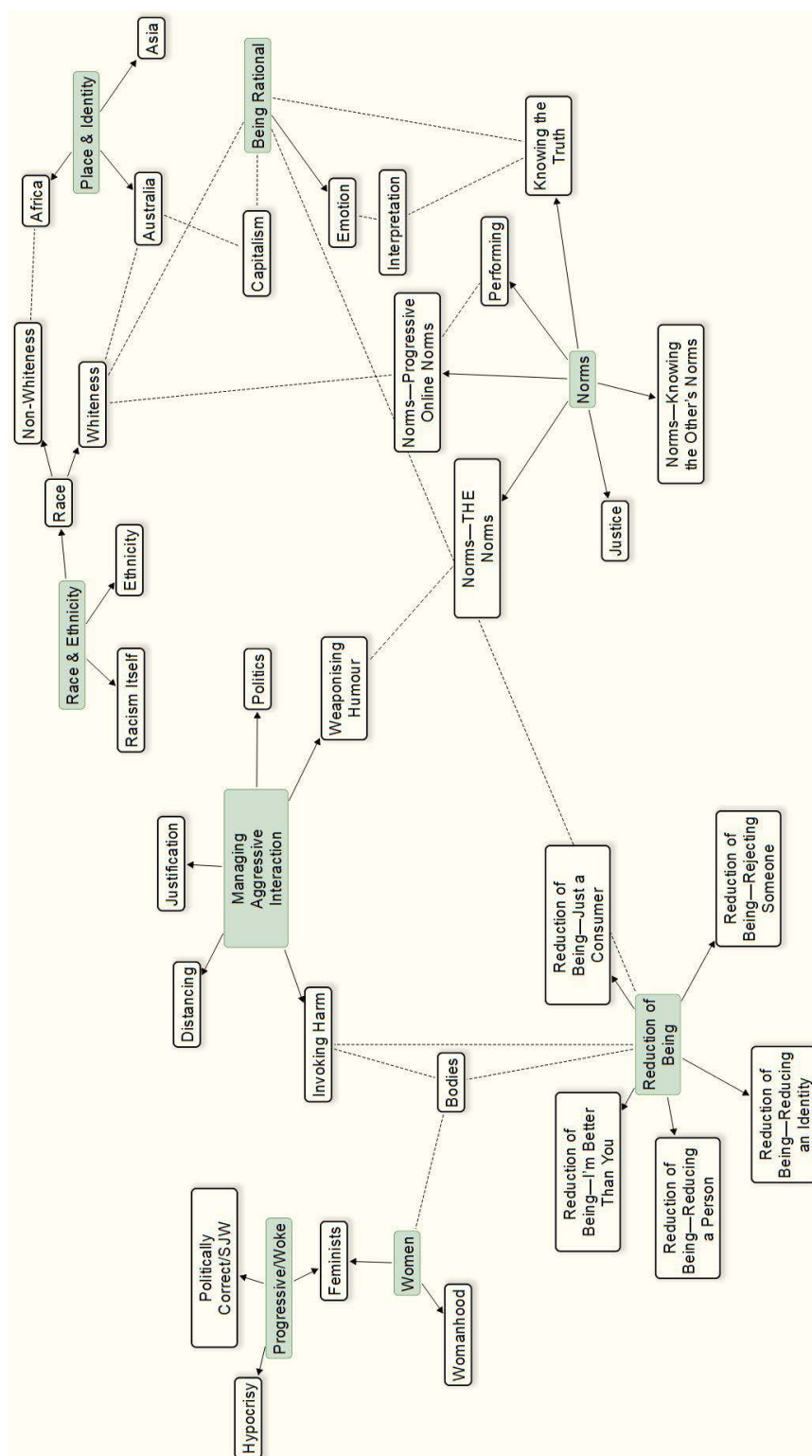
The eleven organising and thirty-three basic sub-themes are:

- Being Rational

  o Emotion

- Interpretation

- Norms

  o Norms—Knowing the Other's Norms

  o Norms—Progressive Online Norms

  o Norms—THE Norms

  o Knowing the Truth

  o Performing

  o Justice

- Reduction of Being

  o Reduction of Being—I'm Better Than You

  o Reduction of Being—Just a Consumer

  o Reduction of Being—Reducing a Person

  o Reduction of Being—Reducing an Identity

  o Reduction of Being—Rejecting Someone

- Race & Ethnicity

  o Race

  o Whiteness

  o Non-Whiteness

  o Ethnicity

  o Racism Itself

- Managing Aggressive Interaction

  o Weaponising Humour

- o Invoking Harm

- o Distancing

- o Justification

- o Politics

- o Performing (see Norms)

- Women

  - o Womanhood

  - o Feminists

- Bodies

- Progressive/Woke

  - o Politically Correct/SJW

  - o Hypocrisy

  - o Feminists (See under theme Women)

- Place & Identity

  - o Australia

  - o Africa

  - o Asia

- Capitalism

  - o Reduction of Being—Just a Consumer (see under theme Reduction of Being)

Again, considering the organising themes analytically, I gathered them under a single high-level "global theme" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 392), in this case, "Managing Inter-Identity Interaction". My selection of this global theme reflects the extent to which the organising themes related to identities of significance to the participants and presenting them or dealing with their performative consequences. A lot of discussion emphasises who

participants are, where they are from, how they behave relative to norms, and what should be done about non-normative behaviour—often based as much on normative assumptions as any kind of objective reality.

Figure 2. Mind map showing global and organising themes.
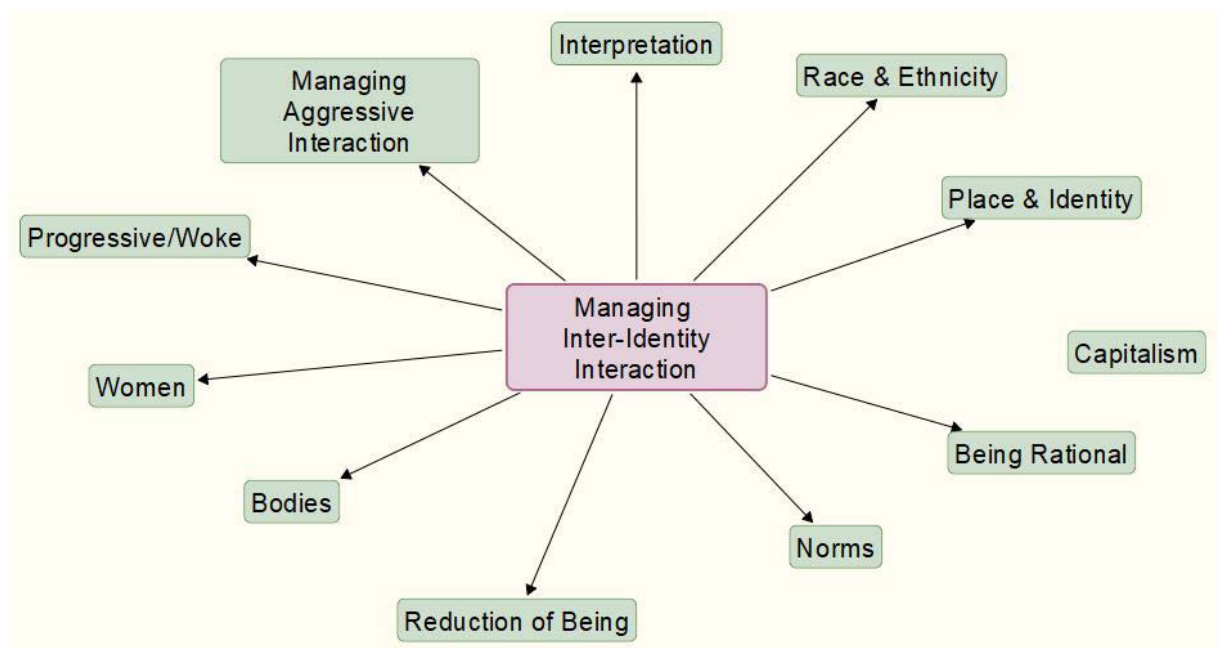
When the thematic analysis was concluded to this point, I commenced the theoretical analysis of its findings described at the start of this chapter. Braun and Clark (2006) advocate preparing a narrative description of the data at the point where I ended the thematic analysis. However, I have not omitted this phase. The discussion chapters that follow—chapters six, seven, and eight—are, to all intents and purposes, three alternative narrative descriptions of the data derived by analysing it from three different theoretical perspectives, leading to the liquidation in chapter nine.

Chapter Six

Goffman, the Sacred Individual, and Online Violence

Consistent with Schinkel's liquidation methodology described in chapter five, Goffmanian analysis of my data and discussion of the results is the focus of this chapter. As a sociologist in the symbolic interactionist tradition, Erving Goffman's theoretical work centres individual social actors and their meaning-filled interactions over the constraining influence of macro-scale social structures and institutions. The micro-focus of his perspective is the predominant reason I employ Goffman's perspective as the micro-scale profile analysing my empirical data in accord with my variant of Schinkel's liquidation methodology (see chapter five). I use a number of Goffman's concepts as they become relevant, including dramaturgy, presentation of self, impression management, and stigma. However, I concentrate on ideas associated with Goffman's work on interaction rituals, such as the rituals themselves, the sacred individual, and the cooperative management of the benefits of social approval he called face-work. This allows analysis of online discussion as ritual exchanges between sacred individuals engaged in face-work, including aggressive face-work, which is the closest Goffman comes to theorising violent behaviour. Interaction rituals also act as connective tissue with Collins, my meso-level perspective, through his own work on interaction ritual chains (see chapter seven). This chapter begins by detailing some of Goffman's relevant concepts alluded to above. I will use Goffman's perspective to analyse and discuss my empirical data, addressing additional key concepts contextually as I proceed. In the end, I demonstrate the amplifying effects of aggressive face-work and social media affordances such as anonymity upon online violence.

Goffman—Some Key Concepts

       Symbolic Interactionism. Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a theoretical perspective in sociology and social psychology that sees the individual human self and society as producing and being produced by each other through symbolically charged social interaction (Burke & Stets, 2009). George Herbert Mead—an early twentieth-century theorist of the self on whose work symbolic interactionism heavily draws—phrased the cyclic process as "society shapes self shapes behaviour" (Stryker et al., 2005, p. 94).

       Symbolic interactionism is a complex perspective underpinned by three assumptions. Firstly, social actors pursue outcomes using actions that are meaningful to them (Handberg et al., 2015). Secondly, meaning is created through human interaction (Handberg et al., 2015). Thirdly, meaning is acted upon and changed as reflexive actors perceive and make sense of their social experiences (Handberg et al., 2015). Structural symbolic interactionism makes the same assumption but acknowledges most individuals are born into a society comprised of existing structures and institutions, so the self is shaped first and only then feeds back through its interactive behaviours to modify society (Stryker et al., 2005).

       An individual's self is generally seen by SI as made up of interrelated parts, an early version of which is Mead's separation of the self into the *Me* and the *I* (Burke & Stets, 2009). The human self has the capacity to reflect on and adapt its environment to its needs, but critically, the self understands itself as part of the environment and can therefore reflect on and adapt itself (Burke & Stets, 2009). The "Me" observes the environment and the actions of the self and their consequences, its perception mediated by meanings and understandings derived from society (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 20-21). The "I" is deployed by the "Me" to act in pursuit of the broader self's goals (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 20). For example, the *I* interacts with its environment, and the *Me*, perceiving a nearby ice cream shop, recalls childhood

happiness and sends the *I* to purchase and eat a cone of ice cream. The *Me* observes the *I* eating and the disapproving stares of other selves in the environment and perceives its actions to be shameful relative to socially instilled values surrounding healthy eating and experiences shame. Avoiding future shame becomes incorporated into the plan-making of the *Me* and influences the ongoing behaviour of the *I*. There are clear connections, here, to the "looking glass-self" of Mead's contemporary, sociologist Charles Cooley. The looking-glass self takes shape as it adapts to its perception of how significant others perceive *it* during social interaction. Walking down the street in their new hat, the self believes it sees disapproval in the eyes of passers-by and soon the hat is discarded; perhaps, going forward, the self will no longer like hats, and will themselves look with disdain at the hats of passers-by, until hats go out of fashion: self shapes behaviour shapes society.

These early ideas about the relationship between the self, social structure, and interaction (Burke & Stets, 2009) coexist under the term symbolic interactionism, coined in the mid-twentieth century by the American sociologist Herbert Blumer. Essentially, Blumer realised the interactions which shaped selves and societies are symbolic in nature, involving symbols—including language—and shared meanings rather than direct contact between objectively existing things (Burke & Stets, 2009). Two human beings in a room are rarely just that; they are immersed in symbols and meaning. They are a doctor and a patient in a place of healing. They are a priest and a penitent in the house of God. They are a mother and a father in their unborn child's first bedroom. Through symbols and shared meaning, humans define and make sense of the situations surrounding their interactions so everyone involved knows who is participating, what they are participating in, and what behaviours might secure desired outcomes (Burke & Stets, 2009). Mead's *Me* perceives through eyeglasses made of symbol and meaning. His *I* acts from scripts constrained by shared meaning and inscribed using language. It is symbols that flow between society, self, and behaviour and mediate how those

things shape one another. Given the importance to symbolic interaction of terms such as meaning, signs, and symbols, it may be useful to provide a few quick definitions.

Meaning can be understood as a response to some earlier experience that the self stores and applies to future experiences (Burke & Stets, 2009). The first time a dog bites an individual, danger may become an aspect of how that individual sees dogs in future encounters. Meaning does not exist as part of an object—it is a response to the object created by and residing in the self (Burke & Stets, 2009). Sets of meaning become associated with certain identities and guide behaviour in situations where those identities come into play. An alcoholic drink will have different meanings to someone when they are acting in their parental role than when they are out on the town with other adults in their role as a friend.

Sign applies when something invokes the same reaction as an individual's earlier reaction to something different (Burke & Stets, 2009). For example, if the dog-bite victim discovers hearing a dog bark on television makes them fearful, that representation of a barking dog is a sign with regard to the initial face-to-face encounter with the dog. Language can be thought of as an assemblage of signs referring to concrete objects that have already been directly experienced or carefully defined using other words (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Symbols take their meaning from socially agreed association with other objects (Burke & Stets, 2009). A roadside stop sign is a symbol conveying to all drivers, through mutual and legally enforceable agreement, the need to bring their car to a full stop. Though symbols have shared meanings, their meaning may change across contexts such as culture, class, identity, ethnicity, or merely situation (Burke & Stets, 2009). A car may symbolise *inter alia* freedom, masculinity, environmental vandalism, or employment, depending on the time, place, and participant in the conversation. Despite this contextual fluidity, the shared nature of symbolic meaning, particularly in the realm of language, makes symbols central to human communication and agency (Burke & Stets, 2009). As Mead's reflexive, observant, strategic

Me is able to observe and communicate with itself, it is able to use words as symbols for future behaviours and goals and develop courses of action for the *I* to take in order to make the symbolic real (Burke & Stets, 2009). A road trip exists in symbolic form as ideas, plans, and to-do lists before the car and its driver hit the road. Likewise, the driver may e-mail the friend intending to accompany them, asking them to bring sandwiches and have a reasonable expectation that their friend will arrive with food held between two slices of bread. Importantly, because symbols reside in the self and are the product of social consensus, they acquire the power to change self and society. Social interaction created and spread the symbol *drop the mic,* referring to a conversational response so devastating that a conversational opponent is—symbolically—destroyed, the conversation ended, and the mic dropper walks away victorious. Mic dropping as a concept is a good example of a meme. An internet meme is a highly infectious idea, often associated with an amusing image, that spreads rapidly because people take it up and share it using communication tools built into social media platforms (Maulana, 2021). Memes often symbolise the values of a social group, organise opposition to opponents of the group, and build group solidarity (DeCook, 2018; Maulana, 2021). The "traits, patterns, and ideas of a culture" encapsulated by a meme may "ultimately change the habits of a generation" (Maulana, 2021, p. 217). For example, as a virally spread meme, mic-dropping acquires meaning as a symbol of superiority relative to an opponent in online discourse, and, over time, more violently-inflected communications come to be interactively reinforced as the pursuit of mic-drop moments becomes normalised.

Given all this, it is beneficial to consider the definition of symbolic interaction given earlier: that it is a perspective understanding the individual human self and society as producing and being produced by each other through symbolically charged social interaction. Signs, symbols, and meaning are the building blocks of these processes. How a social actor uses signs, symbols, and meaning is integral to who they are and how they are perceived by

themselves and others. Similarly, how a given society deploys symbols reflects its normative values and may work helpfully or destructively upon the selves of participants in that society.

   Encounters. Erving Goffman went on to develop these basic ideas in a number of mid-twentieth-century works that remain relevant today. One of these is the analysis of interaction through the lens of the concept of encounters, which he defines as specific instances of social interaction within small groups. He sets out to develop a toolkit of concepts useful for analysing small-scale, face-to-face interactions. Encounters are further defined as "small gatherings"—short-term events emerging from the "normatively stabilized structure" of "co-presence". People come together in encounters or situations and deploy—intentionally and unintentionally—"small behaviours" such as "glances, gestures, positioning, and verbal statements" to convey information and shape the situation (Goffman, 1967, pp. 1-2). These are recognisable as elements of the front social actors present during frontstage performance when engaged in self-presentation to an audience.

   Generally, encounters may be unfocused or focused interactions (Goffman, 1961). An unfocused encounter occurs whenever social actors share a space without having any kind of mutual purpose (Goffman, 1961). Three people waiting in line at a taxi rank might be considered an unfocused encounter. A focused encounter, however, involves two or more social actors coming together to complete an agreed project under the umbrella of a "we rationale" (Goffman, 1961, p. 13); that is, acting as one in pursuit of a shared goal. Something as simple as holding a conversation constitutes a focused interaction, as does playing a game or holding a meeting. Likewise, a handful of people exchanging comments in response to a social media post. Goffman (1961, p. 2) holds that the "natural unit of social organization" for focused interaction is a "focused gathering" or, if the purpose of the interaction is somewhat abstract, a "situated activity system".

Focused gatherings are made up of a small group of people. Gatherings and groups are carefully distinguished to ensure researchers analyse the interaction and not the group (Goffman, 1961). The differences are straightforward. Social groups exist even when individual members are not gathered, while a focused gathering ends when participants disperse (Goffman, 1961). Goffman's (1967) analysis of small gatherings is less interested in the characteristics of groups that shaped the gatherings than in the ways gatherings give rise to the behaviour and identity—the selves—of participants. This is explicit in his oft-quoted comment on the importance of encounter dynamics to understanding interaction: "Not, then, men [sic] and their moments. Rather moments and their men [sic]" (Goffman, 1967, p. 3).

What structures the dynamics of an encounter is the participants' shared understandings of the purpose of the gathering, how it is to be conducted, and under what circumstances it will end (Goffman, 1961). Finally, it is possible for a focused gathering to exist in which the participants are not members of a shared social group. Consider a tour bus full of tourists who are strangers to each other but who have come together to mutually enjoy a guided holiday. This is an important distinction when analysing online interaction, as it is the nature of social media sites to host large numbers of strangers who will come together in focused gatherings to engage in various kinds of conversation. To study a social media flame war is to study interaction, not a group.

Focused gatherings are goal-oriented, characterised by "sanctioned orderliness arising from obligations fulfilled and expectations realised" (Goffman, 1961, p. 14). Participants pursue a shared purpose constrained by shared understandings about the nature of the goal and how it may be achieved, plus how they are to comport themselves in the pursuit and what is to be done in the event of problems or disruptions (Goffman, 1961). What is irrelevant to the purpose is excluded, often including issues of status, class, educational attainment, ethnicity, religion, or identity group, so that the gathering elevates, instead, what is necessary

for the successful completion of the shared task (Goffman, 1961). This can be seen in social media conversations, where it is not unusual for conversations to unfold between experts and laymen in any given topic area, during which expertise is treated as irrelevant. Assertions of expertise may even prove disruptive, resulting in violent rejection and the dispersal of the conversational focused gathering.

It is a characteristic of encounters that they happen apart from the world external to them, whether my meeting in a specialised space, excluding talk of the real world behind rules of procedure, or using some similar device to build a barrier between the shared goals of the group and the distractions beyond them (Goffman, 1961). Internal rules, shared goals, reliance on situationally available resources, and policing relevance also help to direct and focus the attention of participants toward the encounter itself, building a kind of mutual fascination with matters at hand that Goffman calls "engrossment" (Goffman, 1961, pp. 87-88). In chapter seven, I discuss a quality Collins attributes to situations—which are, to all intents and purposes, encounters—which is a kind of physiological and emotional synchronisation occurring between interactants sharing co-presence, which is similar to and certainly fostered by engrossment.

The Dramaturgical Perspective. Possibly the best-known application of these basic principles of symbolic interactionism is Goffman's explication of his dramaturgical perspective of human behaviour in his 1959 classic *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.*

In this book, Goffman (1959) details his dramaturgical perspective, which engages with human behaviour during social encounters as if it were theatrical performance. Individuals participating in a social encounter are social actors performatively presenting themselves to create particular impressions in the minds of their audience (Goffman, 1959). Social actors perform within a networked system of socially constructed normative obligations and expectations (Goffman, 1961). What an individual in a position must do to

meet associated obligations and expectations is considered their role in that position

(Goffman, 1961). However, more is at stake than performance. Goffman (1961, p. 93)

adheres to the symbolic interactionist belief, borrowed from Kenneth Burke, that "doing is

being"—that performative behaviours, over time, become embodied within the actor as a real

aspect of their identity to which they become genuinely attached.

An individual is the bearer of a complex self that is made up of all the roles they play,

propelled by their occupation of numerous positions in the social world (Goffman, 1961). For

this reason, role analysis tends to focus on the individual-in-a-role rather than the individual

(Goffman, 1961). The duties and expectations associated with roles are among the most

important tools in society's toolkit for producing actions and outcomes consistent with

normative values (Goffman, 1961). That is, roles are functional, and their functions may be

manifest—visible—or latent—hidden (Goffman, 1961). To be socially competent, actors

must learn and demonstrate role requirements through socialisation (Goffman, 1961). Because

roles are entangled in the actor's self and their positions within their social networks, actors

experience role commitment—to fail at the role in their own or their audience's eyes or to

walk away from the role incurs a risk of detrimental consequences to their identity and

relationships (Goffman, 1961). Because of role's fundamental importance, Goffman (1961)

insists it is, for researchers, a valuable window into how socialisation operates.

During an interaction, all participants occupy roles and are both performers and

audience, managing their behaviour within their respective roles to give the best possible

impression that obligations and expectations are being met (Goffman, 1961). This is true to

the extent that Goffman sees successful role performance as central to all purposeful human

gatherings (Goffman, 1961). Significantly, while interaction is described as being designed to

create an impression, there is not necessarily anything inauthentic about it; except in

exceptional circumstances, a person performs aspects of themselves, not something completely extrinsic to their basic nature.

Social actors organise their self-presentational performances around frontstage and backstage elements (Goffman, 1959). Frontstage is the space where the performance visibly takes place and will include sets and props designed to lend the performance credibility and standards of behaviour expected from someone occupying their role (Goffman, 1959). The demeanour necessary to play a role convincingly is referred to as a mask (Goffman, 1959). An example might be a doctor's office viewed as their front of stage, including props like their degree, tools, or lab coat, and their mask made up of behaviours such as confidence, dignity, and expertise, which legitimises their performance in the role of doctor.

Backstage is the region where the actor rests from previous performances or hides aspects of their humanity, behaviour, or preparation to play their role, which might be discreditable to the actor or role (Goffman, 1959). A comedian's depression—hidden behind a mask of jollity—is consigned backstage while the comedian strives to give the impression that they are all funny all the time. An accountant's struggle to upgrade their qualification despite poor grades and difficulty understanding taxation legislation will be hidden backstage while the accountant, front of stage in their office, performs as hard as they can to give clients the impression of competence.

Goffman's Continuing Relevance

Though Goffman's most important work is confined to the middle of the twentieth century, he remains relevant in the information era because his work has been widely adapted to understanding the interactive and performative aspects of online life. However, his book

Interaction Rituals includes "face-to-face" in its subtitle, and social media consists of interaction famously free of the constraints of shared time and space. Goffman himself considered physical co-presence a defining characteristic of interaction. Publishing in the mid-twentieth century, when technologically mediated communication meant a telephone connected to a manually operated switchboard, he acknowledged the existence of this kind of interaction (Goffman, 1961, p. 88; 1967, p. 167; Rettie, 2009). He simply dismissed it as abnormal, inferior—owing to the inability of the body and its embedded library of signs and gestures to contribute to communication—and rare relative to co-presence (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 102; Goffman, 1983).

Repeatedly Goffman includes terms like face-to-face and co-presence in his definitions of social encounters and focused gatherings, but how could he theorise interaction otherwise generations before any meaningful form of technologically mediated co-presence existed? Goffman (1961, p. 12) formulated his theories around physical co-presence because nothing else in the world offered a rich enough interactive experience to allow the "single visual and cognitive focus of attention", "heightened mutual relevance of acts", and "eye-to-eye ecological huddle that maximizes each participants' opportunity to perceive the other participants' monitoring of him [sic]" that made possible the mutual engrossment he considered essential to social encounters (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 102). However, the modern Internet and social media are an evolution of technologically mediated communication beyond anything with which Goffman or his contemporaries were familiar. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, accessible everywhere via portable wireless devices, are normative inclusions in almost every twenty-first-century life. Multi-media capabilities embedded in social media—including live and recorded video and audio, animated and still images, the ability to *friend* and *unfriend* other users or *like*, *unlike*, *up-vote* and *down-vote* messages, or tag them with expressive *emojis*—lend social media the

equivalent of a gestural language to mitigate Goffman's charge of inferiority (Murthy, 2012). Social media offers a spatial alternative to the physical world where digital co-presence and, therefore, Goffmanian social encounters are possible, and Goffmanian analysis remains powerfully relevant (Murthy, 2012).

Indeed, there is no shortage of studies using Goffman's theoretical perspective to understand social media and the ways humans harness it to create and perform their identities during online interaction. Rettie's (2009) study of synchronous and asynchronous digital communication using mobile devices found that synchronous interaction resulted in focused encounters more often than asynchronous, but the line between them was blurred. Murthy (2012) makes a first step towards theorising Twitter through a Goffmanian perspective, emphasising the ways modern mediated communication can usefully stretch Goffman to accommodate the contemporary world. Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) draw on Goffman's dramaturgy and presentation of self to examine the behaviour of bloggers and users of Second Life, concluding that online actors tend to strive for consistency between their offline and online personas. Bullock (2016) applies the same dramaturgical lens to online police interaction with members of the public, concluding that the police strategically deploy impression management in a bid to improve their image. More recently, Walsh and Baker (2021) consider aggressive face-work on Twitter and find that Twitter's efforts to curtail aspects of it may have a divisive effect on online social interaction. And Murrell, Jamie, and Penfold-Mounce (2021) dramaturgically analyse online death announcements and propose they are becoming complex performances of grief that assist mourners in dealing with the disruption caused by death. These are only a few examples of the ways researchers of online behaviour are incorporating Goffman usefully into their work; there are innumerably more. Considering that Goffman is also present in modern violence research through Collins' elaboration of his theories in his work on interaction ritual chains and situational violence,

Goffman is more than suitable to represent the micro-perspective of my liquidation of online violence.

Goffman and Violence

Elsewhere, I have asserted that violence is so complex that choosing a theoretical perspective inevitably excludes some forms of violence and the people who suffer from its effects, rendering the choice itself an act of violence (Schinkel, 2010). This raises two questions here. Does Goffman's theoretical perspective contain concepts able to see violence, and if so, what kinds of violence does it see? Moreover, to what kinds of violence is it blind?

In this thesis, I am using Schinkel's (2010, p. 45) definition of violence as "reduction of being", a sufficiently broad definition to incorporate direct, indirect, physical, and non-physical harm. Reduction of being is explained in detail in chapter four. Briefly, violence as reduction of being occurs when some person or force acts to reduce the options for being—the facets of their identity available in a given situation (Schinkel, 2010). Online violence is necessarily constrained to only a portion of the spectrum of reduction of being. While individuals can use social media tools on their devices to communicate as if they are physically co-present, most online communication only utilises digital co-presence. Even that may often be asynchronous—that is, significant periods may pass between messages. Therefore, online violence cannot be direct and physical but must be indirect and non-physical. It must occupy the space between the subtle constructive violence of regular social activity—in which we reduce each other's being in ways conducive to getting things done, such as when a teacher regulates the behaviour of a student—and the use of words and other symbolic acts to inscribe emotional and psychological harm on what Pearce (2017, p. 2),

following Miller (2002), calls the "social body"—the vulnerable totality of our embodied self situated in the social world. Nor can it be forgotten that our social body is centred on a physical body and that harm done to our emotions, minds, and identities is, ultimately, somatic harm, however keenly we cling to cartesian duality (Pearce, 2017).

All this means online violence necessarily has its roots in symbolic and structural violence: macro-level norms created and maintained by socially dominant groups or inequality built into social structures and institutions that attack the identities and life chances of members of subordinate groups. Examples of this abound in my empirical data. Discussion in the comments following the Facebook 7News story of the murder of a young Melbourne man takes for granted that the associated photograph of the victim is a photograph of the alleged killer because the victim is black. The same discussion explicitly associates black bodies with Africa, jungles, savagery, and other crime. These white ideas of blackness reduce the being of people of colour—black bodies become criminal bodies in the white imagination (Unnever & Cullen, 2010). Common-sense assumptions that criminality is a natural characteristic of blackness—that society must deal with—is symbolic violence by definition and is certainly reduction of being in the way it removes law-abiding existence from the aspect horizons of people of colour. Similarly, participants in the YouTube thread discussing feminist Anita Sarkeesian's critique of women's armour in the TV show *The Mandalorian* argue that women who "degrade" themselves by appearing in a risqué video clip promoting their music are hypocrites for not allowing men to degrade them. Again, this is violence in the Schinkellian sense of reduced being—a woman as no more than her attractiveness to the male gaze—and symbolic violence based on normalised historical conceptions of womanhood as possessed of an arbitrary purity that can be sullied by disobeying patriarchal moral values (Barratt, 2018; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016).

There is little utility in using Goffman to analyse the macro-level patterns driving symbolic and structural violence, as he concerns himself with the micro-level of human interaction and its characteristics, elements, and outcomes. However, symbolic and structural violence must—to work the harm that makes them violent—become embodied in individual human flesh through human interaction. "Society," as Collins (2004, p. 54) points out, "is above all an embodied activity." A health care system that dispenses medical treatment differentially by race (Hayter & King, 2019, July 29)—as lethally happened to Naomi Williams in the story detailed in chapter eight—doles out its violence situation by situation, as individuals interact, apply policies, and behave in ways influenced by biases woven into their identities through lived experience in the social world. The examples from the data offered above are not structural or symbolic violence per se: they are individuals interacting in social situations *structured* by structural and symbolic violence to reduce the being of participants. Goffman (1967, p. xii) is useful in analysing violence arising from "the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another" that we see in social media discussions. His theorising of interaction as performative sets of ritual interchanges designed to create, preserve, or restore face—along the way building, damaging, or rebuilding the identities comprising human selves—is extremely useful for studying how violence enters, structures, and does its harm within the social media encounters making up my data.

In his concept of stigma, Goffman (1963) describes another way the interaction order can harm a social actor's identity. His 1963 *book Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* is a thorough exploration of the idea that failed social interaction damages the identity of those who suffer the failure. Social interaction takes place between individuals acting out roles derived from positions within a social network, and roles come with a set of expectations and obligations, the performance of which shapes identity and how society views the performer. When there is evidence that the performer fills the role well, that they are

credibly and consistently who society desires them to be, their status increases. However, when the social actor produces visible evidence that they are not suitable for the role or, worse, that their role is a deeply discreditable one, then the actor will be perceived as "a person who is thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak" and "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963, p. 12). Stigma is the name given to the visible evidence that produces the perception of stained identity. Examples are not hard to come by. Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old African American boy gunned down by US police because they mistook his toy for a gun, is experiencing the stigma of skin colour in a racially stratified society to tragic effect (McCorkel, 2020, June 1). Both members of the same-sex couple assaulted for a public display of affection suffer from the stigma associated with non-heteronormative relationships (Brito, 2019, June 7). What is at play here is not a negative quality per se but a perceived negative quality that is at odds with what is expected of a particular type of person in a particular context (Goffman, 1963). In the former case, an acceptable citizen is expected to be white, and a person of colour is expected to be a criminal and potentially dangerous. In the latter case, a male or female is expected to show affection towards the sex opposite to their own and same-sex attraction is meant to be hidden. Instead, different types of stigma in each case violated expectations, disrupted sociality and resulted in violence.

Goffman (1963) identifies three types of stigma: physical, whether relating to appearance or ability; character-based, where the stigma demonstrates some moral defect; identity-based, deriving from membership in an ethnic, religious, or another identity-related group. Those possessing a stigma are perceived as less human than those who do not, and explanations are socially constructed to justify discrimination against them (Goffman, 1963). Remembering Cooley's looking-glass self who changes in response to their understanding of how society perceives them, an individual with stigmata will often understand their status,

internalise the judgement and experience shame, anxiety, or a desire to change or hide their condition (Goffman, 1963). Their social interactions become characterised by their stigmata, whether hiding them or dealing with the fallout from them, making it difficult for them to meet normative social expectations, resulting in a spoiled social identity (Goffman, 1963). Consequently, the stigmatised may end up isolated, anxious, and without access to opportunities, and because they have been raised with the belief system underpinning the stigma, they may live with self-loathing (Goffman, 1963).

What I have just described as stigma is not dissimilar to Bourdieu's description of symbolic violence and its outcomes. Both are embodied through interaction, within the interaction order and impacting identity for Goffman and within the social field and rewriting habitus for Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Goffman, 1963). Both operate by designating an individual or group's perceived failure to meet a social standard as a discreditable attribute and further perceive that failure as an inherent deficit in that individual or group (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Goffman, 1963). Both justify harmful, discriminatory behaviour against victims and have a lasting impact on their life chances (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Goffman, 1963). They are distinguished by the status of stigma as the visible signs of a discreditable attribute versus symbolic violence as a commonsense belief that the blame for a discreditable attribute belongs to the one who is deemed to possess the attribute (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Goffman, 1963). The former occurs at the subjective level of interaction, while the latter is a structural process between the macro-level field and micro-level habitus (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Goffman, 1963). I suggest it might be useful to understand stigma residing in and shaping habitus and being shaped by the social field while participating in the habitus' shaping *of* the social field. In this view, stigma may be seen as a marker of symbolic violence—the visible sign and identity-harming marker of the flawed individual or group—while symbolic violence is a macro-level outcome of repeated stigmatisation. In the sampled 7News discussion of a

young Melbourne man's murder, participants engage in stigmatising behaviour when the victim's skin colour causes them to mistake him for the alleged murderer, making the symbolic violence of ascribing criminality to people of colour visible. At the same time, stigmatising behaviour is a practice in the social field, reifying the stigma in the field and the habitus of participants. This makes it arguable that stigmatising processes are violence, and their outcomes can be understood in terms of the outcomes of symbolic violence.

Goffman (1963) develops the concept of stigma in far greater detail than outlined here, including the myriad ways in which stigma is not a homogeneous process affecting all people in the same way. However, what is most relevant to this thesis is the basic notion that society constructs discreditable statuses and imposes them upon people through interaction, damaging their identities in various ways, and that this is a form of violence.

The Sacred Individual

Goffman's approach to individual social actors has roots in the theorising of religion accomplished by classical sociologist Emile Durkheim (Collins, 2004). Durkheim (1915) argues that religion is a true human universal—an emergent property of all societies as they form, organise themselves, and give rise to the ideals that define their specific collective natures. The two components comprising religion are belief and ritual, where the former is what the religion holds to be true while the latter denotes actions that religious adherents must take or avoid (Durkheim, 1915). Religion divides the world into two fundamental, mutually exclusive realms: the sacred and the profane (Durkheim, 1915). Sacredness is the signature

quality of those things having profound spiritual significance to the religion, defined within its beliefs and defended and upheld by its rituals (Durkheim, 1915). Conversely, the profane is everything that is not sacred, kept separate from the sacred or carefully brought into contact with it through the action of interdictory ritual (Durkheim, 1915). Durkheim develops the role of religion in creating social collectives and their normative values at great length. However, for this thesis, it is only necessary to note that rituals can confer sacredness upon objects, and sacred objects used in ritual activities tend to foster collective solidarity (Durkheim, 1915).

Addressing the future of religion, Durkheim proposes it is an eternal aspect of human experience but paradoxically notes that the traditional gods and their associated beliefs and rites are passing away as modernity proceeds (Chriss, 1993; Durkheim, 1915). They are being replaced by "the cult of the individual", in which shared individuality is the predominant commonality unifying society, and individuals themselves are sacred objects and the focus of ritual behaviour (Carls, 2019, p. 293; Durkheim, 1915). Sociologists of late modernity now see the cult of the individual in phenomena such as the conflict between individual rights and traditional religious values underlying the Charlie Hedbo murders (Carls, 2019), the rise of human and identitarian rights in the Western democracies (Souza, 2019), or individualistic resistance to collective measures for dealing with the spread of the COVID-19 virus and its variants (Powell et al., 2021).

For Durkheim, the sacred individual is a component in the macro-level patterning of society, an individualising of the specialised workers of modern society's organic solidarity and the movement of individuality to the centre of society's system of moral values (Souza, 2019). Goffman (1983), however, adapts the idea to his analyses of the interaction order. The sacred individual is the star of the interaction order, moving through a social world where every encounter is an exchange between individuals of normative performance and audience

critique (Chriss, 1993; Goffman, 1967), where each actor, in turn, claims their due and stands or falls by how that claim is received.

> Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance. He walks with some dignity and is the recipient of many little offerings. He is jealous of the worship due him, yet, approached in the right spirit, he is ready to forgive those who may have offended him. Because of their status relative to his, some persons will find him contaminating while others will find they contaminate him, in either case finding that they must treat him with ritual care. (Goffman, 1967, p. 91)

A social actor's performance is sacred precisely because it demonstrates—by how well they conform to society's rules and expectations for someone in that role—both their worth and their assessment of the worth of other participants, and because of the mistakes they make they must be corrected through ritual interchange (Goffman, 1967). When an actor burps, they excuse themselves, and the person with them signals that they take no offence: a brief ritual interchange marking the disruption and restoration of social equilibrium. It is a ritual because it is a socially prescribed action, penance and forgiveness, and because it repairs the brief slide towards the profane suffered by the sacred individual.

In the above, it is plain that the sacredness of the individual is created and demonstrated through interactive behaviours following various social scripts: the cult of the individual's equivalent to traditional religion's beliefs and prescribed-by-ritual actions. Goffman (1961) notes an exception to this that is increasingly important: the common belief that what is sacred in a person is what is underneath polite, scripted behaviour, that a person's hidden self is what is authentic, and authenticity is the mark of sacredness in opposition to the profanity of shallow hypocrisy. As will be seen later, this manifests online in arguments that reliance on old scripts—such as pro forma apologies, which interactants increasingly see as

hypocritical and discrediting—intensify. Consequently, actors favour new scripts deemed less rote, truer, more authentic, and therefore more able to restore the sacredness of a self that has been damaged by delivering a social gaffe.

Noteworthy here is that Goffman's body of work places the sacred individual at the centre of an interaction order which relies on shared response presence, is performative, role-based, supported and maintained by ritualistic face-work, and creates, sometimes damages, and restores the individual's sacred self. Goffman's is the perspective from which I analyse my data in this chapter, following the idea of the sacred individual through a social media interaction order inflected by performance, aggressive face-work, and rapidly evolving rituals to shed light on the everyday violence of online behaviour.

Social Media and Dramaturgy

Earlier in the chapter, I described Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, which views behaviour within the interaction order in terms of theatrical performance: actors, performances and presentation, sets and props, audiences, and backstages and frontstages. There is ample evidence of performative behaviour in the data, with it featuring in nine of the eleven organising themes and many of the sub-themes (for a complete list of themes, see chapter five).

Being Rational. Performances of *being rational* are prevalent in the data, being a primary means participants use to lend credibility to themselves and their arguments while characterising those who disagree with them or who demonstrate values other than their own as discreditable. As seen in the Facebook comments thread about the murder of a young man of colour, sometimes this involves elevating opinions beyond argument by claiming them as

"facts" that trump "your feelings", accompanied by the claim that other participants cannot consider an opinion "racist" if it is a fact, because facts are neutral. Consequently, the participant demonstrates that they hold their opinion through cool objectivity and dismisses critique as the mere eruption of emotion. Through this manoeuvre, a participant can explicitly associate blackness, immigration, and murderous criminality and deflect critique of their position as "just the facts".

Similarly, in the YouTube comment thread discussing feminist Anita Sarkeesian's criticism of the TV show *The Mandalorian*, men performatively claim rationality to position feminist views as, among other things, "stupid", exploitative of "people's emotions", believed only by "rubes", who are so filled with hatred for breasts that they may not even be "mammals", and the product of a "whiny bitch" whose arguments are merely "crying". Conversely, the men, confronted by feminist critique of women's armour worn on the show that conforms to the shape of breasts, either claim not to have noticed or offer carefully reasoned and technical comparisons to the specifications of contemporary and historical armour to rationalise the show's essentially aesthetic design decision. They present themselves as detached and calm relative to the feminist "loony's [sic]" who are now running the "asylum". At the same time, they distinguish the feminists from "real women", to whom the feminists are a more significant threat than men. One participant offers the example of one such woman—his detached and calm wife who "laughs" at the issue—who agrees with the male position and actively wishes she could wear breast-shaped armour. Here, the performances strengthen arguments but also rehabilitate nakedly misogynistic assertions by demonstrating concern for women unable to make rational decisions on their own and the normal women they may hurt. The stance is paternalistic but presented as necessary given the irrationality of women in comparison to the men's performative calm reason.

The Twitter thread primarily castigating an online media critic is also filled with performances around rationality but with a slightly different emphasis. In this discussion, there is the expected use of rationality and logic to strengthen an argument and weaken an opponent's position. Initially, this comes from the author of the original tweet, who calmly counters accusations of racism with explanation and distancing humour and tries to tease their opponents—who had been engaging in more emotive self-presentation such as using all uppercase textual shouting—by calling them crazies. However, as Goffman (1959) points out, in choosing behaviours designed to give a particular impression, social actors may simultaneously involuntarily give off contrary impressions that make the audience sceptical of the performance and intensify any hostility present. Certainly, the original tweeter's efforts to be coolly persuasive only seem to create greater offence. Their explanation that being accused of racism has exhausted them is greeted as proof that they lack empathy because they privilege their exhaustion over that of those who experience racism. Their urging the audience to accept their original tweet as nothing but a "throwaway" prompts anger that they do not understand the power of their large platform to do harm, or they would understand none of their tweets is "throwaway". The tide of performative rationality then turns against the original tweeter as their arguments and explanations are analysed and rejected, and they are told the rules for the "cancelled": they must "LISTEN", "apologise", and "LEARN". This pathway to forgiveness is similar to Goffman's (1967, pp. 15-18) "interchange", a set of interactive movements designed to restore social equilibrium after a mistake: challenge (in this case, the accusations of racism to which the accusers say the tweeter fails to listen), offering (the apology, which the tweeter has not delivered), acceptance (which the accusers are withholding pending the apology), and gratitude (for the opportunity to learn). In this instance, the original tweeter is too intent on rationally defending their position to notice their opportunity to participate in a corrective interchange, and the consequence is a failed

performance of the sort Goffman (1959) describes as the loss of face. A relevant factor here may be the mass nature of online communication, as an actor may moderate their performance by gauging audience reaction through small behaviours on the fly in face-to-face encounters. However, online, audience reaction is not apparent until the reaction itself—whether one reply or very many —arrives in its entirety, increasing the possibility of social error.

Ritual and Inauthenticity. An interesting difference between the example above and the other examples of performative rationality is the framing of the original tweeter's performance as "gaslighting" the marginalised, hypocrisy, inauthentically progressive, and evidence of "privilege". At the same time, emotion—"feeling"—is presented as the creditable attribute of vulnerable others to which the original tweeter's logical explanations are "harmful", "exhausting", vilifying as "bad", and "hurting". The need for the original tweeter to give up rational self-defence, empathise with the feelings of hurt vulnerable others, apologise and "LEARN" is presented repeatedly as the logical, commonsense approach, switching the usual understanding of rational/emotional. This illustrates Goffman's assertion—described earlier in this chapter—that collectively constructed corrective ritual interchanges have come to be seen as profane and inauthentic, and individual spontaneous emotional expression has become a sign of the honest and sacred. Because corrective rituals receive their scripts from normative beliefs about moral behaviour fostered by socialisation, they become associated with impersonal responses devoid of sincerity because they are automatic, figuratively mass-produced, cookie-cutter answers. Structurally patterned ritual behaviour as an easy corrective for discrimination can readily be understood as a mechanism for supporting and maintaining broader structurally embedded social inequality in ways that cast those who rely on corrective interchanges as inauthentic. As one participant observes, if you find yourself repeatedly apologising for racism, "it's a YOU problem." Aborting the corrective interchange by rejecting a ritual apology as discreditable and requiring more

reflection seems to support the idea that participants in this discussion are responding in this way, as if attempts to repair social damage through a simple ritual interchange has begun to be understood as a privilege of social elites attempting to present as progressive with a few rote words rather than by working towards social equality in reflexive, authentic and meaningful ways.

Capitalism and the Sacred Individual. It is also worth noting here that a tendency to valorise individual emotional expression over carefully performed collective ritual is arguably an example of modernity's centring of the sacred individual, as noted by Durkheim (1915) and Goffman (1967). In late modernity, the cult of the individual finds near-hegemonic expression as an organising principle of the ideology underlying neoliberal capitalism (Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009). Good neoliberal citizens are understood by the state and themselves as rational—specifically, a masculinised rationality implicitly understood in opposition to emotionally incontinent femininity—self-managing individuals competing with other individuals in various marketplaces to promote and defend their own self-interest without concern for the welfare of others (Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Coleman, 2016; Yamagishi et al., 2014). The emphasis on rationality and competitiveness in social interaction under capitalism may account for the use of performative rationality in the data to elevate some participants and diminish others (for examples of weaponised rationality in the data, see the social media and dramaturgy section in this chapter). In chapter seven, Collins, whose interaction ritual chains theory is deeply rooted in Goffman's concept of interaction rituals, explicitly invokes rational choice theory—a key theoretical underpinning of neoliberal capitalism—to explain how individuals choosing which interactions to experience, over time and in the aggregate, structure society at the macro-scale. Normatively inflecting social interaction towards exchanges where success in a given marketplace requires reduction of being for some, neoliberal capitalism may be implicated as a contributor to online violence in

this data set. Violent interaction between individuals online may be one way macro-level systemic and economic violence become embodied as harm.

Frontstage and Backstage Online. In accord with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, performance spaces—locations where social interactions and performative presentations of self occur—are divided into front and back regions. Frontstage is where the performance takes place, where the social actor behaves in a way that communicates the impression they wish to give (Goffman, 1959). A key component of the frontstage is called the front: the expressive equipment which symbolically contributes to impression management (Goffman, 1959). Front is comprised, *inter alia,* of the setting and décor, layout, physical aspects of the background, plus personal front, personal expressive equipment directly associated with the social actor and which it is expected they will bring with them from situation to situation (Goffman, 1959). For example, a social actor in the role of a police officer might perform in a police station setting while displaying among their personal front a badge and a handgun, all of which would support their performance. Personal front is further divided into appearance and manner (Goffman, 1959). Appearance includes elements that display the performer's social or ritual status, such as role-specific apparel or degree of formality, and must meet audience expectations for the performer to be seen to possess decorum (Goffman, 1959). Manner comprises signs alerting the audience to the role the performer intends to take in the performance (Goffman, 1959). For example, a social actor might adopt an assertive, controlling manner—signalled by facial expressions, gestures, and the like—if their intent is to take a leadership role (Goffman, 1959). Generally, audiences expect all these aspects of the front region to present a picture consistent with themselves, the performance, and the impression the actor hopes to convey(Goffman, 1959).

Backstage, conversely, is a location—usually separated in some fashion from frontstage—where, for a given performance, a social actor may abandon efforts to give a

particular impression and relax (Goffman, 1959). For example, staff-only areas in a retail shop are backstage relative to the customer service floor, and in the staff-only backstage, customer service staff can drop permanent smiles and solicitous demeanours and be themselves. Moreover, back regions are also where sensitive deals are made away from the pressure of scrutiny and performances, props, and private equipment are made, rehearsed, adapted, improved, or stored (Goffman, 1959). Situated close to the frontstage, they may be a source of help if a performance goes awry, or, after a performative disaster, they may be a hiding place to shed the stress of being in character, lick wounds, and plot corrective action (Goffman, 1959).

Audience members are generally excluded from the backstage of a given performance precisely because it is a place where the social actor's mask is off, their front put aside, in ways that upend the consistency of the performance, breach decorum and manners, and produce loss of face and social disequilibrium necessitating corrective action (Goffman, 1959).

Contemporary researchers have acknowledged for some time that social media platforms and other Web 2.0 communication tools are spaces where participants performatively present themselves in order to create impressions, which is very much in line with Goffman's dramaturgical perspective (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). There is evidence that the offline world is backstage to social media frontstage performances in that offline identities are embellished before being presented online (Goffman, 1959).

There are signs in the sampled discussions that participants are implicitly aware of frontstage and backstage aspects of their interaction. When the online media critic who is the originator of the sampled Twitter thread defends herself against charges of racism by chiding other participants for taking an "offhand remark" too seriously, it may be a sign that they understand social media as backstage to their offline life—a place for them to relax and speak

without worrying about the impressions they are giving. The majority of participants in their thread immediately denounced this defence. "NO SUCH THING AS A THROWAWAY TWEET". The Internet "doesn't need" people's every "half-baked offhand thought". An "incredibly large following" confers responsibility to be aware of "offhandedly" saying "poorly thought out stuff" and take corrective action when you "fuck up". The opinion should have been expressed in "private rants with your friends" or kept "in the DMs". That is, they implicitly frame public social media posts as performative and front stage and encourage them to keep socially undesirable opinions backstage. Eventually, the original tweeter admits they tweeted inappropriately for the size of their audience and commits to changing their behaviour in future. The example above can readily be interpreted as the original tweeter making a backstage-style candid remark frontstage to a large audience who expect progressive values to be part of their front. Their audience is angered by the inconsistency and clearly indicate awareness that their comment should have been made backstage and dropped their manner below acceptable standards for a frontstage performance. In the aftermath of the sampled thread, the original tweeter publicly resigned from social media and disappeared offline or to more private, backstage social media platforms with the stated aim of recovering from their failed performance. This part of the discussion is fascinating as it explicitly frames truthfulness—and therefore sincerity—as a backstage quality once a social actor's audience becomes substantial enough. The success or failure of a performance is generally judged by whether it matches audience expectations, and what is suggested here is that audiences expect not truthfulness from people with large platforms but conformity with group values—to an extent where failure creates moral outrage. In this context, the difference between frontstage and backstage is not synonymous with online/offline but with the reach of a given platform or medium. The original tweeter is clearly told that their DMs—the private direct messaging

service provided by some social media platforms, including Twitter—are the backstage where their honest remarks belong.

       That the original tweeter and their critics seem to differ over whether social media constitutes a back or front region is interesting. Goffman (1959) stresses that no real-world space is perfectly divided between backstage and frontstage and that some spaces are both simultaneously. Spaces are multi-purpose and can be frontstage or backstage, depending on specific interactions that occur in them. Goffman (1959) gives the example of a manager's office, which is frontstage as they interact with customers and colleagues, but backstage when they close the door, loosen their tie, and knock back a drink alone after a difficult meeting. It seems likely that the offline and online worlds are both linked examples of these frontstage/backstage spaces, where, for a given performance and depending on the nature of the interaction either may be frontstage with the other serving as backstage. For some, frontstage performances are reserved for offline, and social media is the backstage where they go to shed masks, relax, and speak freely. Others consider social media performances frontstage and perform and judge others accordingly, retreating to the offline backstage—or exiling failed performers there—at need. Moreover, the asynchronicity of social media communication creates the possibility that a social actor might post a message under the impression that they are acting backstage, and years later, the message may be found and revived into a frontstage context (Murthy, 2012), with potentially deleterious results. For example, a person may have a video of their poor behaviour posted to social media, after which all their old discreditable tweets are found and retweeted as very much a frontstage command performance for a hostile audience, with offline consequences such as job loss. Indeed, the original tweeter in the data is confronted in the discussion with screenshots of other allegedly discriminatory things they have said about vulnerable groups over a period of years, used to discredit their present position. This demonstrates a significant difference

between online and offline communication: online social gaffes are archived as a matter of course and are easy to locate and share again in new contexts. What is clear is that frontstage and backstage become extremely ambiguous online, almost to the point where they cease to be useful concepts—where they become at best contextually constituted behaviours rather than a quality of particular spaces hosting particular styles of interaction.

As in the example from the data described above, the frontstage/backstage ambiguity of social media relative to the offline world can amplify reduction of being in a situation in the direction of harm. Goffman (1959) notes that the relaxation of impression management backstage is relative to a specific performance and does not mean that backstage behaviour is any less performative. Indeed, the backstage performance may deliberately be an exaggerated reversal of the frontstage performance in service of shedding its associated front and relaxing. An audience mistaking backstage for frontstage performance and vigorously pursuing ritual punishment is thus reducing the being of the performer to a single exaggerated, unintended performance, doing violence where a corrective ritual might have better served to restore social equilibrium.

Face-work on Social Media

Face-work. By successfully managing front and backstage to deliver a socially approved performance meeting audience expectations for a role, a social actor acquires face (Goffman, 1967). In every interactive situation, a social actor "takes a line"—a "pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts" presenting their "view of the situation" and their "evaluation of the participants, especially" themselves, which the audience assumes to be intentional even if it is not (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Face is the "positive social value" the actor acquires from audience approval of how well the taken line meets their expectations (Goffman, 1967, p. 5).

Through poor performance or accidental mixing of back and frontstage, audiences may glimpse behind the mask in ways discreditable to the performer, and face may be lost (Goffman, 1967). In accordance with the symbolic interactionist assertion that society shapes self shapes behaviour shapes society, loss of face may impact multiple social levels (Goffman, 1959). Where face is lost in a role integral to the actor's identity, the consequences for the actor at the micro-level may be harmful to their identity, social relationships, or ability to perform the role (Goffman, 1959, 1967). At the meso-level, their failure may compromise their organisation or professional affiliations, and at the macro-level may damage important institutions with which they are associated, their ethnic, religious, or identity groups, or their class (Goffman, 1959). Given the far-reaching possible ramifications of disruptions to social interactions, it is unsurprising that among the shared obligations and expectations of the social world is an obligation for audience members to cooperate in ignoring, minimising, or hiding a performer's loss of face (Goffman, 1959, 1967). Likewise, it is clear why a core feature of Goffman's (1959) presentation of self is impression management: the activities by which a performer seeks to give an impression of themselves or deal with errors in their performance.

An important point made by Goffman (1959) is that performers may successfully give an impression while simultaneously giving off a disastrous one. A doctor may faultlessly decorate their frontstage, hang their prestigious degrees, and compose themselves to give an impression of dignity, yet rise to greet their next patient with toilet paper attached to their shoe heel. The normative codes of social interaction are designed to create an ordered social theatre within a chaotic universe, but chaos is never far away.

When social interaction is disrupted by this sort of sour note, the actor is said to lose face—the net beneficial impressions they have created through successful performance (Goffman, 1967). Actors become emotionally attached to the faces they have accumulated and to the consistently recurring faces of the people with whom they associate (Goffman,

1967). Encounter participants anticipate everyone involved will present an expected face, and failure to do so successfully will be discreditable to the actor who slips (Goffman, 1967). To avoid this, participants engage in face-work: behaviours designed to manage the consistency and credibility of the presentation of faces within an encounter (Goffman, 1967). Because role behaviour tends to follow socialised scripts and brings with it the possibility of symbolic harm—resulting from and imposing non-physical consequences rooted in meaning—Goffman (1967) considers these behaviours to be ritualistic, terming them interaction rituals. An encounter participant who errs may work through the relevant interaction rituals skilfully in a display of face-work that compensates for their mistake and still achieves a favourable impression (Goffman, 1967). Presentation of self and impression management, as described earlier in this section, can be seen as an ongoing process of face-work, conducted within the framework of interaction ritual, creating and disseminating the identity of social actors in consistent, face-nurturing ways.

Applying Face-Work to the Data. Goffman's (1967, p. 2) work on interaction often focuses on social behaviour in everyday settings during what he called "small gatherings". Social media discussions such as those comprising my data can usefully be analysed as small gatherings. They have, as I argued earlier in this chapter, the prerequisites to be considered digital co-presence; they represent human assembly in spaces created by technologically mediated communication more advanced than Goffman could have imagined when he defined co-presence. Online discussions feature many of the characteristics Goffman attributes to small gatherings. They arise "during co-presence and by virtue of co-presence" (Goffman, 1967, p. 1). They are "temporary interactional enterprises", "shifting, necessarily evanescent, created by arrivals and killed by departures" (Goffman, 1967, p. 2), though online, arrivals and departures are often asynchronous. Moreover, they come with their own version of small behaviours, such as profile pictures, emojis, gifs, likes, retweets, links, and various multi-

media attachments. These include rote phrases, which can be generic and plain, such as "ROFL" or typing words in uppercase to indicate shouting.

They can also be specific and subtle. The title "injustice system" is conferred on the criminal justice system to highlight the irony that the criminal justice system is—perceived to be—too weak and insufficiently cruel to inflict justice, conflated here with punitive punishment, on offenders. "CULTURAL DIVERSITY", the uppercase here connoting shouting, shows the disdain for what is perceived to be a negative: the mixing for the discreditable reason of social justice of white civilization with inherently criminal others. While discussing people of colour, the term "jungle" is used to connote wildness and savagery. Similarly, terms like "outrage", "feminist", or "SJW", where context, emojis, or "HaHa" likes make plain they convey particular ideologically inflected tones and manners, are used to characterise discussion as vividly as any sneering facial expression or peremptory hand gesture. In some ways, being textual, these examples are more expressive than small the small behaviours Goffman describes and help to clearly mark online discussions as small gatherings.

Small gatherings are the locus of the specific, instrumental, and generally cooperative form of presentation of self that is basic face-work. An example of this basic face-work in the data would be the moment one participant takes as their line correcting another's use of the acronym AAPI to indicate Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders when the discussion is focused on American and international Asian people. The corrected participant thanks them for the act of reminding them of how AAPI should be used and commends the "very good" reminder as valuable in its own right, conferring face on the correcting participant. Face is not, however, something internal to the actor who has it—it is a product of external approval for the internal consistency of the actor's line, based on "judgments and evidence conveyed by other participants" and therefore resides in the interactive flow of the situation (Goffman,

1967, pp. 6-7). Given that face depends on meeting expectations for a given line, lines suitable for a situation tend to be acquired by actors through socialisation and so are somewhat scripted and ritualistic in nature (Goffman, 1967).

Face is not acquired automatically and is not reliably cumulative and durable. It can be lost through social misadventure when an actor intentionally or unintentionally violates expectations. Actors may be caught in wrong face when evidence emerges that cannot be reconciled with a line they are taking. They may also be out of face if they are forced into a social encounter without having a line prepared for them to take consistent with the lines expected of someone in that situation. The original tweeter in the Twitter thread accusing an online media critic of anti-Asian racism is caught wrong faced when their tweets dismissing their problematic remarks as nothing, just "offhand", "uncharitable interpretation" by "crazies" are taken as evidence of strong contradiction of the progressive line they usually take in their social media presence. In the case of online interaction, asynchronicity can also wrong face an actor when someone responds to their current line by retweeting old, contradictory messages. Similarly, a participant in the sampled 7News comments thread is rendered out of face after expressing bewilderment that Australia keeps "bringing these kind of people here" when another participant asks him to specify ", What kind of people?" Obliged to provide a specific, discreditable answer—from context, non-white people for whom criminality was an implicit racial characteristic—the tweeter is out of face, unable to take a clear line, and resorts to multiple tweets accusing their critic of childishness, being un-Australian, and being old, before declining into confusion. In both cases, the result was a failed performance and evident loss of face, by definition making both participants shamefaced (Goffman, 1967).

Management of face is a fundament characteristic of interaction itself rather than an emerging property of it (Goffman, 1967). All social actors are taking a line, working to

acquire or maintain face, and judging the lines taken by others at the same time (Goffman, 1967). Consequently, actors who are wrong faced, out of face, shamefaced, or losing face threaten to disrupt social equilibrium, requiring all interactants to collaborate in ritual behaviours designed to maximise face, minimise loss of face, and preserve social equilibrium (Goffman, 1967). The behaviours contributing to this are called face-work (Goffman, 1967). Often, face-work is tacit (Goffman, 1967). It operates through etiquette, where it veils itself in commonly understood behavioural rules that unconsciously shape our front and hints, attempts to guide behaviour using subtle, ambiguous, deniable language (Goffman, 1967). Apart from friendliness between people allied against common opponents, there is little politeness in the data, which, in aggregate, is mostly repeated exchanges of accusation and insult. However, some hinting is present, such as a participant in the 7News comment thread asking someone who was demanding the alleged murderer be sent back to Africa if they know where they are from, which ambiguously and deniably warns the other person of the racist nature of their comments without face-damaging directness. In a different vein, in the midst of the data's Twitter thread, a participant posts a bright cheery gif declaring "Happy Friday", which, from context, is a hint that the interaction has become too hostile and the participants need to adopt a lighter manner.

Face-work can take many forms: avoidance, in which participants act to avoid situations promising face loss; defensiveness, which seeks to distract from contradictions to an actor's taken line or to alter audience expectations to minimise the contradiction; protection, when others support an actor by lying, discrediting contradictory sources, using humour, or rationalising offensive behaviour; and corrective behaviour, rituals designed to acknowledge incidents that cannot be ignored and to repair an offender's face in accord with a socially agreed corrective interchange (Goffman, 1967). It is prevalent in the data, where humour is often weaponised or deployed to minimise face-threatening harsh criticism

(defensiveness), to attempt to defuse conflict (defensiveness, protection), to deflect criticism (defensiveness), and to show an actor has the creditable quality of poise (defensiveness, protection). The original tweeter in the Twitter thread is multiply invited to remove herself from the discussion and Twitter itself (avoidance). They are also shown support by a small number of participants who cite previous progressive behaviour in their defence or criticise too rigorous policing of their mistake (protection).

Furthermore, participants initiate any number of corrective interchanges by accusing each other of discreditable characteristics and behaviours. Participants are accused of foolishness arising from old age. Others are told they are racist for their assumptions about the deficits of people of colour, while people of colour are associated with the jungle, savagery, and criminality. And feminists are criticised for feminism, toxicity, vileness, naivete, fascism, inauthenticity, hypocrisy, fraud, joylessness, ruining good things, hating beauty, oppressing non-feminist women, and not—by virtue of hating women's breasts if they want to hide them so much—being mammals. Though, most of these attacks on feminism are increasingly typical online (Cockerill, 2019; Ging, 2019) and may resemble the opening of a corrective interchange only to legitimise rote attacks. Regardless, none of these accusations initiates an interchange that progresses beyond the accusation itself.

Goffman (1967) describes face-work as pervasive across the interaction order, a "ritual game" between sacred individuals whose selves are comprised of multiple identities derived from their many faces and the judgements of their audiences. Individuals are sacred because they are vulnerable to symbolic harm, and interaction has a ritual quality because it so often involves ritual expression designed at the collective level to prevent or undo that harm (Goffman, 1967). Interaction is unavoidable, and every encounter both exposes the sacred individual to the risk of giving or receiving "slights and profanation" and provides an opportunity for the deployment of ritual gambits that increase, maintain, or save face for

themselves or others (Goffman, 1967). After giving offence, they may self-denigrate to protect the other's face without profaning their own, for others will understand that self-denigration is ritualistic rather than meaningfully representative of their character (Goffman, 1967). This is the case in the sampled Twitter thread when the original tweeter acknowledges the truth of a "joke" someone made them not tweeting appropriately for someone with so many followers. Prior to this, the original tweeter had expressed tiredness over people misinterpreting their "offhand thought". Another participant responded in exasperation, using uppercase in the textual equivalent of shouting, critical that anyone could think a comment to hundreds of thousands of people could ever be a "throwaway tweet". In this exchange, the original tweeter's admitting they were justifiably the butt of a joke supporting the respondent's criticism is self-denigration that admits guilt in a fashion that saves face for both participants. However, if, under these circumstances, others compel them to self-abasement, they will be dishonoured, and their sacred self will be damaged. Conversely, when others have profaned an actor's self, the actor alone can ritually signal forgiveness, though, when the actor shames themselves, corrective overtures must come from others (Goffman, 1967). In each case, the right to accept, ignore, or forgive harm to the sacred self resides in participants who cannot readily misuse it to amplify the social disequilibrium or excuse their own sins (Goffman, 1967). The fundamental nature of collaborative ritual exchange dampens the tinderbox of interaction. Universally, societies provide numerous rules for the conduct of interaction that serve this purpose, and individuals are socialised to be aware of the risk of damage to face and sacred selves and to approach encounters with due "ritual care" (Goffman, 1967, p. 32). For symbolic interactionists such as Goffman (and Collins), these rules arise through interaction rituals that, in accord with Durkheim, create collective solidarity and imbue group beliefs and symbols with emotional energy and incorporate them into the selves of ritual participants.

As a result, spoken interaction often occurs as chains of ritual interchanges in which actors couch their speech in polite terms intended to avoid giving or receiving loss of face, and recipients shape their responses to indicate success or failure, both managing failure in conservative, expected ways before navigating the conversation to the next interchange (Goffman, 1967).

While cooperation may be common across broader social media, the sample discussions specifically feature behaviour in relation to contested topics and, again, there is little evidence in the data of cooperative exchange. In the Twitter thread, the original tweeter acknowledges their error in making an "offhand" remark but insists the error exists only through the lens of "uncharitable interpretation", shifting blame to others rather than attempting to earn forgiveness for their self-shaming. In the 7News comments thread, the participant who profanes their performance with a racist gaffe refuses to acknowledge the mistake, makes knowledge claims to rationalise it, and resorts to name-calling to shift blame. In the YouTube comments thread attacking feminist Anita Sarkeesian, the majority of participants are unified in their condemnation, supporting and amplifying each other's problematic remarks and appearing to take pride in making profane declarations as proof of their credentials as rational, free-thinking individuals in opposition to feminists policing behaviour in the name of a "vile" and "toxic" woke collective. Even given the contentiousness of the topics, it seems notable that the data show signs of Goffman's basic concepts of performance, sacred individuality, and ritual exchange, but so few traces of his fundamental assumption that social failures and their correction manifest in the interaction order collaboratively. The explanation may reside in Goffman's description of aggressive face-work.

Aggressive Face-work on Social Media

If the basic ritual words and behaviours are sourced from socialised understandings of collective norms, then interactants can be assumed to have knowledge of rules and expectations and the ability to guess how others will be ritually obliged to act in particular situations (Goffman, 1967). This opens the door for shrewd and unscrupulous participants to direct their own behaviour to prompt responses that serve their own purposes, promoting their face at the expense of others; this is aggressive face-work (Goffman, 1967). A family member may, for example, frame the ordinary behaviour of those closest to them as hurtful, as repaying their kindness and generosity with neglect and cruelty, in order to milk the guilt of those they accuse to get their own way. On a more destructive level, Goffman (1967) cites the power of suicide to impute wrongdoing on the deceased's significant others while cutting them off from access to corrective behaviours or the comfort of ritual satisfaction. In circumstances where participants exploit face-work to control others to their benefit, encounters become conflictual rather than collaborative, winners and losers come into the equation, and, through reduction of being, interaction becomes violent.

The basic move of aggressive face-work is to convey positive information about the aggressor and negative information about other participants, costing them face without crossing a line or presenting others with an opportunity for corrective action (Goffman, 1967). An audience is essential to this process, for success conveys the social superiority of the aggressor and enhances their face (Goffman, 1967). As noted earlier, in the data, this is the exact nature of performative rationality. When the men in the YouTube thread performatively position Sarkeesian, feminists in general, and Sarkeesian's supporters as, *inter alia*, irrational, "rubes", unable to understand "no brainer" truths, "throwing a fit", self-obsessed, "hating" breasts, illogical, "whiny", and "crying" at not getting their own way, they are discursively

manipulating their opponents into wrong face. They frame the discussion as reason-based, implying their opponents are attempting to take a logical, fact-based line and then impugn their ability to reason through the accusation of irrationality. A reasonable person would apologise for wrongdoing, but corrective interchanges are ruled out as the accusations impute inferiority for which the targets could never maintain self-respect while apologising. At the same time, the aggressors score social points by giving an impression that their opponents are "flustering" or demonstrating discreditable amounts of emotion and self-control, a sign of failed role performance (Goffman, 1961, p. 117). Attempts to counter this bit of face-work with any degree of emotion or passion risk proving the flustering charge. The whole is an impressive display of using conventions of polite behaviour to attack opponents' status, or aggressive face-work. Another example is the way participants in the 7News comments frame non-white people and criminals interchangeably as "creatures", from the "jungles" of a crime-riddle Africa, as "germs", "feral flogs", and defence of them as un-Australian, positioning them as inferior relative to relative to discursively fully human, civilised white Australians. This maneuver recreates people of colour as intrinsically wrong-faced in a civilised milieu, using face-work to execute a deft bit of symbolic violence.

Pervasive patriarchal symbolic violence is also delivered via aggressive face-work to the Anita Sarkeesian-related discussion alluded to above. In accomplishing the point-scoring move of presenting women as inferior, the men reconstruct "real" women as "defiant" and "disrespectful" owing to their mistaken understanding that they are "oppressed". Women are also described as hypocritical for supposedly being willing to "degrade" themselves while refusing to allow men to "degrade them", a not uncommon view among some men's groups online who take for granted women should be naturally available to the male gaze (Cockerill, 2019; Ging, 2019). Women untainted by feminism are imagined physically fighting feminists to prove the men correct. Furthermore, women preferring to hide breasts—the loving of

which is natural to all mammals—are assumed to "hate" them and are explicitly accused of, therefore, not being mammals. All this demonstrates the core characteristic of symbolic violence—mistaking structural patterns for objectively true common sense. In this case, failing at womanhood is framed relative to patriarchal assumptions around what a woman is allowed to be, including that a woman's behaviour *is* something allowed to her.

Participants in the data manage aggressive face-work in various ways, captured in the organising theme of *managing aggressive interaction* and the basic themes of *weaponising humour*, *invoking harm*, *distancing*, *justification*, *politics*, and *performing*. Some of these have been considered already, such as the performative rationality above, which is used by participants on both sides of any given discussion. In addition to the purposes already outlined, performative rationality also serves as *justification*: aggressors' presumptions, offensive remarks, judgements and censures, and controlling actions are all justified by the burden of rationality they carry in dealing with the addled, emotional, and silly abroad in the social world. Distancing is somewhat related to this idea. Goffman (1961) notes that successful performance in a role requires poise—demonstrated emotional and physical control—to avoid the appearance of the face-sapping emotional incontinence he describes as flustering. One form of flustering is known as role attachment, where an actor in a role signals themselves attached to a role with an unseemly, exaggerated intensity that defies poise (Goffman, 1961). To avoid or counter charges of flustering, actors employ techniques of role distancing (Goffman, 1961). When someone loses something to which they are attached, they might declare they never wanted it anyway. Someone publicly given something they have always wanted might present themselves as politely grateful but a little bored and unimpressed. The data are filled with similar examples. When the original tweeter in the Twitter thread initially tries to joke away the building conflict, they are distancing themselves to convey that nothing terrible, nothing that requires emotional commitment, is happening.

The men in the YouTube comments who insist they did not even notice breast-shaped armour in *The Mandalorian* because they were too busy appreciating the storylines and world-building are fostering their performance of rationality by indicating they have to attachment to the issue relative to the "joyless" feminists, who, by extension, are overly attached and therefore irrationally flustering. In the 7News comments, participants attribute the problem of allowing criminal people of colour into Australia to political problems, distancing themselves from the appearance of racist ideas by making the whole thing a feature of the public sphere and their comments merely reasoned political claims.

Invoking harm—literally one of the categories of aggressive face-work identified by Goffman (1967)—generally appears in the data most frequently in the Twitter thread accusing the progressive online media critic of anti-Asian racism. There, the participants instruct the original tweeter to follow the rules, admit their wrongness, apologise, and learn to do better, repeatedly telling them they have "done something harmful". Harms include imputations that they have behaved like a racist white person doubling down on their offensive behaviour out of white denial, that they position the vulnerable as "The Bads" in the conflict, "hurt them", and focus on their own intent rather than the harm they have done. Some of these harms are gathered under accusations of trying to "gaslight the vulnerable". Drawn from *Gaslight*, an Alfred Hitchcock film where one character attempts to drive another mad by persuading her that her perceptions differ from reality, gaslighting is any attempt to legitimise behaviour by persuading people that they are misperceiving something (Sweet, 2019). In the list above, the original tweeter's attempt to persuade other participants that their words were inoffensive and had simply been misinterpreted by the oversensitive was flagged by other participants as gaslighting. It is also violence as reduction of being: it removes from people's aspect horizon the version of themselves considered able to interpret their own experience correctly. Further harm identified in these tweets is contextual, charging the original tweeter with attacking

Asians at a time when they are particularly vulnerable from violent attacks against Asian women going on offline at that time, and tried to "gaslight" the vulnerable". While I am emphatically not implying that some of these charges are malicious or even lack validity, they are clear examples of aggressive face-work intended to corner a participant into particular responses harmful to their face and imply the superiority of the aggressor.

I have mentioned harm and violence arising from normal and aggressive face-work a number of times in this chapter. By it, I refer to Goffman's (1961, 1967) assertion that actors become attached to both roles and familiar faces associated with them to the extent of incorporating them into their self-image and even their identities (Goffman, 1961, 1967). Failed performances and being subjected to aggressive face-work are damaging to self-image and identity and, by extension, to an actor's social body and fundamental self (Goffman, 1961, 1967). Actors who have lost face in a role may also begin to avoid the offending role and the unpleasantness associated with it (Goffman, 1967). Given that I am using Schinkel's (2010) definition of violence as reduction of being, these examples of actors losing access to available faces and roles and taking damage to identities that may no longer be available to the actors in particular encounters, all of which constitute "reduction of being, it is proper to consider the harms described by Goffman to be violence. Where I have identified these aspects of Goffman's theories in the data, I therefore claim the presence of violence for the purposes of my research. Because Goffman's interaction order concerns itself with small-scale, everyday interactions, this should be considered evidence of everyday violence: the daily micro-scale violences which, while occupying one end of the continuum of violence, aggregate across a society to provoke and legitimise the macro-scale violences filling the other end of the continuum, such as internal state violence and war (Bourgois, 2001; Scheper-Hughes, 1997).

Much of the violence here seems to stem from the absence of Goffman's collaborative face-work from the data. Instead, what is seen is a disparate gathering of individuals—or small collaborative bands of allies—attacking each other and allowing as little room as possible for behaviours that might restore social harmony: that is, aggressive face-work entirely centred on the sacred individual. The performatively rational, competitive, zero-sum version of individuality on display suggests Durkheim's cult of the individual has been overtaken by the rational, ruthless, free-market conquering individual of hegemonic neoliberal capitalism. This cult of the individual is dominated less by traditional ideas of collaborative face-work than by the drive to promote their own self-interest and hobble other participants through strategically aggressive face-work. Ritual exchanges become weaponised, no longer supporting social harmony but leading to more disharmony. Moreover, participants are cut off from corrective rituals because the only available move of the four comprising corrective interchanges is accusation. The extremity of accusations prevents the second move, the offering of apology, and the remaining option is to meet aggressive face-work with aggressive face-work: exchanges made up of strings of competing accusations: "Racist"; "naïve"; "Fascist"; Snowflake; RWNJ; "SJW"; "Old man"; "Wokescold"; "Whitey"; "Germ", and so on. Most of these position an opponent relative to the sides of the culture war, such as RWNJ and SJW, which signify Right Wing Nut Job and Social Justice Warrior, respectively. Others assign discreditable values to an opponent. Fascist and racist are self-explanatory. Snowflake suggests a delicate progressive who will melt away if offended. A wokescold is a progressive—one of the woke—who shrewishly imposes their wokeness on others. Other accusations—such as germ—question opponents' existential value: they are worthless, inhuman, or undeserving of life. These accusations continue endlessly until the discussion breaks or participants resort to the final move of aggressive face-work by disappearing to the backstage of the offline world, denying their opponents the ritual satisfaction of an

unambiguous victory. Remembering that face-work is fundamental to the existence of interaction, any normative shift from primary to aggressive face-work as I am describing here also suggests these forms of violence may be becoming part of the interaction order itself, rewriting the old scripts for interaction rituals so that violence becomes the first, common-sense response rather than the last resort, the exceptional on the social world it is often perceived to be.

Conclusion

Analysing the data set using Goffman's theoretical perspective first establishes that the ideas he presented based on his analysis of the social world of the twentieth century remain relevant in the computer-mediated spaces of the twenty-first century. They are present, and some are even prevalent, in the data set underlying my empirical research.

Social media is emphatically demonstrated to be a performance space complicated by frontstage/backstage ambiguity. It is characterised by individualistic aggressive face-work between competing sacred individuals, bolstered and inflected by the rational, individualistic, self-managing values of hegemonic neoliberal capitalism. Contentiousness is amplified by the intrusion into Durkheim's cult of the individual of late capitalism's ruthless, self-interested competition for individual success in the marketplaces comprising society, which reduces the availability of collaborative face-work promoting collective harmony in favour of aggressive face-work focused on achieving wins and imposing losses. Consequently, the social media space is a violent space where individuals engage in everyday violence reflecting broader patterns of violence afflicting broader society, in their own name and in the name of the political and identity groups with whom they identify.

The next chapter will build on Goffman's micro-analysis of the data to discuss Collins' work, subjecting the three sampled online discussions to meso-analysis based on his theories of interaction ritual chains and violence.

Chapter Seven

Collins, Interaction Ritual Chains, and Online Violence

Following the guidelines of Schinkel's liquidation methodology, this chapter will analyse the data set using the theoretical perspective of sociologist Randall Collins, emphasising his work on interaction ritual chains and, to a lesser extent, situational violence. Though Collins is widely known and cited for his micro-situational theory of violence, it is based on and takes for granted his interaction ritual chain theory, so I focus my analysis on the latter. Interaction ritual chain theory details how micro-level interactions are linked by meso-level flows of emotional energy between social encounters and how chains of encounters aggregate to give rise to macro-level phenomena (Collins, 2004). Because it is a meso-level evolution of Goffman's micro-level elaborations of the interaction order that I used in chapter six, bridges the micro-level and macro-level so effectively, and is accompanied by one of the most widely respected theories of violence available to sociology, Collins offers a compelling and insightful meso-level theoretical perspective to this thesis. This chapter points towards the conclusion that interaction ritual chains serve online violence as conduits for emotional energy transfer from offline group membership to online interaction, where social media affordances amplify emotional energy into violence by providing pathways around ct/f at the situational level. This suggests emotional energy plays a role in mediating violent processes across levels of analysis.

Collins and Violence

Unlike Goffman, Collins is known for a comprehensive, empirically based theory of violence. While interaction ritual chain theory has meso-level implications, Collins is mainly a micro-sociological theorist, and his theory of violence—which works analytically and centres violent situations—is normally referred to as situational or micro-situational. His focus is on the impact of violent situations on individuals rather than violent individuals impacting situations (Collins, 2008).

Two more of his broad concepts of violence merit recapping here. Firstly, Collins (2008, p. 24) insists that "real violence" is nothing but physical harm directly inflicted by one subject upon another—to the extent that he dismisses work by theorists, such as Bourdieu, who disagree with him as "vacuous" and symptomatic of misunderstanding what violence is. Secondly, humans possess an innate reluctance to commit acts of violence as they cut across the entrainment—physical and emotional synchronisation—generated between co-present individuals linked by shared focus and action within a situation, to which humans are biologically adapted (Collins, 2004, 2008, 2009). Because of these fundamental assumptions, much of Collins' discussion of violence takes physical co-presence and physical harm for granted, and it may be argued this makes his theory unsuitable for analysing online violence. However, it is worth noting here that it is the meso-level focus of Collins' interaction theory that justifies choosing his work for the meso-level analysis. His violence theory is elaborated from interaction ritual chain theory. But both theories are useful in the online context if these two assumptions are simply not taken as objectively true and set in stone and are applied with appropriate caveats, such as noting that digital co-presence may have weaker effects than the physical kind.

Reluctance to disrupt entrainment manifests as confrontational tension/fear (ct/f), an emotion that forestalls violence unless situational dynamics provide a pathway around fear— and even then, ct/f may render an act of violence incompetent or ineffective (Collins, 2008). He notes this effect in a 1943 post-battle report finding that only 15% of frontline soldiers fired their weapons in battle, rising to a high of 25% for well-trained, hardened units under close supervision (Collins, 2008). This is the reason Collins confines violence to the situational level. Once it is accepted that humans find violence hard and respond to the thought of committing it with paralysing fear, then macro-level motivations to do violence are less important to whether violence actually occurs than the dynamics of violent situations that circumvent fear and determine what form the violence will take (Collins, 2008).

For example, in the sampled online discussions comprising my data, not all participants resort to symbolic violence despite sharing elements of their macro-level background. Instead, symbolic violence occurs when online discussions are structured by power and status dynamics to place particular superordinate individuals centre stage, disinhibit their behaviour through anonymity, and provoke them to highly performative ritual anger through the profanation of symbols significant to their most salient group memberships. Superordinates then use the emotional energy tied up in the situation— including the energy of ct/f itself (Collins, 2008)—to exert their dominance, inflicting on subordinates the harms associated with low emotional energy and symbolic violence. This is very much in accord with Collin's (2008, p. 22) description of the "patterns" structuring violent situations: "…small numbers of violent specialists, getting their energy from the unviolent part of the group, requiring the support of audiences, and battening on the emotionally weak".

Ct/f need not be confined to lethal or even only physical violence—as noted above— as the tension involved derives from internal conflict between opposing needs and not from external threats. I suggest the fear is just as readily social—fear of humiliation, rejection,

being unworthy, unlovable, irredeemable, and so on, through all the emotions doled out by symbolic violence and internalised as stigma. Indeed Collins himself (2008, p. 77) finds ct/f arises between people facing only an "angry argument". Nothing here is exclusively physical; none of it precludes ct/f arising around violent online behaviour. Are there signs of ct/f in the data? A performative, majority textual medium is unlikely to yield explicit traces of fear. However, I have noted the intensity of anger and hatred in the data, and it is possible these owe some of their virulence to the process Collins (2008) describes, where the violent fuel emotions that weaken ct/f by drawing on the intense emotional energy of ct/f itself. Alternatively, it may be that ct/f is occurring, but violent online behaviour escalates past it before it builds up enough to become visible.

Collins (2008, p. 8) goes so far as to define violence as "a set of pathways around confrontational tension and fear"—that is, violence itself is dependent upon something in the situational dynamics reducing or transforming fearful emotional energy until the motivation towards violence overcomes resistance and violence occurs. Major pathways around ct/f described by Collins (2008, 2009) include embedding violence in a sport, sharing mood/awareness with a supportive audience, having a victim susceptible to emotional domination, attacking from a distance, deception, and focusing on the details of how violence will be delivered. Of the sampled online discussions, the Twitter thread and YouTube comments show signs of unanimity in attacking their targets and so may circumvent ct/f somewhat through shared awareness with a supportive audience.

However, it is worth noting the previously mentioned tendency of the inherent anonymity of online interaction to encourage violent behaviour and produce more of it than is found offline. The effect was created because individuals protected by anonymity suffered disinhibition and deindividuation—the former separating them from their offline moral values and the latter separating them from individual responsibility and making them vulnerable to

group norms, including those of groups to which they belong that have violent belief systems and symbol sets (Lowry et al., 2016). Distancing is a significant pathway around ct/f (Collins, 2008). It is the logic of drone attacks, where a remote operator may explode a building full of people a thousand miles away, never being present to risk entrainment with the dead or having to see more than a grey-scale television image of the target. It is the logic of signing off on shutting down a hospital in a disadvantaged area from a desk in a CBD high-rise, never knowing who among the vulnerable will suffer or die for want of a hospital. In this case, the disinhibition and deindividuation of anonymity may place sufficient distance between individual participants in the sampled discussion and those they target for symbolic violence to act as a pathway around ct/f. Just as drone warfare distances the soldier, it is the disinhibited, pseudonymous, avatar-masked online self who engages violently with other digital participants. Driven harder by group norms—second-order, emotionally energised symbol sets—than their own moral beliefs, they tell other participants they are vile, toxic, garbage, and deserving of death. Given that anonymity is an affordance of the Internet, this would embed a significant pathway around ct/f into the architecture of social media itself. A violent situation online would come with the pathway built in. Ct/f need not build up until it becomes visible in the text before violence breaks out. Deindividuated centre-stage participants stripped of their individual responsibility and filled with anger from some group whose hostility they internalised further down the interaction ritual chain can draw on the emotional energy of ct/f as they will and attack. It is telling that symbolic violence in the sampled discussions is most prevalent and intense in the threads where participants are most clearly arguing from within opposed groups: white citizenship versus criminal, non-white outsiders and conservative men versus feminists and other progressives, where deindividuation would have the greatest purchase in harnessing ct/f to escape its constraints and amplify resulting violence.

Collins and Direct Physical Violence

In the discussion above, I take online and symbolic violence and their involvement with ct/f for granted. Collins (2008, p. 24) would emphatically reject that on the grounds that violence is specifically direct and physical, and symbolic violence is a "rhetorical pseudo-explanation" ruled out from serious study, not least because the dynamics of symbolic violence:

> "…are not at all similar to the dynamics of physically violent confrontations. The latter is a micro-situational process revolving around emotions of fear, tension, and forward panic, with strong elements of emergence; Bourdieu's "symbolic violence," to the contrary, is smooth, tension-free, non-confrontational, highly repetitive, and without situational contingencies." (Collins, 2008, p. 24)

Collins (2008) would most likely judge that my data are not representative of violence but of bluster—the boisterous, boastful aggressiveness that may build up to violence or occur in its stead as ct/f pushes participants to avoid violence.

I reject Collins' (2008, p. 24) argument that the dynamics of physical and non-physical violence are necessarily different, most particularly the notion that symbolic violence "is smooth, tension-free, non-confrontational, highly repetitive, and without situational contingencies". Symbolic violence may seem so when considered in its most macro-level form, abstracted from perpetrators and victims, but Collins' own interaction ritual chain theory would suggest symbolic violence arises within situations and is delivered and embodied within situations, in both cases by complicated, tense, confrontational human beings whose behaviours are shaped by the same situational contingencies as any other interaction. When a participant in the 7News Facebook discussion tells the non-white murder victim to go back to the jungle, mistaking him for the alleged killer on the basis of a

photograph, it is symbolic violence, but it is delivered by an individual human driven by his fear and hatred of another human being, and to not see the tension and confrontation in that micro-level exchange misses the point of what symbolic violence is and what it does. It originates in human subjects, and it hurts human subjects and human bodies. Violence does not cease to be violence because the assailant is well-hidden, and they strike their blows with symbols that take a miserable, foreshortened lifetime to kill. In this context, the principal difference between symbolic and direct physical violence is that the concept of symbolic violence makes powerfully visible that violence is a process that only culminates in whatever harm occurs, whereas conceiving of direct physical violence as the only real violence reduces what violence can be to an immediate act occurring within a particular social situation. I concur with Schubert's (2008) validation of symbolic violence: "To deny such suffering because it is not genuine compounds the effects of symbolic violence by leading sufferers to question the legitimacy of their own pain and misery. Such a denial in effect blames the victim".

Throughout this chapter, I assert that nominally physical elements such as co-presence or entrainment are valid to my data or that other Collins' concepts such as interaction rituals, interaction ritual chains, and ct/f apply. I hope that I succeed sufficiently in supporting my arguments. However, I make no apology for accepting among my premises widely accepted and cited symbolic and structural modes of violence. The reality and validity of non-physical violence is a critical component of my epistemological approach to my research. It is fundamental to my definition of violence and to my theoretical methodology. It is the basis of one of my research questions. Bluster may be present in my data as it is before and during other definitively violent situations. But there is also violence there.

Interaction Ritual Chain Theory

As might be inferred from the name, interaction ritual chain theory evolves from Goffman's concept of interaction rituals (Collins, 2004). Rituals are behaviours compelled or forbidden by the underlying beliefs of the social collective (Goffman, 1967). Social interaction is described by Goffman (1961, 1967) as a ritual game played by sacred individuals throughout their lives, made up of encounters between individuals sharing response space—co-presence—and involving a mix of collaborative and aggressive ritual interchanges.

Like Goffman, Collins belongs to the symbolic interactionist tradition and shares its micro-focus on how meaning-laden interaction—mediated by symbols—shapes individual identity and behaviour and, through those, society itself, which, in turn, influences interaction. Moreover, just as Goffman (1967) applies his ideas of interaction rituals to the ways encounters shape individuals rather than vice versa, Collins (2004) claims the foundation of microsociology is the situation.

> A theory of interaction ritual (IR) and interaction ritual chains is above all a theory of situations. It is a theory of momentary encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness because they have gone through chains of previous encounters. (Collins, 2004, p. 23)

In late modernity, there exists a hegemonic moral belief in the centrality of unique individuals and their actions in the social world—reflecting Durkheim's cult of the individual and Goffman's sacred individual—but individuals interact and exercise their agency within the constraining boundaries of situational encounters (Collins, 2004). Unique individuals, as distinct from their mere bodies, come into existence through specific experiences across multiple, variable situations, chained together in variable ways (Collins, 2004). Goffman's

sacred individual is not a unique being experiencing encounters but a body remade as a unique individual by unique variations in and among the situations comprising their lifepath (Collins, 2004). Sacred they may be, but they are sacred "precipitate of past interactional situations and an ingredient of each new situation" (Collins, 2004, p. 25). Similarly, though macro-level patterns structuring behaviour may seem like reified monoliths, vast and inevitable and ascendant over situations, structure is an aggregate of the actions and outcomes of interactional situations woven together by the movement of their participants along chains of encounters (Collins, 2004). Structure and agency are essential for understanding society, but situations are the foundation of the interaction order that maintains both (Collins, 2004).

The core idea of interaction ritual chain theory is that individuals move from one encounter to another in series, bringing to and taking from each the ingredients from which subsequent situations are constructed (Collins, 2004). It begins with the concept of ritual, which, following Durkheim and Goffman, Collins (2004, p. 27) defines as "…a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership". Collins (2004, p. 27) differentiates between his description of anthropological understandings of rituals as fixed rules and meanings embedded in structure and his view of them as "the chief form of microsituational action" and "a situationally generated flux of imputed rules and meanings". They are socially ubiquitous and integral to identity formation and the organisation of individuals in hierarchies, and they are key ingredients in shaping situational dynamics in ways that produce successful or failed encounters (Collins, 2004).

Ritual interaction achieves these effects by creating, transforming, and manipulating emotional energy (Collins, 2004). Researchers sometimes criticise Collins for talking about emotional energy without precisely defining the term (Boyns & Luery, 2015). However, a close reading of the early chapters of *Interaction Ritual Chains* suggests that he is drawing

from a concept of Durkheim's: "that a successful social ritual makes the individual participant feel strong, confident, full of impulses to take the initiative", that is, confers an "effervescence" associated with solidarity (Collins, 2004, p. 12). The intensity of the feeling of effervescence or lack of it—the amount of emotional energy conferred—is determined by the extent to which ritual participants experience mutual focus and emotional entrainment, where entrainment is a state of harmonisation with the collective achieved by normative pressure exerted by the ritual (Collins, 2004). Entrainment often involves literal physical attunement of participants' bodies brought about by co-presence and shared action, awareness, and emotion (Collins, 2004, pp. 54-56). For Durkheim, this energy is specifically positive and the result of successful religious rituals, but Collins (2004) later draws on Goffman to expand this to include the secular rituals of the interaction order, and he extends it himself to other forms of emotion, including the negative. Therefore, in this thesis I define emotional energy as emotionally relevant energy of variable intensity, created through ritual interaction and able to be transferred to or sapped from sacred individuals and objects, symbols, and feelings of solidarity towards groups. While researchers also claim that Collins offers no meaningful way to measure emotional energy (Boyns & Luery, 2015), I am less interested in precise measurement than whether it is present and positive or negative.

Collins (2004) argues strongly for the sociological importance of emotion; he sees emotion in Durkheim's solidarity, Goffman's approval-seeking sacred individual, the legitimacy upholding Weber's states, and Marx's class-based antagonism.

> The sociology of emotions thus bears upon the central questions of sociology. What holds a society together—the "glue" of solidarity—and what mobilizes conflict—the energy of mobilized groups—are emotions; so is what operates to uphold stratification—hierarchical feelings, whether dominant, subservient, or resentful.
> (Collins, 2004, p. 123)

Though he is talking here about seemingly abstract macro-level concepts, he contends that

abstracts manifesting at the interactive level of real encounters do so through feeling (Collins,

2004). Solidarity holds society together, but the individual barracking at the football *feels*

belonging: "…the micro-translation of macro-concepts yields emotion" (Collins, 2004, p.

123). Interaction ritual chain theory sees emotion as a fundamental ingredient of ritual that

interaction changes and intensifies, often producing other emotions in the process; all these

emotions ultimately become an output from one social situation and an input for the next,

forming a chain (Collins, 2004).

Interactions also create and emotionally charge symbols that are also transported along

the chain by individuals moving from encounter to encounter (Collins, 2004). Symbols are

things encapsulating shared meaning, including, among other things, ideas, words, and

objects. Those symbols signifying shared membership that are relevant to interaction ritual

chain theory are created and charged with emotional energy—depth and weight of meaning—

through rituals (Collins, 2004). Once created, symbols become sacred objects placing on

individuals an obligation to behave in specific ways around them: to guard their meaning and

significance against those who would profane them and ritually punish profaners (Collins,

2004). They become "embodied in sentiments of group solidarity, symbols or sacred objects,

and individual emotional energy"; they become "group emblems, markers of group identity"

(Collins, 2004, p. 56). Thereafter, the symbols themselves become ingredients of interaction

rituals that intensify encounters' emotional energy and contribute to their success (Collins,

2004). While collective emotions created by successful interaction rituals are ephemeral,

symbols created in these "first-order" encounters can prolong the energy and transport it to

new situations (Collins, 2004, p. 203). Second-order circulation of symbols moves them

around the conversational networks of the original first-order participants (Collins, 2004, p.

203). Third-order movement delivers symbols to the internal interaction rituals of individuals'

thoughts, where they become that person's store of symbols directly influencing what they may think (Collins, 2004). Shared symbol sets are a significant contributor to the ability of groups to share focus and thus to the success or failure of social encounters, interaction rituals, and the groups themselves (Collins, 2004). Nevertheless, symbols and their emotional charge are not eternal but decay over time, and they must be periodically recharged by exposure to new interaction rituals (Collins, 2004).

There is more to interaction rituals than emotional energy imported from previous encounters. Collins (2004, p. 67) details the makeup of an interaction ritual as follows:

- Preconditions:
    - A small gathering
    - Individuals bearing emotional residue from earlier (not necessarily shared) encounters
- Ritual ingredients
    - Bodily co-presence
    - Isolation from others
    - Mutual focus and shared mood (in a self-reinforcing feedback loop via entrainment)
- Ritual output
    - Solidarity
    - Emotional energy
    - Symbols
    - Moral standards and moral anger for violators of the sacred.

Noteworthy here is the inclusion of physical co-presence as a necessary ingredient for a successful interaction ritual. Like Goffman, Collins developed his theory before the flowering of sophisticated tools for enhancing digital interaction. Where *Interaction Ritual*

Chains touches on technologically mediated communication, he refers to telephones, teleconferencing, and exchanging video-taped messages using the physical mail service. Technologically mediated communication has evolved. Moreover, as Boyns and Luery (2015) point out, successful interaction rituals do not absolutely succeed or fail based on the presence of all ingredients; rather, the intensity of emotional energy created by the interaction ritual is strengthened by each additional ingredient present. Consequently, I argue digital co-presence is sufficient to bring social media interaction within reach of Collins' theory, at worst, making it a little less intense than its offline counterpart. An additional point Collins (2004) makes is that every listed component of an interaction ritual is a variable and that it is differences in these variables in endless combination that explains differences in all the social phenomena for which Collins offers interaction ritual chain theory as an explanation.

For example, Collins (2004) describes aggregated ritual interaction chains as productive of macro-scale patterns underlying social structure. These result from differences in the intensity of emotional energy moving along the chains, which derive from the values taken by the variables in each linked interaction ritual (Collins, 2004). Some experiences of recurring interaction rituals will be good and some bad, and interactants will learn to anticipate and choose the good (Collins, 2004). They will learn that they do not share symbol sets with certain other interactants and that interaction rituals featuring those groups will be awkward, unpleasant, and often fail (Collins, 2004). Collins invokes a kind of rational choice theory to argue that individuals will, in the aggregate, choose from a marketplace of possible encounters the interactive situations and groups that will deliver intense positive emotional energy, and these situations and groups will thrive at the macro-level while others die out (Collins, 2004). This creates the macro-scale patterning of social structure, as the symbols and ideas of successful groups return to the chains as rituals, as society's rules (Collins, 2004).

In summary: through interaction, emotional energy and symbols alike permeate interaction ritual chains and the consciousness of individual social actors, shape interactants' identities and even what ideas they may entertain, and coalesce into macro-scale patterns discernible as structures and institutions and the rules that govern subsequent interactions (Collins, 2004).

Social Media Topography

Interaction ritual chain theory is a micro-situational theory. Collins (2004, p. 3) warns that this requires researchers who use it to first chart "the contours of situations, which shape the emotions and acts of the individuals who step inside them", dismissing as a "false lead" the temptation to "look for types of violent individuals, constant across situations". That is, researchers should focus analysis on situational dynamics, acknowledging that variations in these are what shape individuals and sort them through rational, emotional energy-seeking choice-making into the situations where they might be found.

What are the contours of social media interaction? Primarily, the affordances of the Internet and social media platforms determine the shape of online discussion.

It is non-physical. Computers and smart devices mediate digital interaction. Goffman's small behaviours and personal front—facial expressions, gestures, positioning, symbolically meaningful accessories—become emojis, emoticons, gifs and other multimedia attachments, and avatar curation. Setting becomes a matter of the feel and reputation of the site itself, such as Facebook's increasing reputation passe or Twitter's constraining tweets to 280 characters. The connection between bodies that combines with mutual focus and action to become entrainment is less intense.

Digital interaction is also non-local and asynchronous: comments and replies may originate anywhere in the world and arrive within seconds or after years. Furthermore, depending on the platform, social media utterances are editable in ways live conversation is not and durable, preserved indefinitely in searchable archives.

Anonymity is a much-mentioned Internet affordance often associated with the idea that it lends freedom from consequence that translates to bad behaviour. Indeed, researchers have found that social actors are more likely to bully online (Lowry et al., 2016). Perceived anonymity may drive this effect by persuading potential bullies that no one will see *them* misbehaving, recognise *them* when they do, or hold *them* individually responsible, resulting in a state of disinhibition loosening social restraints on ill-treating others (Lowry et al., 2016). Moreover, anonymity may lead to deindividuation (Lowry et al., 2016). Potential bullies lose their sense of themselves as individuals and replace their morality and feelings of responsibility with the norms of the groups to which they belong, including groups with problematic norms fostering violent behaviour (Lowry et al., 2016).

The described criminological studies make these observations in the context of crime and deviance—they explain the exceptions that make harmful conflict more likely online than in shared physical spaces (Lowry et al., 2016). However, it seems highly likely that everyday social media users experience some disinhibition and deindividuation. Of the 212 unique participants in the social media discussions comprising my data, 117 are unambiguously anonymous, judging from their proffered names, and participants do engage in prevalent discursive, symbolic violence as described in chapter three (the offender "gets to live", "we fund that waste of air"), sarcasm (but consequences are for "*other* people!"), name-calling (offenders are "societies [sic] garbage, and the progressive tweeter is a "wokescold" and "whitey"), accusation (the progressive tweeter is racist, harassing, and gaslighting, and the feminist media critic and "all feminists" are "vile", grifting hypocrites), and displays of

symbolic violence (inherently criminal non-white immigrants inflict on Australia the experience of "living in Africa" and should be deported back to their "jungle", and the hypocrisy of women choosing to be "half naked and twerking" but rejecting the chance to "empower themselves" by dressing and fighting as a man "tells" them to). Most of this behaviour is sufficiently beyond the norm for polite interaction that it suggests the presence of disinhibition. In the male-populated YouTube comment thread criticising Anita Sarkeesian, the anger and downright loathing in the discussion is noteworthy for its unanimity and calls to ideological positions from the more traditional side of the culture wars, such as reviling the "woke"—the only type of person one participant "hates"—the "SJWs" and "these people" who "live to be" and "WANT" to "be offended". Similarly, some participants in the 7News Facebook comments attribute their inappropriate statements to an obligation placed on them by weak politicians who support "CULTURAL DIVERSITY", who help a murderer to secure his "vote". Also to blame is a vague sense of their Australianness, empowering them to dislike multiculturalism because "why shouldn't" they? "It's my country". These examples provide some evidence for deindividuation in the data. That said, it is worth noting that some of the participants may be using recognisable variants of their offline names, and not all their exchanges are intended as violence or reduction of being, even those that are critical of other participants. Again, evidence from the literature suggests that online interactants actively curate their online self-presentation to create, sometimes in a slightly exaggerated form, consistency with their offline personas (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). There is more to online interaction than disinhibited hostility.

Social Media Discussion as Interaction Rituals

Do the sampled social media discussions from my empirical research count as interaction rituals as Collins presents them? Earlier, I listed Collins' elements of a successful interaction ritual: as a precondition, a gathering made up of individuals carrying emotional energy from previous, not necessarily shared encounters; as ingredients, physical co-presence, isolation from situational outsiders, and shared focus and mood reinforced by entrainment; and the resulting ritual output, comprising solidarity, emotional energy, symbols, plus moral standards and anger for violators of the sacred (Collins, 2004, p. 67). My assumption is that the presence of these elements in the data will mark the social discussions used in my empirical research as interaction rituals.

Gatherings. Collins is adapting Goffman's work here, and I have established in chapter six that online interaction qualifies as Goffmanian small gatherings.

Emotional Energy From Previous Encounters. When participants in the 7News Facebook discussion excoriate the offender in the new article and offenders in general in hate-filled terms and judge the outcome of the murder investigation as doomed because of perceived earlier "slap on the wrist" failures of the justice system, they are displaying emotional energy carried from previous interaction rituals. At that moment, they are at the end of a series of experiences, including being victims of crime and interactions with likeminded people angry at perceived weaknesses in the criminal justice system, each of these experiences producing or reinforcing beliefs, symbols, and group solidarity, intensifying them with emotional energy, turning up here as third-order distribution rooted in their identity and second-order distribution along their discussion network. The ability of previous interactions to shape current situational dynamics is also evidenced when one participant in the Twitter discussion glories in the fall of a progressive "wokescold" based on their previous criticism of

the same behaviour in others. Old emotional energy is also powerfully present in the YouTube comments reminding participants of Anita Sarkeesian's role in the long-ago Gamergate incident, "riding in on the backlash", "too stupid to understand the games", her present-day comments a "sad attempt" to cry victim and regain attention. In each case, previous situations invoke intense emotional responses that shape the present interaction, as is characteristic of the emotional energy Collins describes.

Isolation From Situational Outsiders. This entails nothing more than a gathering being distinct from things that are not the gathering. Firstly, social media discussions are distinguished from the offline world by virtue of taking place online. Second, they are demarcated by platform. A tweet is made to Twitter and not to Facebook. A YouTube video comment appears under the video on YouTube and not on Instagram. It is the nature of social media that individual messages may be shared between platforms, but entire discussions attach to the platform where they take place. Thirdly, individual discussions are drawn together into threads: individual replies listed, usually in order of posting, under the thread's first message. Any given thread is distinct from any other thread. Participants may operate in multiple threads, but their focus within a single thread is on that thread. This fosters the development of mutual focus among participants.

Physical Co-Presence, Shared Focus and Mood, and Entrainment. Earlier in this chapter and in chapter six, I have stated my case for treating digital co-presence as equivalent to but potentially less intense than physical co-presence. Shared focus is established by the existence of discussion threads. Goffman himself offers conversation as a possible shared focus of small gatherings, and discussion is an important purpose of Twitter and Facebook and YouTube comment threads. Shared mood is a subjective characteristic of exchanges rather than individual statements, which could not be reproduced here without excessive quoting. However, I point to numerous accusing and name-calling comments already quoted

in chapters six and seven and argue that all three sampled discussions share a mood of hostility. I include below an example of one exchange from the 7News Facebook comments, partially paraphrased to preserve anonymity (for the same reason, participant names are replaced with numbers.

> 0036: 0025, a friend saw. I know them. Do you still play with toys lol. You could help Australia instead of whining.
>
> 0037: 0036, you're the one complaining about everything.
>
> 0036: 0037, just giving you the facts, old man.
>
> 0037: 0036, what facts? Where's the evidence, if you know what that is?
>
> 0036: 0037, seems you didn't read my comment. Maybe you're blind.
>
> 0025: 0037, just ignore 0036. He can talk to himself. I'm ignoring him.
>
> 0036: 0025, go play with your toys lol.

The shared mood of hostility here is impossible to miss. Playing with toys ascribes infantilised behaviour to the opponent. Whining likewise implies a degree of childishness and impotence relative to a rational adult who might instead act effectively. Old man is an ageist insult. Questioning the ability to recognise evidence suggests intellectual insufficiency. It is implied they are too lazy or intellectually lacking in rigour to bother to read the thread. Blindness as an insult is ableist. Finally, one participant is dismissed as unworthy of attention, better ignored and, by extension, unworthy of society.

Again, the entrainment in the above exchange may be less intense than it would be if the three individuals shared physical space and could respond to each other's somatic symptoms and small behaviours denoting hostility. However, Collins (2004, p. 88) notes that entrainment is built up when participants fall into shared rhythms, and that this process includes conversational turn-taking that contains "no gaps and no overlaps; no embarrassing pauses between speakers or within utterances, and a minimal amount of struggle over who

gets the floor to speak at any one moment". Orderly turn-taking is part of the architecture of social media platforms—participants cannot interrupt; they can only reply. But gaps are inevitable in asynchronous communication. The quoted example above occurred in the course of the same day, but response times on social media can range between a moment and Eternity. Note that Collins refers to "embarrassing" pauses—suggesting that the issue is some symbolic quality in the gap or the situation that disrupts shared mood and thus entrainment rather than the gap itself. It seems reasonable to suppose, two decades after its invention and near-universal uptake, that social media users understand digital interaction is asynchronous. Gaps in the exchange are expected, and exchanges need not be ended by a break but only paused, to be unpaused again in each moment they return to catch up and resume participation in the conversation. I suggest there is no need to think of such a familiar aspect of digital communication as awkward or embarrassing. I would borrow a term from Giddens to contend that, for those accustomed to it, digital interaction simply disembeds mutual focus and entrainment—untangles them from time (and space) to restructure encounters across broader timespans (Vanden Abeele et al., 2018). Vanden Abeele et al. (2018) argue that mobile ICT disembeds social relations from local time and space in ways that make individuals responsible for ensuring that activities that can take place anytime and anywhere actually do take place *some*time, in *some* place. Arguably, these tools for computer-mediated communication may be, in the same way, responsibilising online interactants to maintain their own mutual focus and entrainment through the mental work of tracking the asynchronous interaction rituals in which they are ongoingly engaged. While this is speculation and beyond the scope of this thesis, it may be a valuable idea to follow up in future research. For now, I only wish to suggest that asynchronous communication is now so commonplace that ordinary time gaps do not necessarily interrupt turn-taking in ways that disrupt entrainment, so some entrainment is present.

Solidarity. Durkheim (1915, pp. 208-210) presents solidarity as the powerful feeling of group membership—the uplifting "collective force", the "effervescence" created by group membership and amplified by ritual participation that induces society to hold itself together. Collins (2004) adopts this but again applies the idea to secular interaction rituals as well as to the religious ones of interest to Durkheim. As described above, successful interaction rituals create or strengthen the sense of group membership and solidarity with the group. Those feelings entwine with the emotional energy imparted by the rituals and are thus carried into subsequent interaction rituals along the chain (Collins, 2004).

Intra-group solidarity is less explicit in textual data where symptoms of energised bodies cannot be directly observed, e.g., cheering, clapping, or shouting the names of individuals having symbolic significance to the group. However, groups external to the sampled discussions are invoked by participants directly and indirectly, and arguably feelings of membership and solidarity towards those groups are energising aspects of the interactions. In the 7News Facebook comments, one participant defends his racist comments by attributing the right to dislike multiculturalism to his Australianness, saying that it is his country and he can do what he likes. This may point to a group feeling for Australian citizenship that he understands implies white citizenship, or it may signpost association with explicitly right-wing nationalist affiliations. In the Twitter discussion of allegedly anti-Asian tweets, some participants explicitly speak for American Asians, AAPI, and non-white groups, claiming membership in the act and demonstrating solidarity in the shared enterprise of chastising someone for offending those groups.

Participants in the YouTube thread berating feminist critic Anita Sarkeesian are—as far as can be known online—almost entirely men and show solidarity among themselves and with the group of all men whose lives are allegedly robbed of enjoyment by feminists and progressives and potentially with conservative groups who define "real" women in opposition

to feminism. In that respect, this YouTube discussion exemplifies Collins' concept of a *power ritual*. Power rituals are interaction rituals involving members with unequal access to resources, including status and power (Collins, 2004). The focus of a power ritual is what Collins (2004, p. 132) calls "the giving and taking of orders itself", though what is meant here is the imposition of the will of the dominant upon the behaviour of subordinates—regardless of whether the dominance/subordination is real or perceived or whether the subordinates actually obey the so-called orders. Much of the discussion in the sampled YouTube thread is structured around male dominance: women are assessed, judged, mocked, and told what is necessary to do womanhood properly, with the explicitly stated understanding that the men participating *are* dominant. They are the rational ones. They know what's what for men and women, and they have the right to police that, as they attempt to do in many of the comments. Orders are not given explicitly, but acceptable behaviour is described, and women and progressives not meeting those standards are strongly derided. Solidarity is evident. Participants joke with each other and congratulate each other on the validity of their points. This is in accord with the nature of power rituals, where the thinking of dominant participants tends to be conservative—as are the views expressed about women in the thread—and where dominant participants acquire solidarity and emotional energy from the performance of their dominance (Collins, 2004). It is also a close match with the Venäläinen and Virkki (2019) study described in chapter two, which investigated male online discussions of violent women and immigrant men, finding that white men shored up insecurities about their waning hegemony in the contemporary world by framing women and othered masculinities as morally degenerate relative to their own strong white masculine values.

Where membership to an external group exists, behaviour within a particular interaction ritual may derive from the values of that group rather than from internal situational dynamics, with status and emotional energy accrued also being applicable to the external

group. Someone directing a profanity-laden accusation against the original Twitter poster is less likely to be seeking higher status with them than with other outspoken online progressives. Remembering that interaction rituals create and energise symbols of sacred importance to the group, and symbols become internalised as symbol sets shaping what an individual can think, these external group memberships delivering emotional energy to the sampled discussions will also directly structure their shared focus and mood; no feminists participate in the YouTube discussion, yet the awfulness of feminists as a group is a major topic and fuelled by intense emotions most likely inspired by outside affiliations.

Symbols. Successful interaction rituals create symbols, including ideas and, ultimately, culture (Collins, 2004). They charge symbols with emotional energy of varying intensities, and the symbols move around participants' conversational networks and become embodied in the participants as thoughts and the symbol sets with which they interpret reality. (Note: when I describe people or identities as symbols below, I am not reducing particular groups, individuals, or participants to emotionally charged discursive objects. Rather, I am identifying their use by someone in that capacity. I believe using groups or group members as symbols is a clear example of the reduction of being my thesis considers violence.)

In the 7News Facebook exchange quoted above, one participant creates a symbol of foolishness around the idea of an opponent playing with toys. The symbol is only repeated once and is not picked up and used or distributed by others, so it is an output of a limited sub-interaction but does not accrue the emotional energy to survive. "Africa" and the "jungle" are used as symbols of non-white criminality and the lack of civilisation—relative to Australia—to which offenders should be sent back. The mollycoddled offender symbol is raised up to frame racism and punitiveness as a rational response to the equally symbolic broken criminal justice system. Britain is invoked as a symbol of whiteness. None of these symbols is created in the discussion—they are not debated or defined there, instead coming pre-made from

interactions outside in situations structured by racial and socioeconomic inequality—but because of that, they do show symbols circulating along conversational networks.

Women are present in the YouTube comments as multiple symbols. The quoted suggestion that women cannot complain about men degrading them if they degrade themselves is based on the old patriarchal symbol of the pure woman, who is kept so by her father on behalf of her future husband, who owns the ritual right and obligation to despoil her innocence in the name of legitimate procreation (Barratt, 2018). Conversely, a woman identified in the thread *as* degraded can stand for the old idea of the fallen woman, who fails in her duty to be a fortress of chastity until claimed by a husband, who is fair game for male attention and worthy of scorn (Barratt, 2018). The feminists attacked throughout symbolise the scold, the shrew, the joyless mannish woman who, participants note, hate beauty (Barratt, 2018; Cockerill, 2019; Ganguly, 2012; Ging, 2019)—or, at least, confine "twerking" to the "ugly" and deny beauty as a "fiction", and stand between men and everything that is enjoyable or good. Venus is present on her half shell as the woman whose beauty, whose "boobs", "beeewbs", and "mammies", it is natural for the male gaze to light upon and unnatural for a woman to hide. She is also present in the porn star that one participant imagines wearing the armour to which Sarkeesian objects, and when another imagines an actress shooting Sarkeesian in the breast while she wears the armour.

The Twitter thread offers symbols such as the racist, the ally, the woke, whiteness, and the vulnerable. Asians, as a particularised symbol of the vulnerable, resonate with considerable emotional energy from lethal violence that was being directed against Asian women offline at that time. Again, no symbols are created in the thread, but symbols are seen to be sustained and moved about the conversational network amongst participants.

The lack of symbol creation in the threads may point to the lower intensity of emotional energy, mutual focus and mood, and entrainment in social media interaction rituals.

Weak entrainment and low emotional energy may produce new symbols unable to escape first-order interaction and spread. This may suggest that individual social media discussions are poor soil for symbol creation. At the same time, it may account for the social media process which does successfully create symbols: the production and distribution of memes. These draw emotional energy from a collectivity spanning the entire Internet and tend to reinforce and be reinforced by group solidarity and values (DeCook, 2018; Maulana, 2021). Once they enter online interaction rituals, second-order distribution occurs because their purpose is to capture shades of meaning that are challenging to convey in text. They are one of the small behaviours, the gestures available to participants in online discussion.

What remains for imported symbols in the sample discussions is to add the power of norms and collective belief to discursive claims. It is one thing if one person does not approve of you but quite another if Australia, all men, society, white people, conservatives, "real" women, Christians, progressive people, and so on, rebuke you. The social capacity to inflict actual harm on identity is amplified when the judgement is coming from a "significant other" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 165), a category that would include those with whom a person shares group membership or members of groups wielding power over an individual.

Moral standards and Anger for Profaners. As rituals create and energise symbols of shared significance to the collective, they create the ideas, objects, and people that are sacred to the group: the things able to be profaned if disrespected or misused, that, when damaged, must be ritually repaired (Collins, 2004; Goffman, 1967). Beliefs the group holds about itself—it is hardworking, honest, free, and so on—ritually acquire symbolic significance and sacred status, and become the moral standards that group members must follow to demonstrate group membership (Collins, 2004). Conversely, profaning those standards marks a person as an outsider or as an insider guilty of a moral failure that must be corrected and provokes moral anger able to be embodied and transported along ritual interaction chains like

any other emotion (Collins, 2004). All three sampled online discussions show evidence of producing or distributing moral standards, reflected in every one of the eleven organising themes, suggesting moral outrage plays a significant role in hostile online behaviour. For the 7News Facebook comments thread, civilisation is the moral standard, and moral anger is directed at weak politicians, judges, and the progressive left for indulging non-white people with criminal proclivities and profaning the right of citizens to be safe. In the Twitter thread, progressiveness around interacting with vulnerable groups is a developing online moral standard, arousing anger for the profanation of those groups. The YouTube comments threat is, perhaps, more complex. There, the standards include women's moral purity and adherence to traditional gender roles, the presumed natural right of men to appreciate women's beauty, and the right of all to be safe from the corrupt hypocrisy of feminist "grifters". Moral anger is thus reserved for profaners such as Sarkeesian, feminists in general, SJWs, the woke, and various other progressive groups and their "toxic" "outrage". Most of the moral standards present have, by their nature, carried over from previous interaction rituals. Some—such as the inappropriateness of saying something anti-Asian while Asian women were being fatally assaulted in the US city of Atlanta—appear to have come into being internally to the discussion but to have taken on emotional energy from outside. As with symbols, it may be that social media discussion does not generate enough shared awareness, mood, entrainment, or emotional energy to fuel the widespread creation of moral standards or second- and third-order moral anger. However, the standards and anger on display do demonstrate second- and third-order distribution of both from earlier interaction rituals and the existence of interaction chains connecting offline and online worlds. Given that symbolic violence is the imposition of superordinate group values on subordinate groups in harmful, self-maintaining ways, the symbolic violence prevalent in the sampled discussions can be traced back to ritually-created moral standards. The violence becomes the product of second- and third-order moral outrage

against those discursively framed as belonging to groups intrinsically incapable of meeting superordinate moral standards and so profane them by their mere existence. The Twitter discussion offers an interesting exception, as the imposition of progressive values in that thread shows signs of a relatively new moral standard somewhat at odds with superordinate values—what is coming to be known as 'cancel culture'—assuming superordinate status online. In this case, the mechanism for distributing symbolic violence remains the same but is fed by the emotional energy of belonging to a different group.

Emotional Energy, Power, and Hierarchy. Emotional energy has an additional part to play in how social inequality operates through interaction rituals. As Durkheim's collective effervescence, emotional energy is a force that lends strength to individuals who participate in society's rituals of cohesion (Collins, 2004; Durkheim, 1915). However, not all ritual participation is equal. When individuals engaged in rituals experience feelings of powerlessness or marginalisation, carry internal symbol sets incompatible with other participants, or are at odds with the shared mood, moral atmosphere, or situation type, they lose emotional energy (Collins, 1974).

Levels of emotional energy are often influenced by situational dynamics stratified by the flow of power and status through particular interaction rituals (Collins, 2004). Some participants come into an interaction ritual with high status and the power to take centre stage and command others, while others, lacking status or power, perhaps forced into participation, may stand at the margins, only able to passively observe and await instructions (Collins, 2004). The former will be filled with confidence, commitment to group symbols, and emotional energy. The latter will feel anxious, less effective, shamed, and disconnected from the symbols that are important to the group, including those indicative of group membership, and those feelings may provoke anger (Collins, 2004). Widespread negative emotional energy among participants may result in interaction rituals that fail or end prematurely (Collins,

2004). Whether an individual routinely experiences high or low emotional energy in their interactions becomes embodied—through second-order distribution—as a fundamental part of their character and self (Collins, 2004).

A power ritual comprises participants of mixed power and status, during which superordinates display dominance over subordinates (Collins, 2004). In a power ritual, superordinates draw emotional energy from exercising their dominance, and a successful ritual is one in which the shared mood is compliance even where subordinate participants are resistant (Collins, 2004). For the subordinate, the ritual reduces personal emotional energy, but they will also acquire some of the energy given off by the way superordinates exercise their power—even if it is angry or tyrannical (Collins, 2004). If the subordinate is in a position of power later in the interaction ritual chain, they will likely shape their behaviour to that energy (Collins, 2004). Generally, superordinates feel a strong allegiance to group symbols, their determination to protect them manifesting as conservatism (Collins, 2004). Subordinates may perform deference to group symbols but will resent and deride them backstage, and if the balance of power shifts, they may destroy those symbols with the same fervour shown by their erstwhile protectors (Collins, 2004). An example of this process is the drive to remove Confederate statues as the Black Lives Matter movement gained ascendancy while resisting racially charged aspects of the Trump presidency in the United States (Kurnick, 2020, August 19).

A status ritual—and, here, status denotes "belonging or not belonging" rather than position within a hierarchy—is one in which some participants hold centre stage while intense entrainment produces powerful collective effervescence, conferring on them heightened symbolic significance (Collins, 2004, p. 135). When successful power and status rituals coincide, superordinate participants receive intense emotional energy payoffs (Collins, 2004).

However, every interaction ritual and the experience of every participant is shaped by some combination of power and status in variable quantities (Collins, 2004).

Status depends on four variable factors:

- **Ritual intensity.** How much entrainment takes place, producing how much effervescence?

- **Central/peripheral participation.** Does the participant operate at the core or periphery of the ritual?

- **Social density.** At the meso-level of interaction chains, how often do group members meet, and how much time do they spend together?

- **Social diversity.** Again, at the meso-level, is the number of groups limited and the participants local? Or are the groups numerous and participants drawn from all over, producing cosmopolitanism? (Collins, 2004, pp. 136-137)

Different values for these factors produce different levels of group solidarity, commitment to group symbols, and aggressiveness in policing misbehaviour (Collins, 2004).

Social media discussion is generally of low ritual intensity because of its non-physicality. It tends to the peripheral owing to the egalitarian nature of online communication. However, where discussions involve celebrities or participants with large followings, there may be a distinct core and periphery. Mobile devices make social media participation possible everywhere and all the time, delivering the possibility of high social density, and social media platforms host so many discussions and groups drawing participants from across the globe, resulting in very high social diversity. According to Collins (2004, pp. 136-137), high social density and diversity generally result in "individualism, relativistic attitudes towards symbols" and "abstract rather than concrete thinking". Furthermore, there will be "relatively weak feelings of conformity to group symbols; emotional coolness of tone; and generalized trust in a wide range of interactions", plus "amusement" at "minor ritual violations by others"

and "embarrassment" and "contempt" (Collins, 2004, pp. 136-137). Lastly, there will be "a desire to exclude perpetrators of more serious violations" from the social order (Collins, 2004, pp. 136-137).

The data reflect some of this. The degree of individualism, responding to violations with amusement, embarrassment, and contempt, and commitment to performative rationality—emotional coolness—has been discussed in chapter six. The desire to exclude violators is reflected in the basic theme *reduction of being—rejecting someone*. Examples include: discursively stripping opponents of their status as humans, real women, children, Australians, progressives, mammals, and living things; telling them to go back where they came from or to emigrate to England; and conferring inherent outsider status on offenders by conflating criminality with foreignness and discreditably coloured bodies and demanding that they be exiled, locked up indefinitely, or exiled. The Twitter discussion about the original tweeter's allegedly anti-Asian remarks is particularly characterised by abstracts. Interest in their actual intent and remarks is dismissed out of hand as prioritising their intent over the harm they have caused—"impact > intent"—where details of specific harm are never provided in favour of references to presumed harm to generalised Asians, AAPI, and BIPOC. The tweeter is also multiply implied to be symbolically complicit with the murder of several Asian women in Atlanta at that time, a link achieving an extremely rarefied degree of abstraction. The Twitter thread is also an example of an online discussion started by a minor celebrity where a significant number of their participants are their followers, producing a clear core and periphery. However, the original tweeter achieves none of the dominance or deference expected for superordinates in an interaction ritual. They are, instead, treated to collective anger and suggestions that they leave Twitter. This indicates that the collective in play here—followers of the original tweeter—is local and therefore more virulent in its punishment of transgression but networked to the larger, external group of progressives

policing what they perceive to be offensive behaviour online, and it is this bigger group influencing situational dynamics along an interaction ritual chain, decentring the original tweeter. While the original tweeter initially performed as if they were centre stage and superordinate, they were networked to the periphery of a larger group, where their status was uncertain, in a situation primed with pre-existing, angry emotional energy.

Symbolic violence in the sampled discussions would, in these terms, be inflected by the interplay of power and status among participants. In the 7News Facebook thread, white Australians place themselves centre stage and use symbolic violence to assert dominance. The YouTube thread places heterosexual men with patriarchal values at the centre, deploying symbolic violence against "defiant" women, feminists, and SJWs and somewhat taking their dominance for granted. In the Twitter thread, the original tweeter inflicts symbolic violence with a mistaken utterance, attempts a failed corrective ritual assuming they are the centre of the group, and realises too late that they profaned a more extensive, external group in which they are low-status and peripheral, making them the target of ritual anger and symbolic violence. In the end, in events transpiring outside the data, the original tweeter announces experiences within the data have driven them to abandon their public social media presence. That symbolic violence is most intense in the 7News Facebook and YouTube comments— where racial and gender dominance are in play, and violent participants belong to the dominant race and gender—suggest that online violence in these threads is amplified by higher power, higher status, interactants who skew towards core participation. Furthermore, the Twitter thread suggests that an online group can be local—small and self-contained— amplifying power, status, and symbolic violence when punishing infractions—even when the geographical distribution of members suggests they should be cosmopolitan and punish with a lighter hand.

Conclusion

Though epistemologically at odds with the analysis of online violence because of a fixation on direct physical violence, Collins' theories of interaction ritual chains and violence do yield useful insights into the impact of situational dynamics on violent online discussions and on individuals who participate in them.

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that online interaction can contain the preconditions, ingredients, and outputs that make them valid interaction rituals. They also chain to previous and subsequent interaction rituals and, through those, to external groups with whom participants feel solidarity. There is evidence that some ingredients dependent upon physical co-presence are less intense in online spaces, and solidarity with external groups imports emotional energy, symbols, moral standards, and moral anger into the sampled interactions along interaction ritual chains. The presence of external groups adds social diversity to online interaction that should weaken moral outrage in particular ways. However, online groups often have limited membership through subscription or self-select interest in discussion topics, bringing to moral outrage an intensity usually associated with local membership. In all cases, the external groups are more important to discussion group dynamics than the internal interactions themselves.

Internet and social media affordances are also significant to how online violence occurred in the sampled discussions. Apart from non-physicality, asynchronicity posed a possible threat to entrainment, though arguably—as described in Vanden Abeele et al. (2018)—experienced participants may disembed mutual focus and entrainment to restructure their experience of interaction across broader spans of time and space than in the offline realm. Anonymity may play a greater role through disinhibition and deindividuation,

weakening the social constraints and sense of personal responsibility of participants and increasing the role of external group values in their behaviour.

Evidence shows participants in the sampled groups deploy symbols, moral standards, and moral outrage but overwhelmingly import them from external groups along interaction ritual chains, almost never creating them. This may be because the lower intensity of online interaction rarely produces levels of emotional energy sufficient to fuel the creation or second- and third-order distribution of symbols and moral standards and anger. Memes and gifs—the obvious exception—may achieve the emotional energy to go viral because they so often reflect common human experiences and so may draw energy from the offline realm via interaction ritual chains. Moreover, second-order distribution is highly motivated as they are among the tools used to express subtle gradations of emotion online; they serve the function of Goffman's small behaviours.

Evidence also existed for group solidarity, symbols, moral standards, and moral anger entering the sampled discussions along interaction ritual chains and situationally reproducing social inequality. The discussions have characteristics of power rituals, in which members of dominant groups take centre stage and gain emotional energy from exerting dominance over subordinate participants, relying on the neutral participants who constitute the audience to provide the support circumventing ct/f associated with inflicting symbolic violence.

However, the pathway around ct/f most present in the data may be the distancing provided by anonymity built into the fundamental architecture of the Internet and social media platforms. Embedded in the social media affordances themselves, this antidote to ct/f may provide an open doorway for merely blustering online discussion to become violent when other situational dynamics are suitable, making online spaces inherently more likely to produce violent situations than offline ones. This may partly explain study results confirming that harmful interaction is disproportionately present online (Vanden Abeele et al., 2018).

Basically, evidence exists that the sampled discussions are interaction rituals structured by their position within interaction chains, significantly shaped by harmful, hostility-generating ritual ingredients and other elements flooding along the chains from external groups to which the participants belong and overwhelming less intense internal dynamics, exacerbated to symbolic violence by the anonymising nature of digital interaction. This suggests interaction ritual chains as a viable pipeline for moving emotional energy and other ingredients of online violence across violent processes occurring at multiple levels of analysis.

Finally, Collins' insistence that violence is only direct and physical brought into this chapter one of my core research questions: how can we understand violent social media behaviour *as* violence? The answer seems to be that online violence can be understood *as* violence merely by removing somewhat arbitrary definitional insistence that it must be direct and physical. Most other elements of violence exist within the data, making them accessible for analysis as violence. Furthermore, accepting online violence as violence though it is indirect and non-physical can hardly be called radical given the widespread acceptance of symbolic and structural violence within sociology. Going forward, I assume the validity of non-physical and online violence for the purposes of my research.

In the next chapter, I return to symbolic violence in detail, using Bourdieu's perspective to discuss the symbolic violence in my sampled discussions when viewed from the macro-level and what it might mean.

Chapter Eight

Bourdieu and Symbolic Online Violence

This is the third of three chapters following Schinkel's liquidation methodology to apply particular theoretical perspectives to my data. In this chapter, I apply Bourdieu's theoretical perspective, particularly his concept of symbolic violence, to consider and discuss conflictual online interaction as violence. I consider online violence from the macro-level of analysis, illuminating macro-level structures and processes involved in online violence and what they may mean. In the end, I find symbolic violence does exist in the data, but it often derives from historically situated values and presents in a generalised way rather than being directed at specific participants.

Pierre Bourdieu was a twentieth-century philosopher and sociologist who remains among the first-rank of thinkers to whom the field has played host. His interconnected concepts of social field, doxa, habitus, and symbolic violence are not, perhaps, universally revered among sociologists. Objections tend to centre around where his ideas stand in the debate between objectivism and subjectivism, wherein he is sometimes accused of incompatibly making use of both (King, 2000). And, as I have previously noted, some—such as Collins (2008) and Betz (1977)—object to his formulation of indirect, non-physical, symbolic violence. Nevertheless, his work is certainly universally known and widely cited in the field, and he is indisputably a towering, even a "founding" figure (Grenfell, 2008, p. 20).

While Bourdieu's work operates at multiple levels, fundamentally addressing how structure and subjectivity constitute and are constituted by each other, here I predominantly focus on symbolic violence. Briefly, symbolic violence occurs when the standards and assumptions of a society's superordinate classes are incorporated into the structures, institutions, and systems of that society and then, crucially, are mistaken by most social

agents for natural, inevitable truth. At its inception, symbolic violence is a macro-level phenomenon explaining how elites restructure society itself to reproduce their power and impose their dominance. Symbolic violence is decidedly present in the sampled discussion comprising my data. As mentioned in chapters six and seven, the non-physical nature of online interaction limits violence to symbolic expression in that medium. Those chapters focused on symbolic violence as an emergent property of violent, micro-situational computer-mediated communication. Drawing on Bourdieu will allow me to centre the symbolic violence in my data and analyse it to see how it is situated in relation to broader social structures. For this reason, I selected Bourdieu as the macro-level theoretical profile component of my liquidation.

Bourdieu—Some Key Concepts

  Field, Capital, Habitus, and Doxa. Bourdieu's central ideas of field, capital, habitus, and symbolic violence are interrelated and best understood together. Fields, or social spaces, are bounded areas of related social activity where social agents perpetually contend—individually and in groups—for the right to determine what is proper, expected, meaningful, or just plain necessary to function in the field and improve one's position there (Bourdieu, 2020; Thomson, 2008). The conflictual nature of social fields is central to their character, to the extent that Bourdieu coined the term with sporting arenas and battlefields in mind (Thomson, 2008).

  How well an agent does in the social game is partly determined by their access to advantageous resources known as capital (Bourdieu, 2002; Maton, 2008, pp. 51-54, 67). Usual forms of capital are economic, cultural, social, and symbolic, which are, respectively:

money and its equivalent; knowledge, including of taste and social rules; connection to social networks; and power acquired from prestige, status, and other creditable earned characteristics (Bourdieu, 2002; Thomson, 2008, p. 69). Recently, other forms of capital have come to be considered in the social sciences, often being specific variations of Bourdieu's original four, such as digital capital—knowledge of using digital communication technology—and racial capital, a form of symbolic capital encapsulating the benefits and privileges accruing to particular racial groups and the barriers and disadvantages associated with others (Inwood et al., 2021; Yates & Lockley, 2018). All forms of capital are unequally distributed—capital is necessary to thrive in a field but is also the reward for successfully navigating the field, so capital tends to adhere to members of dominant groups whose values, knowledges, skills, connections, and characteristics comprise it, and thus it reinforces their dominance (Bourdieu, 2020; Thomson, 2008). Collectively, the social positions associated with the power to exert control over capital in various fields are known as the *field of power*, and agents with positions within the field of power are able to structure the fields within which they operate (Bourdieu, 2020). The restructuring of a field is accomplished through the outcome of strategic interactions between agents within the field, as these are experiences that reinforce or call into question the value within the field of particular types of capital.

However, experience within a field also shapes the social agent, giving rise to and constantly restructuring what Bourdieu termed their habitus (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Maton, 2008). Habitus is a characteristic of individuals, groups, and institutions that encapsulates traits such as worldview, symbol set, available skills and capacities: the *dispositions* which determine an agent's *practices* in the field—determining what they can do, even what they can conceive of doing (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Maton, 2008). Being in the social world adds to habitus ideas, beliefs, and practices derived from what is considered common sense for people in that space and time, social assumptions mistaken as natural, even beyond question

(Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Deere, 2008). Bourdieu called these elements of habitus that preconsciously shape a social agent's behaviour *doxa* (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Bourdieu & Nice, 1980; Deere, 2008).

Because the practice of social agents shapes the field in which they take place and the conditions of the field itself shape habitus—which in turn shapes subsequent practice— Bourdieu describes field and habitus as structuring structures. With capital, the concepts of inextricably linked field and habitus allow Bourdieu to explain how agents can have agency *and* be constrained in their behaviour by seemingly durable structure (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Maton, 2008). Agency is determined by structure at the level of practice, but characteristics of the structure are determined at the field level by previous practice (King, 2000).

Symbolic Violence. If access to capital and a position within the field of power governs success in a field, if these are most often characteristics of dominant groups, and if successful practice in the field structures the field in accord with the characteristics necessary to succeed there, it follows that members of subordinate groups, lacking capital as their birthright, will struggle to succeed. Social and institutional fields are literally structured to value capital the dominant acquire through the simple virtue of being who they are, knowing what they know, and socialising within their in-group (Schubert, 2008). Subordinate groups may lose the social game more often than they win and collectively give the impression that they lack the positive attributes of the dominant—but the impression results from unequal structures in the field, including unequal access to capital (Schubert, 2008). When structures in the field are no longer understood to be the products of strategic contestation mediated by access to capital—when they are mistaken for natural strengths or weaknesses in different identity groups—and that mistake enters the habitus of participants in that field generally as

doxa, the result is *symbolic violence* (Schubert, 2008). Because specific configurations of field, habitus, doxa, and practice arise from pre-reflexive understandings of social experience, they are easily mistaken as natural, as the inevitable and irremediable condition of being in the world, and so they are invisible to the humans whose lives they structure towards domination or subjection (Schubert, 2008). Indeed, habitus in a field structured by symbolic violence supports the legitimacy of domination: the dominated are weak, foolish, distinguished by any number of discreditable characteristics and moral failings, and they deserve their suffering (Schubert, 2008, pp. 189-190). From there, symbolic violence becomes an insidious oppressive force requiring that oppressors merely "let the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise their domination" (Bourdieu, 1977b cited in Schubert, 2008, p. 184).

Bourdieu's classic example of this process is the twentieth-century French education system. Though schools open their doors to all, the standards and requirements of the educational field are set to those of the upper classes (Bourdieu, 1974; Schubert, 2008). Children raised to those standards have no trouble adhering to them at school, while children from the lower classes, with no such experience, struggle to do well, drop out, and less commonly continue to tertiary education (Bourdieu, 1974; Schubert, 2008). That is, the habitus of upper-class children gives them the cultural capital necessary to engage in successful practice in the educational field, while lower-class habitus is less compatible with the field, resulting in struggle, failure, and reduced life chances (Bourdieu, 1974). When the belief arises on both sides of the socioeconomic divide that all children have equal access to the education system, but lower-class children have worse outcomes because they are intrinsically less capable, then the educational field has become constitutive of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1974).

The harm in symbolic violence may be subtler than that of direct violence that lands immediately and visibly upon the body of its victim. However, symbolic violence does not exist in a vacuum. Denied access to capital and the means to acquire it by assumptions about their intrinsic flaws, the disadvantaged may be denied jobs with liveable wages and consequently safe housing, nutritious food, and medical care and subjected to a greater chance of being drafted to war, incarcerated, or the victim of police violence. Considered as part of an entire life course in which a person's position within the social field may repeatedly harm their mind, body, and life chances, ultimately shortening their life, symbolic violence is harder to see but at least as damaging as physical violence (Schubert, 2008). Moreover, victims of symbolic violence are much more likely to be blamed for the harm done to them and denied help in recovering from it or avoiding it in future (Schubert, 2008).

Structural and Symbolic Violence. Violence is often referred to as being *direct* or *indirect*. Simply, the former involves a social agent personally delivering the violent act, while the latter is harm arising without an obvious agent's intervention (Galtung, 1969). Direct violence usually entails physical harm inflicted upon another social agent's body: the direct physical violence Collins defines as the sum of all violence despite evidence that indirect violence is quite capable of inflicting harm. Indirect violence is often imposed by structures and systems on vulnerable groups who inhabit them and tends to be described as non-physical, non-somatic, psychological, and less real than direct violence (Betz, 1977; Collins, 2008). There is a wilful perversity in framing the indirect as somehow above or separate from the body. For an individual situation, indirect violence may be less obvious, less blood-soaked, but considered across an agent's life course, it can be no less destructive to the body (Schubert, 2008). In 2018, a young Indigenous Australian woman, five and a half months pregnant, presented to Tumut Hospital in New South Wales suffering from septicaemia (Hayter & King, 2019, July 29; Pezet & Shields, 2018, September 18). She had

been sick with the condition for seven months and had visited the hospital twenty times in search of medical care (Hayter & King, 2019, July 29; Pezet & Shields, 2018, September 18). However, she was never diagnosed, and her final attempt ended when she was sent home with paracetamol, and she and her unborn child died fifteen hours later (Hayter & King, 2019, July 29; Pezet & Shields, 2018, September 18). At the subsequent inquest, the coroner identified bias against Indigenous patients, lack of Indigenous representation among Health District staff, and no consulting with the local Indigenous community as contributing to the perfunctory medical attention the deceased woman had repeatedly received (Hayter & King, 2019, July 29; Pezet & Shields, 2018, September 18). Indigenous witnesses reported they were reluctant to attend the hospital because they had been targeted by discriminatory, stereotyping behaviour and knew they would not be given treatment(Hayter & King, 2019, July 29; Pezet & Shields, 2018, September 18). To be very clear: this is a story of indirect violence. A system configured to read Indigenous bodies as less worthy of care killed a woman and her unborn child, and it is inadequate to frame that as non-physical, as intrinsically less violent than a slap across the face. Symbolic violence, Bourdieu argues, can be "gentler" but "more effective, and (in some ways), more brutal…" than the direct violence so readily understood as *real* (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992, as cited in Schubert, 2008, p. 184).

Indirect violence of the kind described above was famously defined by peace researcher Johan Galtung, in the mid-twentieth century, as structural violence.

> There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as un- equal life chances. (Galtung, 1969, p. 170)

When a social agent suffers because of structural settings in a system that are "objectively avoidable", the result is structural violence, and Galtung (1969, pp. 170-171) treats the term as synonymous with "social injustice".

In a later paper, Galtung (1990, p. 291) proposes a new mode of violence he calls "cultural violence": "…those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence." Cultural violence in defence of structural violence results in the dominant values underpinning the structural violence becoming embedded in its victims, what Galtung (1990, p. 294) calls "penetration", "implanting the topdog inside the underdog". Usefully, Galtung (1990, p. 294) organises violence by its relationship to time, where direct violence is an "event", structural violence a "process", and cultural violence a "permanence". That is, embedded in culture, cultural violence remains stable and works to legitimise macro-level direct and symbolic violence over extended periods of time. Beliefs held over periods of time, as Gramsci notes, tend to become "common sense", to be uncritically accepted as true, even natural, and thus invisible (Forlenza, 2019; Hawksley & Georgeou, 2019).

While Bourdieu does not make the direct connection himself, structural violence legitimised by cultural violence and slowly becoming accepted as a common-sense truth so obvious and natural that it is no longer visible is, arguably, symbolic violence. But, whereas Galtung's structural and cultural violence are offered as durable features of social structure with which social agents just have to deal, Bourdieu's approach allows an understanding of not just the impact of structure but how agents help to make and maintain structure and are themselves made and remade by it (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Schubert, 2008). This is not dissimilar to the symbolic interactionist view—integral to Goffman and Collins—that self makes behaviour makes society makes self. However, symbolic interactionists engage with this cycle at the micro-level of interaction and situation, assembling particular instances of these into patterns resembling structure. Bourdieu starts with structure—social fields

constituted to shape behaviour without direct coercive interaction—and charts their impact on social agents and vice versa (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Schubert, 2008).

Conservation of Violence. It is a characteristic of symbolic violence to be invisible, as the structures supporting it are accepted as commonsense and legitimate by everyone involved, including its victims (Schinkel, 2010; Schubert, 2008). However, Bourdieu makes the point that violence is inescapable:

> You cannot cheat with the law of the conservation of violence: all violence has to be paid for, and, for example, the structural violence exerted by the financial markets, in the form of layoffs, loss of security, etc., is matched sooner or later in the form of suicides, crime and delinquency, drug addiction, alcoholism, a whole host of minor and major everyday acts of violence. (Bourdieu, 1998b, as cited in Swedberg, 2011, p. 79)

This transformation of violence and its movement across society's systems to manifest again is particularly relevant in a world convinced it has evolved to become less violent (Wieviorka, 2009), in which symbolic violence is ignored or dismissed, and those who struggle to free themselves from it are often dismissed as being uncivil (Applebaum, 2021). Legitimate state violence—when disguised, as described in chapter one, as merely the use of power in the interests of the common good—or seemingly invisible symbolic violence, even violence between or inflicted upon groups no one cares about who can be safely ignored in public discourse, does not go away. It persists, and violence that can be seen may have deep or distant roots, as will become apparent in the findings derived from Collins' interaction ritual chains in chapter seven.

Next, I apply Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence—and, as necessary, the interrelated concepts of field, capital, and habitus—to a detailed analysis of the sampled

Facebook discussion and a brief analysis of salient aspects of the YouTube and Twitter

discussions comprising my data. I demonstrate how symbolic violence within the data arises

offline within the field of power and manifests as a practice online, where it works harm and

is reproduced, structuring the social media field and habitus of participants.

Symbolic Violence and the Sampled Discussions

Before analysing each of the three sampled discussions individually, it is worth noting

that the Internet itself is a field—as are individual social media platforms within it—with its

own forms of capital and relations to the field of power and so is potentially an arena for the

production of symbolic violence. To participate in online discussion requires the economic

capital to purchase the necessary technology or the cultural capital to reliably gain free access

through services such as libraries. Given access, significant cultural capital is involved in

skilfully using hardware, software, and the various websites and platforms comprising social

media. Moreover, the Internet has its own standards of behaviour—occasionally called

netiquette—that smooth user interaction and that users are presumed to know. This

combination of economic and cultural capital with the competencies needed to navigate the

Internet and social media is increasingly considered a new and distinct form of capital—

digital capital (Ragnedda & Ruiu, 2020). The gap between Internet haves and have-nots has

long been known as the digital divide, and it continues to exist; if anything, the shift of many

services and forms of interaction online during the COVID-19 pandemic has made the issue

more visible and the consequences for those without Internet access more devastating (Lai &

Widmar, 2020). When governments restrict the movement of some citizens unless they can

show documentation downloaded from a website using a mobile device, as was the case with

the Australian Government, their MyGov site, and proof of vaccination (O'Sullivan, 2021,

June 10), there is a clear assumption that Internet access is the norm. However, as of 2016-2017, 14% of Australian households had no access (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). As Schubert (2008, p. 185) notes, a system granting access that is built on invisible assumptions is a source of symbolic violence for those it filters out. For that reason, I identify the absence of those who cannot participate in the discussion because they live on the far side of the digital divide as the first example of symbolic violence suggested by my data set. While this violence is not obviously wielded by or against my participants, those unable to participate as a matter of social and economic injustice are nevertheless an example of the relationships between online violence and the broader social world that I am attempting to identify as one of my research aims.

Facebook and the Criminalised Non-white Body. The first sampled online discussion is the comments section from an article posted by 7News on Facebook. There are two obvious throughlines of symbolic violence: racial and ethnic identity and issues of criminal justice.

While the topic of the article was the killing of a young Melbourne man, his included photograph turned the conversation towards race and identity, as some participants assumed it was a photograph of the offender. Others took for granted the race of the offender without relying on the photograph, one arguing that the alleged killer had to be black because there would have been a bigger media rush to judgement if they had been white, an assumption they declared to be a "fact" you could only disagree with if you were thinking with your "feelings". Regardless, the violence was associated with Africa, giving Australians the "experience" of "living in Africa", which assertion garnered more reactions, including clicking "Like" and "HaHa", than any other comment in the thread. Agreeing, another participant suggested sending the offender "back to the jungle", which received four likes.

Two subsequent comments asserted the problem of non-white criminality was a longstanding consequence of Green and Labor politicians pushing policies of "cultural diversity", the term clearly being used in this context to connote sarcastic disdain.

These statements did not go uncontested. The next half dozen posts called out the assumption that the photograph depicted the offender or that their race mattered, called for more "sympathy for the deceased", called the others "racist", and noted that First Nations people must have similarly hated criminal immigrants two centuries ago. An exchange then breaks out between six participants, beginning with one insisting that "black on black" crime is hidden by the media, ensuing charges of racism, and an attempt to discredit a participant with an implication of homosexuality and weakness—that they could do nothing to silence the "facts" of black criminality but attack with their "rainbow flag". The exchange concludes with two jokes: firstly, that the Liberal party—a conservative-oriented Australian political party—let criminals into Australia because they are also criminals, and secondly, that the Government is giving Australians the experience of Africa because COVID-19 restrictions were not (then) allowing them to travel.

Subsequently, a participant queries why Australia keeps importing "these kind of people" when they could bring in "good people". Called on who "these kind" might be in an article that makes no mention of the alleged perpetrator's ethnicity, the poster responds with a claim to know the truth because "his friend" witnessed the crime. Asked if his friend wears a "Klan hood", he responds with a claim that he is presenting the "facts" and suggests his opponent must be old, blind, and childish not to agree with him. His opponent advises him to move to England for its whiteness and lack of racial diversity, and the pair briefly make competing claims of superior Australianness, culminating in the first poster dismissing the other as not Australian at all. He adds that he had a right not to like multiculturalism because "It's my country". Reminded of the existence of First Nations people, he avers that Australia

was theirs "until we took over". The discussion then trails off with a few comments that non-white violence is the "Same in Sydney", that "the left" and "multiculturism" are to blame, and that it is all generally "disgusting". There is a great deal of symbolic violence here, from assumptions about some races being inherently criminal or inherently civilised, through ageist assumptions about rationality and intelligence, on through assumptions about who owns Australia and who is outcast from it, to preconscious acceptance that diversity and multiculturalism are merely discreditable positions of left-wing politics.

The second line of symbolic violence in the comment thread relates to the Australian criminal "injustice system", its prosecution of offenders, and the nature of the offenders themselves. The offender is "this creature", African, a product of the "jungle", a "germ" and a "waster of air", one of the "Kids who Murder", a "Feral Flog", a "thing", "societies [sic] garbage", "trash", and in "no way" even "almost human". Their criminality and presence in Australia are variously the consequence of "CULTURAL DIVERSITY", "multiculturalism", progressive politicians and conservative Governments, the colour of their skin or their African derivation, their status as immigrants, and protection of "black on black" crime by the media. The fifteen-year-old responsible and offenders generally should be "handed over" to the victim's parents to receive "justice", "sent back" to the jungle, held in solitary confinement for twenty-five years then deported, not be allowed to "just live", given what he "deserves" by the victim's parents, "big boy time" in prison, "to pay big time", prosecuted as an adult, locked up forever, or binned. However, the alleged offender and offenders, in general, will most probably receive no "real justice", live in jail on taxpayer's money, be let off "very lightly" by "the courts", avoid jail, be given a "slap on the wrist" or even "two slaps", released in "no time", and be "looked after" by—then unpopular Victorian politician— "Chairman Dan" who "needs his vote". The tone here is often resigned, though there is also

uppercase shouting, the use of angry emojis, and a note of smug self-congratulation (congratulating each other on their wisdom).

A few forms of capital are visible in the portion of the thread dealing directly with racial identity. Firstly, the equation of whiteness with Australianness, civilisation, and an absence of inherent criminality suggests whiteness in this discussion is a form of cultural and social capital—familiarity with the forms and standards of white society and established positions within it. Additionally, a white body is an embodiment of civilised values and a visible sign of reliability and, therefore, also a significant credential: a source of symbolic capital. Conversely, a non-white body is woven around discreditable standards and attributes: violent criminality, the feral incivility of the African jungle, foreignness and foreign ways, and the threat to good citizens permitted by politicians, governments, courts, and journalists who are weak and should know better. These are all illustrations of the way race structures power and powerlessness—most particularly in societies embedded in the historically constituted violence of colonialism—as racial capital (Inwood et al., 2021). Bourdieu (2020) talks of the field of power—the master field intersecting all the others—comprised of positions whose holders gatekeep access and exert control over the forms of capital in a given field and so over the field itself. Inhabitants of the field of power possess enough capital to dominate other capital-holders and the systems, such as habitus, that reproduce a field's structures. This makes it arguable that the field of power structures whiteness into the field of violent online interaction as a credential and a form of capital and shapes discursive practices towards racism and symbolic violence. Online interaction then reproduces offline symbolic violence online and maintains it within the fields, habitus, and practices structuring social media.

This is not to say whiteness is permanent and irresistible in these fields. The core concept of field and habitus as structuring structures conveys Bourdieu's argument that

structure is not the end of agency because fields are spaces where agents strategically contend to reshape the field guided by the habitus the field has shaped but not imprisoned by it. And indeed, resistance to whiteness is visible in the data outlined above; some assert whiteness as civilisation, good citizenship, and sovereignty, and others correct them.

What stops this from being (only) Galtung's cultural violence—whiteness as a symbol justifying the mistreatment of non-white people and groups—is that so much of the discussion takes the inferiority of non-white people for granted. As noted, some participants assumed the victim was the offender based on the victim's included photograph. Moreover, when the participant opposed to multiculturalism declares they do not need to defend their position because it is "my country", they are not being ironic. Their next comment asserts their right to the claim with a curt reduction of First Nations people who lost sovereignty when "we" "took over"—a people discursively consigned to history, definitively established as inferior by their inability to win on a field of colonisation structured by the European field of power and requiring European capital and habitus to navigate. Australia has a history as long as settlement of symbolic violence towards First Nations people, treating as common sense the belief that they are frail, incapable, as out of step with modernity as dinosaurs and just as doomed to extinction, leaving white Australians little to do for them but "smooth the dying pillow" (Soldatic, 2015, p. 61). Many participants in the 7News Facebook discussion will have had their habitus accrete in the social field of a nation whose historical approach to First Nations peoples includes "Radical forms of exclusion, expulsion and genocide…" (Soldatic, 2015, p. 61) and whose current policies operate on a "deficit" assumption that the problems of Indigenous individuals are rooted in their inherent racial weaknesses (Bryant et al., 2021). That is, their practices demonstrated in this discussion are less likely to be the knowing, strategic legitimisation of cultural violence but more probably the acting out of the less conscious, less visible symbolic violence embedded in their habitus through experience in

fields beyond the online world. As in earlier chapters, this suggests many of the problems of online interaction come into being offline and are imported to social media where conditions allow them to flourish.

Interestingly, the symbolic violence in this discussion is not enacted against a particular participant in the discussion itself. With the minor exception of an ageist insult in one of the bitterer exchanges, the thread's symbolic violence is undirected, encompassing racial and ethnic groups to which the victim and offender are assumed to belong and a more nebulous category of ethnicities included under "multiculturalism" and "diversity". No one in the discussion explicitly or implicitly identifies themselves as belonging to those groups, though that does not preclude their presence. It is also possible that the thread was read at the time by individuals who declined to comment, whether casual visitors or those who regularly reading without participating—a class of Internet users known as *lurkers*—who took symbolic harm unseen. Because social media communication is asynchronous, disembedded from local time, and archived, lurkers and participants alike may not encounter the thread until long after discussion has ceased. Nevertheless, the symbolic violence there retains the power to work its harm indefinitely. This suggests online symbolic violence is also disembedded in time, arising within practices in one timeframe and hanging suspended in the field indefinitely to strike at the habitus of any future reader or participant who enters the field. In this discussion, at least, this means that symbolic violence not only originates beyond the immediate interaction but also predominantly lands beyond it. At a bare minimum, it may be an example of Bourdieu's "double plays", in which behaviour is designed to display dominance or earn capital on more than one field simultaneously (Thomson, 2008, p. 73).

In the section of the discussion dealing with criminal offending and the Australian justice system, the most visible symbolic violence also relates to racial or ethnic identity. Here, someone who is non-white, foreign, or an immigrant is understood to be contributing to

Australia's crime problem, either by being inherently criminal themselves or by bringing crime with them in the form of violence understood to be rampant in the society from which they come, that is, by bringing their problems here. Multiculturalism and diversity are both singled out for bringing crime to Australia, and both are identified as the result of political errors in judgement. The exchanges in this thread specifically reference Australia, its political parties, and the Indigenous population, suggesting many of the participants are Australian, if not white Australian. Again, Australia has a history of fear-driven, restrictive attitudes towards immigration (van Krieken, 2012). Most notably, from federation to the mid-1960s, the White Australia Policy promoted the idea of Australia as being one with a racially pure— white—Greater Britain, severely curtailing the entry of "coloured people" who might otherwise drive out the white population through sheer weight of numbers (Jordan, 2017, p. 170). An explicit purpose of the policy was to spare Australia the perceived multiculturalist disaster that had marred the colonisation of the United States, where non-white races had supposedly proved incapable of assimilating into the dominant white culture (Jordan, 2017, p. 171). Immigrants were viewed as embodiments of crime. For example, in 1951, the NSW Attorney General declared immigrant crimes a daily occurrence and characterised their offences as "foul and savage" and "foreign to our manner of thought", though a subsequent study found recent migrants less criminal than Australian citizens (Kaladelfos & Finnane, 2018). More than half a century later, then Home Affairs minister and now leader of the Australian Opposition Peter Dutton echoed these sentiments on multiple occasions, at one time portraying Australian citizens as hiding in their homes from rampant "African gang violence" perpetrated by poorly screened immigrants incapable of assimilating and deserving of deportation (Kaladelfos & Finnane, 2018, p. 49; Karp, 2018, January 3). The notion of deporting "alien coloured immigrants" in Dutton's comments and visible in the data also exists as far back as the White Australia Policy, where non-white people were not only

unwelcome arrivals but were slated for deportation to reduce their existing numbers (Jordan, 2017, p. 171). It seems quite likely that these elements in the sampled 7News Facebook discussion originate in the broader Australian social field and enter the field of violent online interaction through the habitus of participants. If this is the case, the practice of online interaction, as observed, is likely reproducing violent attitudes towards immigrants, multiculturalism, and crime in the structure of the online field.

Finally, several participants enact the symbolic violence of assuming offenders are not just poor citizens but actually less human. Here, the social field has embedded capitalist ideas of the sacred nature of ownership and the individual responsibility for criminal behaviour, plus a classist assumption that all individuals have access to opportunities, employment, and resources and therefore make a rational choice to commit crime because they are inherently bad, undisciplined failures as people. There is a clear assumption that deterrence—the service of such inevitable, swift, and severe justice that potential offenders choose not to offend— works. As a number of the comments illustrate, there is a perception that those occupying Australia's field of power have failed in their duty to make the criminal justice system sufficiently deterrent, and the result is citizen anger towards traditional powerholders such as politicians, judges, and the media. Moreover, the anger amplifies punitive attitudes towards offenders to levels of cruelty that require dehumanising the "germ" offenders to legitimise that cruelty (Milton & Petray, 2020). This is symbolic violence towards criminal offenders in general, of course, but here it mingles with the racial and ethnic animus in the habitus to frame black bodies as subhuman bodies in need of discipline to bring their failed, unruly habitus in line with the civilised standards of the field and so correct their criminal practices—and, where assimilation fails, they deserve to be removed from the field completely.

YouTube and the Contested Female Body. The second sampled discussion is comprised of the comments section of a YouTube video attacking feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian for calling out "boob armour" in the science fiction television show *The Mandalorian* (see chapter five for a full summary). Boob armour is a much-critiqued visual cliché associated with fantasy and science fiction media and involves depicting women characters in sexualised armour or other military attire that serves no purpose beyond emphasising the usually artistically exaggerated sexual characteristics of the woman's body beneath (Langsdale, 2020). Form-fitting metal breastplates complete with nipples are common, as are high-heeled boots, bare legs, bikini bottoms, and sundry leather accessories (see Figure 3). The aesthetic allows women to take traditionally masculine action roles in fiction while preserving their position as fodder for the male gaze, giving women the appearance of empowerment without yielding ownership of the female body (Langsdale, 2020).

Figure 3. Sexually exaggerated armour in various media.
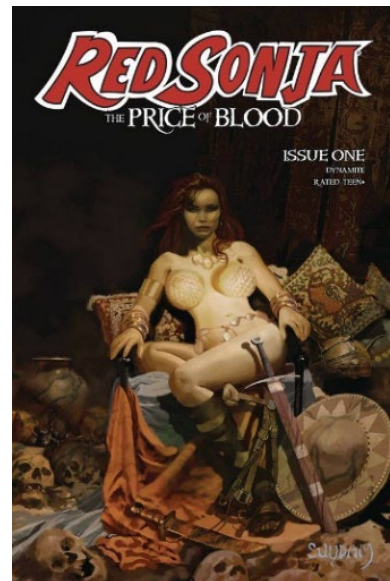
Note. Images excerpted from manga (Senoo, 2019), graphic novels (Lieberman, 2020), television (Xena Warrior Princess, 1995-2001), & games (Perfect World International, 2021).

The symbolic violence inherent to boob armour is fairly clear. It mistakes barely clad, physically exaggerated women who dress for appeal rather than practicality even when the

stakes are life and death, who are nominal equals to men but perpetually sexually available to them for naturalistic representations of actual womanhood. This is symbolic violence as the naturalised embodiment of patriarchal power relations (Barratt, 2018). In chapter six, I note the strong current of performative rationality in this discussion thread, and it is worth reiterating here. Anita Sarkeesian and feminists, in general, are held up as "toxic" fakes, frauds, and hypocrites, "jealous" profiteering "con" artists, "irrelevant", "poisonous", "destructive", "stupid", mentally ill, trolls, and breast hating "terrible people" who "dislike and deny" the existence of beautiful women because they object to boob armour. The male participants in the thread, conversely, are reasonable, calm, disinterested observers who, in comment after comment, point out the rational design basis for boob armour both historically and in the fantasy worlds of various media. The right of the male gaze to reconfigure military gear as burlesque costumery is here so ingrained and common-sensical that it can be defended as engineering, as an assemblage of technical specifications, and anyone who disagrees is the most abject fool, possibly not even a mammal—which point is made with an anger emoji, suggesting disagreement is foolish enough to be enraging.

The discussion also touches on feminism as being in opposition to the silent majority of women who agree with the men on the issue of armour, just want uncomplicated access to Hollywood jobs, and are not so "defiant and disrespectful to men"—at one point, Anita Sarkeesian is labelled a misogynist for being a feminist. However, it is apparent that the participants understand women in accord with their position on a scale of conformity to patriarchal ideals. Feminists block the male gaze. Several participants, for example, object to the hypocrisy of feminists complaining about men "degrading" women with boob armour when women are happy to degrade themselves—i.e., choosing to display their own bodies in sexualised ways. The discussion quickly adds that the hypocrisy is compounded by the

probability that feminists are not happy about women displaying themselves as feminists are impossible to please.

There are no obvious women in the conversation. None identify themselves as women, speak for women, or use othering language that distinguishes them from men. The participants are men voicing their profoundly symbolically violent understandings of women to each other in a spirit of camaraderie in a venue where a woman may see it and experience the violence. The field of power has been structured by a long history of patriarchal domination, which has subsequently similarly structured the other subfields and made misogynistic symbolic violence a widespread dispositional characteristic of habitus (Bourdieu, 1996). In these comments, the practice of interaction in the social media field puts these normally somewhat invisible dispositions on display. However, they are also, through practice, reproducing historical patriarchal dominance, discursively imposing on women a responsibility to perform their femininity in male-approved ways—characterised by "piousness, temperance, decorum and self-restraint, sexual restraint, propriety and morality, neat appearance and self-protection" in order to be "worthy of respect (Barratt, 2018, p. 2). The participants in the comments all but make this point themselves in excoriating Sarkeesian and other feminists for lacking these qualities, using women "degrading" themselves to legitimise the male gaze, and creating a category of women in opposition to feminists for whose welfare they are concerned. The discussion showcases symbolic violence being used in practice as a more or less preconscious tool for "policing" femininity and presenting feminists and other unruly women who depart from traditional assumptions about women as failures deserving of misfortune (Barratt, 2018, pp. 1-9)

As with the 7News Facebook comments, the symbolic violence here is not directed at immediate participants in the thread but is temporally disembedded by the platform's native archiving. In the immediate interaction, it serves as a practice to structure the field and the

habitus of participants. However, the violence outlasts the original rounds of interaction indefinitely, delivering its harm when new agents discover and engage with the thread.

Twitter and the Social Justice Warriors. The third sampled discussion involved the fallout when a well-established online media critic with significant progressive credentials suggested the film *Raya and the Last Dragon* drew heavily from the beloved US-made television series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (see chapter five for a full summary), resulting accusations anti-Asian bias. The critic became the focus of the sort of angry mass debate that has relatively recently come to be called *cancellation* and attributed to *cancel culture*. Cancellation on social media tends to follow a loose pattern: someone is shown to have behaved or commented in a manner offensive to a vulnerable social group; they are accused in tones of moral outrage—sometimes by representatives of the offended group and sometimes by allies, people outside the group who assert they are using their cultural and social capital on behalf of the vulnerable; and they are obliged to apologise in an acceptable way or pressure is exerted for them to reduce their presence in some way or pay other prices, including consequences in the offline world such as losing their job (Bouvier, 2020). While those participating in an online cancellation are likely predominantly engaging in authentic social justice practice, they are also demonstrating and accruing "moral capital" (Bouvier, 2020, p. 10). The Twitter thread considered here demonstrates all of these characteristics. The original tweeter is repeatedly accused of racism and harming others in ways inappropriate for someone of their progressive credentials, told to accept the accusations and apologise without compounding their error by defending themselves, and pressured to withdraw from social media (described in more detail in chapter six). Shortly after the sampled discussion, the tweeter did publicly leave social media, including walking away from their successful YouTube channel.

The clearest specific examples of symbolic violence in this thread may be the original tweeter's inciting comments and a handful of follow-up remarks they subsequently made in self-defence. Their assumption that Asian content in a film involving Asian creators is drawn from a white media product woven around Asian cultural appropriation does stem from a mistaken understanding of the normative centrality of the white perspective. Dismissing raised concerns around Asian erasure as "uncharitable interpretation" shows that the symbolic violence of attributing Asian cultural material to white creators is so invisible, so natural that drawing attention to it implies an interpretive failure on the part of Asian people and their allies. Arguing that cultural appropriation does not warrant anger because nothing "is truly original" demonstrates blindness to the power differential complicated by centuries of white colonialism that separates appropriation from homage or artistic license or influence.

Another interpretation is that the critics attacking the original tweeter are enacting symbolic violence based on a mistaken belief that a feeling of offence in itself makes the words that produced the feeling intrinsically offensive, inseparable from broader contexts of social injustice. As one participant says, "impact > intent". However, this discussion thread is distinct from the other two sampled in that there is a person directly on the receiving end, and they are someone who could be considered as a social agent occupying a position within the field of power relative to the social media field. They are a longstanding social media influencer with very large audiences across multiple social media platforms. They have enormous cultural, social, and moral capital—the progressive disposition of their character being well-known—and could certainly be considered someone able to spend their capital to shape the social media field. Moreover, cancellation itself originated in the early 2010s among online queer people of colour, specifically as a means to use the accessibility and reach of social media to counter structural inequality (Clark, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2022). Even in its current form, adopted by elites and framed as a malignant attack on free speech by the

media and various celebrities, it remains mostly a form of activism motivated by a desire to give voice to vulnerable groups in an unjust world (Clark, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2022). That is, in the sampled discussion, the critics of the original tweeter lack the dominance and capital to implement symbolic violence against an influential social media user—they do not occupy appropriate positions in either the social media field or the field of power—and their goal is unlikely dominance in the sense usually employed in discussing symbolic violence. Rather, the behaviour displayed in this discussion is arguably Galtung's (1990) cultural violence, in this case, the deployment of symbolic elements of the developing ideology associated with activist segments of progressive online culture to legitimise indirect violence used against the cancelled participant. Certainly, the cancelling participants do make efforts to legitimise their claims and actions. They raise the original tweeter's progressive history to shame them by implying a fall from grace, explaining the harm the tweeter is doing and their cruelty for doing it while Asian women are (as they then were) suffering attacks offline. They detail additional harm the tweeter's refusal to apologise does and why that justifies a call for them to leave Twitter altogether. And they invoke the tweeter's status as a writer and creative to decry their inappropriate ignorance of Asian genres, creators, and stories, to support calls for them to remain silent, and so on.

As in the other sampled threads, the symbolic violence here does not visibly impact participants in the immediate discussion. While the anonymous nature of social media makes it impossible to rule out the presence of Asian participants in the discussion, there are few signs in the language used to indicate that this is anything other than a battle between the original tweeter and those who agree with them and the allies of vulnerable groups. Recalling that cancellation has become, in part, a tool of elites used on behalf of vulnerable groups, the contest here may be between different fractions of the dominant class confronting each other across multiple fields—the field of power, racial fields, and the social media field—using

mismatched forms of capital. The original tweeter attempted to deal with the incident from a traditional position within the field of power structured by whiteness rather than harnessing their decisive capital in the social media field. However, they confronted opponents armed with significant moral capital, occupying positions in a social media field at least partly structured by the practice of non-white activists, where a white body provided devalued capital and discreditable credentials.

I have noted the strong ties the other two sampled discussions have to structures of symbolic violence in offline social fields rather than in the social media field itself. The cultural violence in the third group may point to the third discussion being embedded more directly in the social media field, originating in tweeted comments by a social media celebrity and invoking a response—cancellation—which evolved in online spaces. Consequently, the violence here makes visible the nascency of the social media field, where the structures and dispositions of cancellation have yet to be fully incorporated within the field or the habitus of participants because there has not yet been time for them to acquire the acceptance and invisibility of common sense, and the field of power remains relatively fluid as there has been insufficient time for social agents to fill positions there and act to solidify and reproduce their power. Instead, participants in the social media field are engaged in the strategic contention for dominance that characterises fields generally.

Conclusion

This chapter analyses the three sampled violent online discussions from Bourdieu's theoretical perspective, focusing on his concept of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is unquestionably common throughout, relating primarily to race and gender. However, the violence is somewhat diffuse, not being presented to participants in any of the immediate discussions, instead reflecting dispositions derived from historically constituted symbolic

violence external to the social media field, serving to structure practices within the social media field to reproduce symbolic violence there and in the habitus of participants, and lingering indefinitely in the field due to the temporal disembedding built into social media platforms to work harm on participants who discover the conversation threads in the future.

One of the discussions—the cancellation of an online media critic for remarks perceived as anti-Asian—contains less symbolic violence but shows evidence of considerable cultural violence deployed within the thread against the original tweeter to legitimise attack strategies associated with current approaches to cancellation. This discussion is more deeply rooted in social media than the others, as the conflict originates there and involves debate over expectations for the behaviour of online celebrities using social media platforms conducted with the online celebrity most directly involved. Moreover, the act of cancellation is a relatively new phenomenon that evolved online as a tool for leveraging the affordances of social media to give voice to those suffering from social injustice. Therefore, it seems likely that this discussion suggests the relative newness of the social media field and the possibility that social media itself remains a contested space where the strategic struggle between social agents has not yet structured traditional modes of symbolic violence into the field itself or in the habitus of participants. Consequently, there is a mixture of cultural and symbolic violence, and a significant amount of symbolic violence has been constituted offline. The way the conflict in the Twitter thread played out suggests this mixing may result in mismatches between fields occupied, useful capitals and dispositions to employ, with the potential to disrupt some traditional forms of power relation.

The next chapter will perform the liquidation stage of Schinkel's methodology. Findings from the three discussion chapters, each reflecting a different theoretical perspective

at a different level of analysis, will be meshed into a deliberately imperfect, big-picture view of online violence, and the results will provide insight into violence itself and answers to my research questions.

Chapter Nine

Fractured Realism: Liquidating Online Violence

The theoretical methodology I employ in this thesis is liquidation, as developed by sociologist Willem Schinkel. I describe Schinkel's liquidation-based approach to understanding violence in detail in chapter five, outlining its use as my methodology. Briefly, liquidation takes for granted that complex objects cannot be perfectly understood as a single aspect seen from one perspective but are best understood by examining multiple aspects of the object from a relevant perspective called a profile of that aspect (Schinkel, 2010). In my research, I have adapted the spirit of this idea to explore a single aspect—violent online behaviour *a*s violence—from multiple perspectives, each operating at a different level of analysis. Both Schinkel's original approach and my adaptation allow for a liquid exploration of the object rather than one ossified by reliance on seeing a single thing in one way that comes to be seen as common sense (Schinkel, 2010). As I argue in earlier chapters, particularly chapter five, when an aspect of the object has been analysed from more than one theoretical perspective, or when multiple aspects have been analysed from a solitary perspective, the results may be combined—again, liquidated—to achieve a broader, more complicated, and more inclusive understanding than might have resulted (Schinkel, 2010). This is a deliberately imperfect, multi-dimensional, and non-monolithic view of an aspect that Schinkel's (2010) theory calls fractured realism. It proceeds from the assumption that a mosaic of the forest conveys more about the forest and its processes and relationships than would a photograph of a tree.

In the preceding chapters, I have used theoretical work by Erving Goffman, Randall Collins, and Pierre Bourdieu—representing the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis, respectively—as profiles to investigate hostile online behaviour considered as an aspect of

violence. My aim, as per my research question, is to assess the usefulness of the liquidation approach to violence research and achieve insights into online violence enriched by multi-level analysis and the richness of the liquidation approach itself.

In this chapter, I consider the strengths and weaknesses each profile offers to my analysis and outline the findings of each. I then combine the individual findings and present the results of the liquidation: a view of online violence from multiple perspectives at once. Lastly, I offer my assessment of the liquidation methodology, that it is a useful, flexible, inclusive tool for building insights into violence.

Pieces of the Puzzle: The Levels of Analysis in Isolation

There is value in researching a topic at any level of analysis, even where that topic is as complex as violence. As Schinkel (2010) points out, any theoretical perspective can reveal useful and insightful things visible to that perspective when a topic is seen in that way. Difficulties only arise when people forget a particular perspective only activates an equally particular aspect of a topic, leaving other aspects on the topic's aspect horizon unseen (Schinkel, 2010). When this process goes unexamined by researchers, complex topics like violence can become simplified to a single, common-sense view of them, and victims of excluded violence can be made invisible to social science and society itself (Schinkel, 2010). The obvious example of this process is when influential figures in the field—such as Randall Collins—strongly assert the only valid definition of violence is direct physical harm. That definition excludes treating as violence the situation described in chapter eight, where institutional racism prevented a young Aboriginal woman from receiving health care resulting in the death of her and her unborn child. While it is possible to study this incident as racism or from a healthcare perspective, defining it away from the field of violence research makes it

harder to appreciate it as colonial power and violence patterned into social systems, for example, or to see it as a racialised form of everyday violence contributing to the maintenance of those systems.

As outlined in chapter three, this is a contributing cause to the micro-macro problem, an issue facing the young field of the sociology of violence—and social science in general—in which research too often clusters around micro-level or macro-level understandings of violence and its causes without considering the impacts of other levels (Hartmann, 2017). For example, Collins' focus on situational violence yields numerous insights into how situational dynamics set violence in motion but fails to consider how macro-level social patterns contribute to situational dynamics (Schinkel, 2010) or even to explore how his own meso-level interaction ritual chain theory might bridge and chart the relations between the other levels. An outcome of either/or thinking about violence and levels of analysis is to leave violence undefined except by assumptions that it is a thing made from power, structure, interaction, or subjectivity, all of which are restrictively common-sensical to particular theoretical perspectives and all of which exclude important aspects of what violence can be (Schinkel, 2010). None of this is problematic if researchers are, where necessary, mindful of the problem and allow it to inform their research design and subsequent discussion of the limitations of their findings. However, a greater number of multi-level studies might also serve to make the limitations lurking in the micro-macro divide more visible and ultimately help to bridge the gap.

Goffman, Collins, and Bourdieu as Individual Theoretical Profiles

My empirical research for this thesis draws on three theoretical profiles, each representing one of the levels of analysis. Each contributed unique strengths and weaknesses—generally derived from the level of analysis each predominantly revolves around—to understanding the findings from my deliberately limited empirical research. This is a key point of the liquidation methodology even as I have adapted it: to assemble a multi-dimensional view of a complex object by examining a selection of its different aspects. For the purpose of my thesis, I achieve the same effect by viewing a single aspect from a selection of profiles. The approach is similar to the depth given to the observed world by binocular vision.

Goffman. My chosen micro-sociological profile is Goffman. As an expert in how societies and selves are shaped by meaning-filled interaction at the individual level, his theories prove useful for analysing exchanges between small groups using social media and the symbols and meanings at play in their discussions and help to make sense of the interplay between the offline and digital variants of the interaction order. Additionally, he contributes awareness of individual participants as both lone performers and connected, sacred interactants in a ritual game of face-work nurturing status and social stability. This highlights the lack of collaborative face-work in conflictual social media discussions and that online violence is often delivered in the form of prevalent aggressive face-work.

However, Goffman's writings tend to elide macro-level details; they are less effective at revealing specifics of the impact of historically constituted social structures on the digital interaction order. Many elements—such as socially scripted ritual exchanges—are presumed to enter the interaction order via socialisation and, therefore, from society. But his work can be vague on the characteristics of specific social structures and how those characteristics arise

and are maintained. It is more than possible to use Goffman's theories to analyse how, say, racism in a social structure impacts a given set of interactions, but it is less useful to direct his perspective to understanding the structure itself.

Lastly, while very occasionally mentioned, violence is not explicitly theorised in Goffman's writings. While I identify violence in its indirect mode in aggressive face-work via Schinkel's definition of violence as reduction of being, there is nothing in his works used here to suggest he would have thought of aggressive face-work in that way.

Collins. Even as a meso-level profile in isolation, Collins' theories begin to bridge the micro- and macro-levels. His work is part of the symbolic interactionist tradition, often explicitly focused on the same individual and small-group-oriented interaction order developed by Goffman. Indeed, Collins (2008, 2009) classifies his theory of violence as micro-situational to the extent of including that phrase in the title of the book which presents it. However, his emphasis on the situation as the most significant unit of interaction begins a move towards the meso-level that his interaction ritual chain theory—which threads individual situations into chains and aggregates chains into macro-level patterns he all but calls structure—completes. Consequently, Collins' work offers an understanding of Goffman's encounters as interaction rituals experienced through group membership. These create symbols, beliefs, moral values, feelings of solidarity or dominance, and emotional energy. The intensity of emotional energy then shapes the characteristics of symbols, beliefs, moral anger, etc., and distributes them along chains of interactions to shape individual identities, future situations, and social structures. In the data, this illuminates the extent to which social media violence derives from offline group membership and is merely amplified by social media affordances such as anonymity.

However, as useful as this perspective on violent social media interaction is, Collins' (2004, p. 26) seeming aversion to macro-level explanations—he states his preference that

macro-level patterns formed by aggregated interaction ritual chains are not called structure, for example, but only the "macro"—omits specifics of how structure operates and how it is both structured by individual behaviour and structuring of individual identity. The macro level is brought into existence by and plays a role in organising situational dynamics, but the situation remains—and should be—centred (Collins, 2004). Similarly, while his theory of violence is one of the most comprehensive available and an excellent tool for understanding why a simple situation like an online discussion does or does not become violent, Collins' insistence that violence is only direct, physical, and between people denies the existence of structural, cultural, and symbolic violence, including the online violence that is the subject of my research. This is a significant limitation to the theory as an individual perspective.

Bourdieu. The concept of structural violence put forward by Bourdieu is another of the field's leading theories of violence, frequently used and cited in the literature. Though it focuses on indirect, non-physical harm, it does not reject other forms of violence in the way Collins (2008) rejects symbolic violence in his writings. Rather, Bourdieu's work offers symbolic violence as an exploration of one way dominant social groups can inscribe harm upon marginalised ones—structuring society in such a way that dominance is preserved and marginalisation comes to be understood as representing inherent flaws in the marginalised.

Combined with Bourdieu's ideas of field and habitus as structured, contentious social spaces and embodied patterns of dispositions comprising individual identity, respectively, symbolic violence explains how violence can exist in a non-physical space such as social media and that social structure puts it there. Moreover, it identifies a process by which values embedded in structure—in social fields—become violence embodied in participants and how violent behaviour conversely enters and shapes the fields. As with Collins, this perspective makes it possible to see the external influences predominantly driving online violence and

how they operate to amplify online violence and create participants whose actions are routinely shaped by violent dispositions.

That said, Bourdieu's written work is weak on details of how field and habitus shape each other and symbolic violence. How specifically does this shaping happen, and what specific characteristics of a given field or habitus give rise to specific observed differences in structures, behaviours, and identities? At the level of my data, Bourdieusian theory can locate racist interaction in historical structures associated with colonisation, for example, without explaining why some exchanges deliver their harm as humour and some as cruel abuse.

The Liquidation

Examining my data set, each of the three theoretical profiles sees online violence in its own light: aggressive face-work; pseudo-violence enabled by social media anonymity as a distancing pathway around confrontational tension and fear; and symbolic, structural, and cultural violence imported from offline social fields shaping online habitus and a burgeoning social media field of power. As detailed in the discussion chapters, each profile's analysis is interesting and informative in isolation. However, as outlined in the previous section, each misses important aspects of how online violence comes into being and is shaped by forces and processes at all levels of analysis.

Moreover, Schinkel (2010) argues in *Aspects of Violence* that seeing an object as one thing and then as another highlights otherwise unseen relationships between the two perspectives. Viewing a dog as first a pet and then a service animal brings out the dog's individual roles but also the relationship between them and hints at a more nuanced relationship between animals and humans than either individual role would.

In the same way, liquidating the three profiles in accord with Schinkel's methodology not only allows the strengths of each perspective to compensate for the weaknesses of the others but also highlights how these forces and processes interrelate across the levels of analysis and with the broader social world. The result is a mosaic view of online violence and the multi-dimensional big-picture view Schinkel calls fractured realism. As profiles, Bourdieu's theories provide the structured, contested social space in which violent interaction is embedded. Goffman's bring the sacred individuals and their ritual exchanges that break down into the violence of aggressive face-work. And Collins' weave through structures and individual identities a network of interaction ritual chains like blood vessels conveying the beliefs, symbols, moral anger, and emotional energy fuelling violence throughout the whole.

Goffman and Bourdieu. The social scripts, values, and dispositions towards aggressive face-work observed to be at work in the selected discussions—or presumed to be there while using Goffman as a profile—can be argued to originate in Bourdieu's social fields and embodied through practice as habitus. That is, the socialisation Goffman's (1961) writings consider critical to the unfolding of the interaction order, contributing behavioural expectations that shape social performances and audience judgement of them, and which provides scripts for the ritual interchanges that stabilise interaction and correct social errors, can be mapped to the processes of fields structuring habitus and being structured by habitus described by Bourdieu.

When a participant in the selected YouTube discussion complains that women have become disobedient and too defensive about being oppressed, they reveal a disposition from their habitus embodied through practice in a field of power historically structured by patriarchy but shaping the line they are taking within a Goffman-style small-group interaction. Participants in the sampled Twitter thread respond to the original tweeter's apology with criticism and instruction on how to apologise correctly. The original tweeter has

attempted a corrective interchange drawn from a traditional social script acquired through practice in social fields predating the social media field and of dubious value there, leaving the social disruption of their original comments uncorrected. Through contested communication in the still-forming social media field, they are exposed to the new corrective scripts beginning to structure the social media field and the habitus of those interacting there.

  Bourdieu and Collins. By drawing attention to the source of the socialisation, Bourdieu's contribution makes apparent that important aspects of online violence originate offline, something which Collins' interaction ritual chain theory supports. This theory also suggests a link between socialisation and membership in groups external to the discussion— groups that are, themselves, participants in fields and possessed of habitus. Group-mediated interaction rituals create emotional energy that charges powerful feelings of group solidarity, adherence to group beliefs, and loyalty to symbols important to the group (Collins, 2004). Where the group feels their beliefs and symbols have been profaned, emotional energy from group-centred rituals also creates and amplifies moral anger towards the profaning group (Collins, 2004) and motivates violence. The situational dynamics of a group ritual dictate levels of emotional energy produced, and the interplay of emotional energy and situational dynamics significantly inflect the characteristics of behavioural responses (Collins, 2004). Power rituals—the point of which is to increase emotional energy for dominant participants while crushing the emotional energy of marginalised participants, as described in chapter seven (Collins, 2004)—are a delivery mechanism for symbolic violence but also infuse it into group beliefs, symbols, and moral crusades. All of these ritual elements are then distributed from the originating ritual to each participant and through them into subsequent social interactions along interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004).

Goffman, Collins, Bourdieu, and Multi-level Online Violence. Together, the three profiles provide a more complete view of computer-mediated violence. Socialisation occurs in rituals mediated by groups embedded in offline social fields, creating emotional energy and important elements of the interaction order contributing to online violence and transporting them online along interaction ritual chains. These elements fuel and shape aggressive face-work and symbolic violence between sacred individuals interacting in the social media field. Additional characteristics of the interaction are determined by access to capital within the field. And social media interactions can be understood to structure the habitus of participants towards more violent dispositions and the field itself to be more rewarding of violent behaviour.

Several additional insights mentioned earlier come from understanding violence in the data as a multi-level system of processes and relations from this perspective. Firstly, consider the observation that face-work in the sampled discussions was overwhelmingly aggressive—completely lacking cooperation except for in-group cooperation in conducting aggressive face-work against/ competing identity groups. This can be considered in light of the observation that interaction ritual outputs derived from offline group membership entering social media interaction along ritual chains to shape subsequent situational dynamics. Consequently, the possibility is that Goffman's cooperative but sacred individual is evolving into the competitive *homo economicus* individual of late neoliberal capitalism, to the detriment of cooperative face-work online. Aggressive face-work between competing individuals precludes completed corrective rituals, rendering online interaction more volatile. Then, because distancing created by the anonymity built into social media offers a pathway around confrontational tension and fear, online volatility transitions more easily to violence.

Secondly, as alluded to earlier, Collins' interaction ritual chains become a pipeline for moving around the inputs and outputs of interaction rituals—of the social situations that both

Goffman (1961, 1967) and Collins (2004, 2008) argue in their work are of key significance to the interaction order itself. Goffman's encounters and face-work and Collins' situational violence, even Bourdieu's adversarial struggles between social agents in fields, all occur within bounded interactions recognisable as Collins' situations—which he treats as roughly synonymous with interaction rituals (on the basis of Goffman's argument that interaction between sacred individuals requires a ritual quality to create, preserve, and repair the sacred selves involved).

This is important to my research because it explains how beliefs, symbols, and moral outrage generated offline in first-order—face-to-face—interaction rituals—are distributed beyond the initiating ritual via discussions and other exchanges—second-order interaction— throughout participants' social circles (Collins, 2004). These ritual outputs also enter individuals' thoughts and identities as internal—third-order—interactions (Collins, 2004). How successfully symbols, beliefs, and anger spread and become internalised is determined by how frequently interaction rituals that energise them with emotional energy recur and how intensely they produce emotional energy (Collins, 2004). As social agents move through lives comprised of chains of interaction rituals, they choose social situations to participate in or avoid (Collins, 2004). An evolutionary process makes successful interaction rituals more attractive to potential participants, skewing participation in their favour so that successful rituals do recur and unsuccessful ones do not, and the outputs of the successful rituals predominate in moving along interaction ritual chains to structure future situations, selves, and behaviour (Collins, 2004).

For example, in the sampled discussion critiquing feminist media commentator Anita Sarkeesian, considerable misogyny and personal animosity are vigorously directed against Sarkeesian. The moral beliefs and outrage threaded through the discussion and the specific misogynistic language employed can be traced to previous interactions around Sarkeesian's

participation in Gamergate, a previous skirmish in the ongoing culture war. Gamergate involved Sarkeesian and other feminists critiquing sexism in games and game design, sparking a fierce backlash from male gamers. In the current context, this demonstrates how my sampled violent discussions are structured by symbols, emotions, and emotional energy created by earlier chained interaction rituals (the interactions making up Gamergate). These constituted first-order solidarity among men opposed to feminist involvement in gaming and equipped them with symbols—a shared misogynistic language framing their interpretation of their experience—and the ferocity of Gamergate charged them with intense emotional energy. Second-order interactions spread and repetitively re-energised the outputs of the original Gamergate interactions even as the symbols and moral outrage became embodied in participants through the third-order interactions of their thoughts, memories, and other mental processes. The outputs travelled through social situation after social situation to enter my sampled discussion and structure a far later response to Sarkeesian's work as intensely misogynistic and infused with anger amplified to symbolic violence as social media anonymity offered a built-in pathway around confrontational tension/fear.

It must be acknowledged that numerous other interactions influence the behaviour observed in the sampled discussion. All the interactions in the ritual chains comprising the lives of participants will converge in some way—each of greater or lesser significance depending upon the emotional intensity of the originating social interactions—in this YouTube comments thread. Many of these could probably be teased out of the data. However, the conflation of Sarkeesian's current and previous conflicts described above exemplifies how Collins' interaction ritual chain theory can take an aggressive Goffmanian encounter and explode it to show its inputs and outputs and how they mingle to define the characteristics of the situational dynamics at play. The potential exists to take particular social situations and

trace as many inputs as possible to gain a high-definition, multi-dimensional understanding of what is happening within.

Thirdly, interaction ritual chains show the same promise for particularising discussion of Bourdieu's fields and habitus. From Bourdieu's perspective, fields are distinct social spaces where social agents engage in adversarial interaction in pursuit of, using, or suffering the consequences of lack of capital (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Bourdieu, 2020; Thomson, 2008). An agent's success in a given field is linked to the amounts and types of capital to which they have access that dictate their position within the field of power (Bourdieu, 1974, 2013[1972]; Bourdieu, 2020; Thomson, 2008). The field of power is interlaced with other social fields, and someone well-positioned there is able to dominate a field's interactions (Bourdieu, 2020; Thomson, 2008).

As agents interact in a field, their experiences become embodied as habitus—dispositions adhering to their identity that shape their behaviour, even what they consider to be possible for them to do (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Deere, 2008; Maton, 2008). With time and use, these become for social agents unquestioned, preconscious commonsense understandings, or doxa (Deere, 2008). Symbolic violence, considered as harm done by dominant groups by persuading themselves and vulnerable groups that their disadvantage is natural inferiority (Bourdieu, 2013[1972]; Schubert, 2008), can be seen here as made up of doxa lodged within an agent's interactively constructed habitus.

Crucially, fields and habitus are mutually "structured and structuring" (Maton, 2008, pp. 51-53). Both are structured entities: habitus structured by experience in the field and field structured by meaning imposed on it by social agents' perceptions rooted in their habitus (Maton, 2008, pp. 51-53). For the most part, Bourdieu's writings locate entities such as field, capital, doxa, habitus, and symbolic violence and delineate how they relate and interact to create effects but give little insight into why a field is one thing rather than another or why

one behaviour springs from habitus instead of one of many alternatives. In both cases, the answer lies in how a field or habitus is structured: it is what it is made to be.

Some consider this one of Bourdieu's theoretical failings: an attempt to be both objectivist and subjectivist that is merely objectivist once an agent's choices are traced back to structured dispositions in their habitus (King, 2000). Bourdieu presents habitus as a structure arising from practice and practice in distinctly subjectivist terms as behaviour "improvised" in the moment, while the social game is underway, based on the agent's "virtuoso" understanding of their social world and not at all on any arbitrary rule-set dictated by structure (Bourdieu, 2013[1972], pp. 13, 57; King, 2000). However, no clear pathway in habitus leads down to subjectively directed agency operating at the micro-level and returning to budge the objective edifices of social structure (King, 2000): though it emerges from *practice*, habitus is a "structured and structuring *structure* [emphasis added]" (Bourdieu, 1994d, as cited in Maton, 2008, p. 51), and it is as an objective structure it is most often understood to shape agents' behaviour (King, 2000). Bourdieu (2013[1972]) and King (2000) both attribute this to an objectivist tendency in the social sciences.

Bourdieu's (2013[1972]) suggested solution, elaborated by King (2000), is for researchers to maintain awareness that the maps they draw of social structures from their observations capture and reify a moment in time for societies that are somewhat fluid in that they are constantly renewed through meaningful interaction between individuals, without losing sight of the reality that individual interactions are comprised of learned behaviours and therefore somewhat structured. This does address the issue but is not much of an improvement on the basic position of symbolic interactionism that society shapes self, self shapes behaviour, and behaviour shapes society. It is very similar to the version of this cycle laid out by structural symbolic interactionism, which adds to the basic version a reminder that society pre-exists and acts upon the self in the early parts of the cycle (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Regardless, Bourdieu and King's solution says nothing about how the inputs of these processes move about the system and cross levels of analysis or why the outputs are what they are.

Liquidation makes it possible to address the objectivism in Bourdieu's theories in a more concrete and nuanced way, merging his ideas with Collins' interaction ritual chain theory to flip the picture. In this mode, field and habitus explicitly begin below, in the micro-realm. Bourdieu's virtuoso social agents are Goffman's sacred individuals, and their practice is taking place in Collins' situations as interaction rituals chaining together over time. As agents choose successful rituals over unsuccessful ones, their choices pattern the chains and, across lifetimes and populations, the chains aggregate into macro-level patterns constituting structure—and Bourdieu's fields. Fields still give some structure to habitus and, therefore, behaviour, but micro-level practice continues to feed upwards to pattern the macro-level fields, keeping the whole system semi-fluid. It is analogous to tectonic plates in Earth's crust and convection cells in Earth's mantle: a rocky planet but in constantly circulating motion.

Collins (2004) details the ingredients for interaction rituals. These include group assembly/co-presence isolated from outsiders, mutual focus of attention, shared mood, transient emotional stimulus, genetic factors, and unpredictable factors such as the impact of drug or alcohol use (Collins, 2004, p. 67). Each of these is a variable: differences in their characteristics from ritual to ritual produce concrete variations in situational dynamics and the intensity or success of the ritual (Collins, 2004). An example of this is the suggestion that weak co-presence in online groups reduces the emotional energy an online interaction can produce. Alternatively, shared mood, transient emotional stimulus, and drugs might add considerable ritual intensity to a successful party. There are four additional variables relating to how individuals participate in rituals, and differences in these also alter the dynamics of a given situation (Collins, 2004). Ritual intensity is determined by the level of collective

effervescence involved (Collins, 2004). Central/peripheral participation refers to the agent's significance within the group—whether they are a star performer or barely a member (Collins, 2004). Social density is how frequently the group meets to repeat its rituals (Collins, 2004). Finally, social diversity speaks to whether groups are cosmopolitan or local—that is, whether participants are diverse and constantly changing or confined to only certain people (Collins, 2004). A local interaction ritual is more likely to rigorously police its sacred beliefs and symbols and experience greater outrage at profaners (Collins, 2004). However, a cosmopolitan ritual with heightened ritual intensity might lead to the same results. Mapping the precise interplay of these variables within a situation provides detailed and nuanced insight into why a given situation is the way it is and why people behave as they do in that situation (Collins, 2004). As one relevant example, a high level of entrainment amongst participants, arising from a strong mutual focus of attention, would create intense confrontational tension and fear should the situation become conflictual, likely preventing the and outbreak of violence. Turning down the volume on any of these ingredients would increase the risk of violence.

Variables determine the characteristics of rituals and the intensity of emotional energy governing the second- and third-order distribution of ritual outputs—beliefs, symbols, moral outrage—along interaction ritual chains into other interaction rituals. As chains aggregate into patterns and patterns into structure, the variables shaping micro-level practice are, therefore, also shaping macro-level fields and habitus in ways that can be analysed to add a specific dimension of *why*. For example, in the sample 7News Facebook discussion about the murder of a young Melbourne man, much was assumed about the perpetrator, the victim, and the crime based on the race of the victim revealed in the accompanying photography. People spoke of their fear of crime in situations they had experienced involving non-white immigrants. Others saw the photograph and the race of the subject and assumed he was the

perpetrator. Again, this is a complex context shaped by multiple factors. It is possible to attribute the symbolic violence in the discussion to an Australian social field historically shaped by colonial racism. Likewise, it could be argued that traditional media and politicians firmly ensconced in the field of power routinely engaging in the cultural violence of framing non-white people and immigrants as criminals have inflected Australian habitus with racism. But examining the data in the terms outlined above would see it all unfolding within and interconnected by an intricate weaving of interaction ritual chains. Here, symbolic violence arises at the micro-level in historical practices, the outputs of which flow into interaction ritual chains aggregating in Australian social fields in which whiteness is a form of social capital. Whiteness as capital produces interaction rituals lacking cosmopolitanism, centring white participants, intensifying white solidarity and moral outrage around racial issues, and empowering white power rituals, producing racialised doxa and habitus. Outputs from these offline rituals flow along chains into online discussions, their exact characteristics combining to make each discussion a unique interaction ritual in its own right. While the dynamics of the sampled discussions are predominantly shaped by offline group membership, it is noteworthy that throughout the data, all forms of discriminatory behaviour are challenged with varying degrees of vigour, and there are signs of authenticity and tolerance acquiring power as forms of capital within the social media field—as detailed in earlier discussion about the sampled Twitter thread. If so, this is micro-level practice occurring through interaction rituals in the social media field visibly producing and energising new first-order solidarity, beliefs and symbols and chaining them into the fabric of the social media field, its field of power, and back out to add new patterns to the originating offline fields. By using Collins' interaction ritual chain theory in this context, it is possible to see the agency of those pursuing social justice online within the structure of fields, doxa, and habitus and observe the moment when practice is weaving new patterns into them. It is also possible to see the structure of fields not

as high-level products of a struggle between unnuanced identity groups but as, in this example, complex assemblages of ritual ingredients and outputs, each shaped by the specific dynamics of specific micro-level situations and their interactions. The elements of any given social field that might be presumed similar in other social fields—such as racism—may be expressed in that field quite differently than others based on the specifics of the micro-level practices giving rise to the aggregate interaction ritual chains comprising the field.

Liquidation as a Tool for Violence Research

Much of this chapter is theoretical, even speculative, but it does seem a logically arguable extension of this liquidation performed using these theoretical profiles. The aim is not to reformulate or even critique the theories underlying the profiles. Rather, it is to approach the liquidation with the intent of mining the combined profiles for insights that might address my research questions: can certain forms of online interaction be considered *as* violence, and, if so, how, and is Schinkel's violence theory and liquidation methodology a useful tool for violence research? In the first section, the fractured realism produced by liquidation exposes the multi-level nature of online violence processes and traces some of their inputs and outputs to the offline world. The second section sets out to show how liquidation can weave a single multi-part theoretical profile that is stronger than the sum of its parts, as carefully chosen profiles compensate for each other's weaknesses and assumptions.

My discussion of using Collins' theories to address the objectivist issues some attribute to Bourdieu's work is a bare-bones effort in that direction, and the two theorists are not a perfect fit. Collins, as I have pointed out, explicitly dismisses Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence as nonsense. However, the purpose of liquidation is not to make new

perfect and immutable truths. Instead, I hope the combination sketches the way liquidation jury-rigs a new tool for seeing an aspect of violence that makes it possible to see more of the aspect from more angles than either would alone. Using Goffman's work alone to examine my data, I might see only a sideshow in the broader interaction order weakened by technologically mediated co-presence. With Collins' theories, I might observe nothing, except perhaps a little performative bombast that the lack of co-presence precludes from ever being violence. And relying solely on Bourdieu's ideas might show me only symbolically violent practice in a social media field shaped by discriminatory doxa and habitus. It is using them together that gives me a mosaic capturing a multi-level system of sacred individuals and aggressive face-work, situational and symbolic violence, fields, and habitus, shaped by the inputs and outputs of interaction rituals, held together by a circulatory system woven from interaction ritual chains and enflamed by social media affordances such as disinhibition and deindividuation.

Liquidation as a methodology creates the multi-dimensional view I describe above. By liberating me from overreliance on a single rigid view and so beyond the boundaries of commonsense assumptions about violence and how or even whether it operates at different levels of analysis, liquidation let me lay the groundwork for an expanded understanding of online violence and its attendant processes. Moreover, my adaptation of liquidation to apply multiple theoretical perspectives to analysing a single aspect of violence confers the added benefit—as described at length above—of bringing into close contact disparate theories and concepts that would not normally be associated, providing opportunities for them to compensate for each other's weaknesses or provide otherwise useful insights. For these reasons, I strongly argue that liquidation is a useful methodology with a great deal to offer violence sociology.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

In this chapter, I end my thesis by presenting a precis of my core research findings as they relate to my overall research aims and specific questions. I then address the value and significance of my findings to sociology, the sociology of violence, and other researchers. Thereafter, I consider the limitations of my research and how these and other aspects of my findings suggest opportunities to expand on what I have done here in future research.

Findings in Relation to Research Aims

My study aimed to take a theoretical approach to understanding violent behaviour online *as* violence and not as some merely ancillary aspect of another phenomenon, such as cyberbullying or social injustice. I chose a theoretical approach with the intent of addressing research gaps in the sociology of violence. There were too few multi-level analyses. There were too few studies treating online conflict as violence and trying to understand it using theories and methodologies of violence. Not enough studies have explored the relationship between online violence and the broader social world. Moreover, too few studies approached the subject inclusively and flexibly with regard to defining violence. With this last in mind, I selected Schinkel's deliberately inclusive and flexible theory of violence to build my thesis around. Because few studies seem to have applied Schinkel's work in this manner, I identified

this as an additional subject gap and added testing the usefulness of the theory and methodology to my research aims.

To reiterate, my research questions are:

- Can certain forms of online interaction be considered as violence, and if so, how?

- What relationships exist between factors at all three levels of analysis and online violence?

- What relationships exist between online violence and other aspects of the social world, such as interaction, identity formation, and group membership?

- Do Schinkel's violence theory and liquidation methodology offer anything of value to the field of violence research?

My findings suggest online violence *is* violence, with evidence of structural, symbolic, and cultural violence apparent throughout the data. The theorist most resistant to the idea of online violence counting as violence is Randall Collins, who explicitly asserts that symbolic violence is meaningless and reveals its proponents' ignorance of the real nature of violence. However, central ideas from Collins' theory of violence—such as the role of confrontational tension and fear—are exemplified in the data and useful for understanding them. From this, I infer that online violence can be understood *as* violence simply by letting go of the arbitrary insistence that the only real violence is the commonsense conception of it as direct, interpersonal, and resulting in physical harm.

Additional findings indicate that online violence is best understood not as a single thing or event occurring in a single space at a single level of analysis. Instead, it is a complex phenomenon operating across multiple sites and levels of analysis. At the micro-level, online violence is a phenomenon of social media as a performance space supporting aggressive face-work between Goffmanian sacred individuals inflected by contemporary neoliberalist values

of individualisation. However, at the meso- and macro-level, online violence has its roots offline, where group participation fuelled by physical co-presence creates beliefs, symbols, and moral outrage imported along interaction ritual chains into social media discussions. There, the imported elements are incorporated into aggressive face-work, which social media affordances such as anonymity amplify into violence, the destructiveness of which is partly determined by the intensity of emotional energy imported and internal to the discussion itself. The multi-level nature of violence sees it shaping individuals and their behaviour, the situational dynamics of chains of interactions, and the structures of multiple social fields and the embodied dispositions and doxa of habitus. Additionally, there is evidence in the findings for online violence playing a role in the contestation of traditional ritual behaviour—such as corrective rituals scripted through socialisation to help stabilise the interaction order—in favour of new scripts arising from the digital practices of groups forming and growing in solidarity online.

Furthermore, my findings support the argument that Schinkel's theory and methodology are useful tools for researching violence in general and online violence in particular. The inclusive and flexible fractured realist perspective offered by the theory and methodology made the multi-level, multi-site nature of online violence visible even from the analysis of limited data. They also illuminated the flow of ritual ingredients and outputs within individuals—shaping their identities—and around sites and levels. While any particular theoretical approach would have yielded worthwhile insights, Schinkel's provided a bigger picture, a more multi-dimensional view.

Significance of My Research

My research contributes to opening up violent practice online for study *as* violence in line with the subject gap noted in my literature review and with Schinkel's (2010) observation that there is a dearth of research dealing with violence itself. This is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, violence is pervasive and harmful, even deadly in its effects, and as an implicit part of human being, it can be expected to fill online spaces that are increasingly part of the interaction order. Indeed, the finding that elements of online violence originate offline suggests social media may be an inherently violent space where, in accord with Bourdieu's idea of the conservation of violence, violence repressed offline can reappear to do further harm. Whatever can be done to address the harms of violence in the social media space is beneficial. Secondly, it supports Schinkel's (2010) argument that rigid and exclusive definitions of violence in research do violence by making some forms of violence and those who suffer it less visible. Encouraging researchers to approach online violence as what it is helps to make that form of violence and those who experience it more accessible to understanding. Thirdly, it promotes the possibility of researchers choosing to bring to bear on online violence existing theoretical and methodological tools for understanding violence that may give new and more detailed insight into how violence manifests online. Improved understanding is arguably the best hope for reducing the harm violence does.

Moreover, the study helped narrow other subject gaps identified in the literature review chapters of this thesis. It adds a multi-level study to violence research. This has been identified by Hartmann (2017) as constitutive of the micro-macro problem in the field. Reducing this issue promotes more rounded approaches to violence unconstrained by arbitrary or non-reflexive adherence to single-level theoretical or methodological perspectives. As described above, my study adds another to the sparse list dealing with

violence itself and treating online violent behaviour *as* violence. Moreover, my research adds a study employing Schinkel's (2010) theory of violence and liquidation methodology. His theory of violence offers a profoundly inclusive definition of violence as the reduction of being and employs liquidation to maximise theoretical flexibility (Schinkel, 2010). Reducing subject gaps expands human knowledge to the benefit of research generally. In addition, demonstrating the usefulness of Schinkel's work helps to draw attention to a productive theory and methodology that other researchers could apply to the overall benefit of the sociology of violence.

Significantly, my study highlights that online violence is comprised of multi-level and multi-situated processes and phenomena. Inputs such as group membership and participation begin offline and flower into violence online through individual practice, the transport of inputs around the system via interaction ritual chains and structuring of macro-level fields and habitus. Helping to increase awareness of this is critically important to understanding online violence as it suggests single-level, single-site perspectives will glimpse only a narrow piece of what violence is online, where it comes from, how it is maintained, and how it changes the selves of those impacted by it and the structure of underlying social fields. Again, this does not render single-dimensional studies of violence invalid. Nevertheless, multi-level studies such as mine increase awareness that choosing an exclusively micro- or macro-perspective should be a conscious choice to achieve clear aims and not an accident. Contributing in a small way to the intentionality of research design can only be beneficial to the field. Additionally, this aspect of my study clarifies some of the ways online violence relates to other aspects of the social world, most notably membership and participation in offline groups constituted historically—those emerging from Australia's history of colonisation—or around identity—such as race, gender, sexual preference, or ethnicity. This addresses a lack of relational exploration in the field of violence sociology identified by Walby (2013).

Ultimately, all of this matters because it provides an expanded view of online violence and offers researchers pathways for deeper investigation of the ways online violence connects to the broader world, shapes the process of interaction, including participant identities, and communicates across levels, structures, doxa, and habitus. It potentially assists researchers in looking beyond one person punching another in the nose when designing studies to delve into violent online behaviour.

As hinted at throughout this section, my study also tests and confirms the usefulness of Schinkel's violence theory and methodology. This was the theoretical underpinning of my research, and its central ideas and approaches provided the conceptual framework allowing the deliberately rather small-scale empirical research to shine a light on the multi-level nature of online violence. My approach to liquidation—bringing together three theoretical profiles to analyse a single violence aspect rather than directing a single perspective against multiple aspects—created the fractured realist perspective and discerned the sprawl of online violence across multiple levels and the digital and online worlds. It seems highly arguable that either my adaptation or Schinkel's original liquidation would prove equally valuable in other research projects, with the inherent flexibility of being able to choose a large range of theoretical profiles or aspects, each offering potentially new or more nuanced understandings of violence. New perspectives on violence or, more narrowly, online violence can only expand the field and its understanding of violence, help enlarge the understanding of people's violent experiences, and suggest new means to diminish violence's potential for harm.

Lastly, as a side effect, my study hinted at ways multi-perspective liquidation could compensate for weaknesses in existing theory. In this case, Collins' interaction ritual chain theory offers detail and nuance to Bourdieu's ideas of field and habitus and connects them in a more detailed and descriptive way to micro-level practice. At the same time, Bourdieu's understanding of field and habitus adds practical and meaningful detail to Collins' structurally

weak description of interaction ritual chains aggregating across time and populations into macro-level patterns most other theorists would acknowledge as structure. This creates the potential for other researchers to apply combinations of Collins and Bourdieu to map other multi-level processes in detail or to consider other theoretical profiles which might be usefully synthesised through liquidation and used for that purpose.

Limitations

All research has limitations. Where possible, I took the limitations of mine into account during the research design phase. Inevitably, some remain.

My research ultimately located violence in various levels of analysis and in processes and technologies such as group membership or the affordances of social media platforms. In terms of Schinkel's concepts of determinism and formalism, my focus may avoid the micro-macro divide by embracing multiple levels of analysis but remains distinctly deterministic, with the limitations that implies (see chapter three).

I was aware that my subjectivity might create bias in a minor way. My subject involved immersion in online discussions ideologically divided along the political left/right associated with the so-called culture wars. I could be described as left-leaning in that context. My views tend to be progressive and strongly favour social justice. Some of my data promoted views I find personally repugnant. However, my previous research associated with my Honours degree and the guidance of my advisors ensured my awareness of the issue was powerful and clear as I planned my research. Throughout, I approached the data *as* data and not as a political debate, paying attention only to the social meaning of what was present. Ultimately, mine is a theoretical research project concerned with the relationship between the data and my theoretical perspectives rather than the relationship between ideologies or people

of different identity groups, and this simplified not becoming emotionally entangled with the contents of the sampled discussions.

Because of my theoretical focus, my empirical research was deliberately set up during research design to be limited in scope, analysing an intentionally small sample of purposively selected violent online discussions. My intent was never for the data to generate a new theory. Instead, I wanted the results of a small empirical study towards which I could direct my theoretical analysis from the point of view of my theoretical profiles. In this way, I was able to test the understanding of online violence offered by existing theory and whether my overarching theory and theoretical methodology—Schinkel's liquidation—would yield valuable insights. Though my research did not require an expansive study, I did choose purposive sampling and Braun and Clarke's version of thematic analysis to be components of my empirical research, as both are associated with maximising the results of small studies.

My selected theoretical profiles are all white men from the global north. As my research is not intended to be generalised beyond its scope within this thesis, this does not invalidate my findings. However, the liquidation methodology, which depends upon the blending of varied perspectives, would certainly be enriched by including the work of theorists from around the globe and representing all races, genders, and other identity categories.

Similarly, to maintain the tight focus of my theoretical research, I utilised particular aspects of my theoretical profiles rather than drawing on their entire bodies of work—which for most of them was the work of lifetimes. For example, I mostly limited Goffman's work to his dramaturgical principle, face-work, encounters, and the sacred individual and interaction rituals, omitting stigma, total institutions, and a vast ocean of analysis of the interaction order. This guarantees that my research may have precluded some insights that other of Goffman's works may have given. However, making such a choice and seeing violence as what it is

when observed in the chosen way is integral to the liquidation methodology. The only issue is being sure—as I was during research design—to make the selection reflexively and maintain awareness when reporting findings to prevent giving the impression of the study's grasp exceeding its reach.

My intent when designing the study was to analyse discussions where violence was more "everyday"—that is, common and fairly low-intensity, of the sort that any internet user might routinely encounter and how it connects to the continuum of violence. Consequently, my findings do not address more intense and explicitly violent online behaviours, which extend as far as threats of assault, rape, murder, and crimes against the families of participants. I do not examine the ways online violence and direct, physical, offline violence interrelate in events such as mass shootings. Again, this was a matter of scope and focus and reflects a deliberate decision.

A final limitation emerges from my decision to approach my research qualitatively, using thematic analysis—a core qualitative methodology—to drive my empirical research. Critics charge qualitative approaches with a lack of rigour, including the distortion of results by researcher subjectivity. However, qualitative research comprises a large proportion of the sociological literature and scholars such as Braun and Clarke (2006) consider the understanding brought by researcher subjectivity to be an absolute strength of the approach. In my case, the qualitative approach conforms with my research background and is highly suitable for a study focused on experiences of violence and the relationship between violence and other elements of the social world.

Certainly, all of the limitations offer intriguing opportunities for future research with the potential to expand sociological knowledge of violence and its effects, to the benefit of the field of violence research and the overwhelming number of people subjected to the damaging effects of violence as they try to live their lives.

Future Research

   As my analytical approach was predominantly deterministic (see chapter three), future use of Schinkel's violence theory in this area might embrace formalism to obtain insights offering more understanding of violence itself.

   Undeniably, it would be valuable for my findings to be tested by a quantitative study covering similar ground. Just as using multiple theoretical perspectives in the liquidation allowed for a more multi-dimensional understanding of online violence, adding the strengths of quantitative methodologies would likely yield broader, more generalisable results around my basic conclusions.

   My findings hinted that liquidation employing multiple theoretical perspectives might reveal productive ways different theories could be combined to compensate for each other's weaknesses. It would be intriguing to use future research to test whether this might apply to other combinations of theories in other contexts. A crucial aspect of this would be including theoretical perspectives representing the full diversity of human research and experience across, *inter alia*, categories of race, gender, sexual preference, and position within sociopolitical hierarchies such as the global north and south. For research intended, in part, to investigate how power manifesting within research systems turns research itself and the act of defining violence into violence, diversity when selecting theoretical profiles can only benefit violence research and sociology in general.

   Another tangent from my research touched briefly on Collins' use of his interaction ritual chain theory to analyse sexual relations, teasing out a number of fascinating ways ritual ingredients and emotional energy combine to account for various aspects of sex. The ways Collins set up his analysis suggested similarities between sex and violence as interactive processes and inclines me to believe a study duplicating this analysis using violence as the

case study might generate a theory of violence based on the work of Collins but with insightful differences from his own theory of violence.

Future research might also cover the same ground as mine but glean additional insights through variations such as centring and expanding upon the empirical study, considering the violence of private communication channels such as the direct message functionality included by most social media platforms, or merely the differences created by researcher subjectivity. They might lean into Schinkel's work but make use of different aspects or profiles, or different numbers of profiles, or use Schinkel's original method of applying a single profile to multiple aspects.

Other studies could focus on the more intense forms of online violence described in the previous section. These might yield clearer results by virtue of their starker brutality. Alternatively, future studies explicitly treating online violence as violence might chart the relationships between online violence and forms of offline violence, such as, among others, intimate partner violence, mass shootings, and bullying.

Concluding Thoughts

To briefly recap, my theoretical study set out to understand online violence as violence and just a characteristic of some other phenomenon. As a secondary aim, it tested the usefulness of Willem Schinkel's violence theory and liquidation methodology. My research found that online violence is violence, with evidence suggesting the only barrier to treating it as such is the presence of definitional rigidity in social science that makes common sense of assuming violence is direct, physical, and interpersonal. Other findings showed online violence to be best understood as a complex, multi-level, multi-site phenomenon, for the most

part, more influenced by offline group membership and pre-existing offline interactions than the internal dynamics of individual discussions. This insight emerged from the application of Schinkel's theory of violence and his liquidation methodology, confirming their usefulness as tools for the sociology of violence.

These findings made several contributions to human knowledge and the field of violence sociology. They confirmed violent online practice *as* violence and the applicability of theories of violence to analyse it. They narrowed subject gaps, such as the lack in the literature of multi-level studies of violence and studies that treated online violence as violence or drew on Schinkel's work. My research contributed to the understanding of online violence as a complex multi-level, multi-site phenomenon impacting identity, interaction, and structure. By adding to the knowledge and understanding of violence and the tools researchers could apply to study it, my research matters by virtue of its potential to make violence more accessible to study and to efforts to ameliorate its harms.

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