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**“STILL ALIVE AND KICKING”:
GIRL BLOGGERS AND FEMINIST POLITICS IN A
“POSTFEMINIST” AGE**

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“POSTFEMINIST” AGE**

by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

To my mom, Mary...

who inspires me everyday and who always encouraged me to be a girl feminist.

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“Still Alive and Kicking”: Girl Bloggers and Feminist Politics in a “Postfeminist” Age

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This dissertation refutes the notion that contemporary girls are uninterested in feminism by exploring how teenage girls are engaging in feminist activism as bloggers. Using a feminist cultural studies approach I analyze how girl bloggers produce feminist identities and practices that challenge hegemonic postfeminist and neoliberal cultural politics. I employ feminist ethnographic methods, including a series of in-depth interviews with U.S. -based girl feminist bloggers and an online collaborative focus group, as well as a discursive and ideological textual analysis of girl-produced feminist blogs. Using these methods, I privilege girls’ voices while proposing a model for conducting feminist ethnography online. In doing so, I demonstrate how girls’ feminist blogging functions as an activist practice through networked counterpublics, intervening in mainstream and sometimes even commercial public space. I position this activism within a lengthy tradition of American feminism, analyzing how my participants remain in conversation with feminist history while simultaneously responding to their unique cultural climate. Finally, I argue that we must recognize the political importance of girls’ feminist blogging by theorizing it as an emergent citizenship practice that makes feminism an accessible discourse to contemporary teenage girls.

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Introduction: Transforming Feminist Conversations? Girls, Blogging, and Feminist Politics in the Twenty-first Century

“Lacking editors (whose intolerance for insanity tends to sand off pointy edges), lacking balance (as any self-publishing platform tends to do), laced with humor and fury (emotions intensified by the web’s spontaneity), the blogosphere has transformed feminist conversation, reviving in the process an older style of activism among young women...”

-Emily Nussbaum, “The Rebirth of the Feminist Manifesto”

The above quote from journalist Emily Nussbaum is from an October 2011 article she penned for *New York Magazine* entitled, “The Rebirth of the Feminist Manifesto,” and is telling in its insistence that the Internet has fundamentally altered contemporary feminism. Whether or not Nussbaum is correct in her rather technological-deterministic assessment, her argument raises significant questions about the relationship between the Internet, specifically the blogosphere, and feminism. Nussbaum goes on to describe a feminist blogosphere that is passionate and messy, yet unequivocally political. She writes,

These sites inspired an even sharper cadre of commenters, who bonded and argued, sometimes didactically, sometimes cruelly, but just as often pushing one another to hone their ideas – all this from a generation of women written off in the media as uninterested in any form of gender analysis, let alone the label ‘feminist.’ Freed from the boundaries of print, writers could blur the lines between formal and casual writing; between a call to arms, a confession, and a stand-up routine – and this new looseness of form in turn emboldened readers to join in, to take risks in the safety of the shared spotlight.

Nussbaum raises important issues here: the tension over the label “feminist,” the space for debate and dialogue made available online, the playfulness harnessed by many feminist bloggers, and finally, the very public performativity of blogging itself. These are

some of the themes that I will take up throughout this dissertation; however, I aim to complicate dominant discourses that privilege young women's blogging practices (generally women in their twenties and thirties) by focusing on girls' participation in the feminist blogosphere. In other words, I have begun thinking about this project by asking: How are girls articulating a feminist politics within this emergent feminist blogosphere, as celebrated by women like Emily Nussbaum?

Within the past decade, many feminist scholars have grappled with the relationship between girls and feminism. For example, in her recent article "Mind the Gap: Attitudes and Emergent Feminist Politics since the Third Wave", Anita Harris (2010) describes how many scholars and cultural commentators, both feminists and non-feminists alike, have questioned the ability of young women and girls to continue a relevant feminist politics into the future. Citing the proliferation of a neoliberal rhetoric that privileges individualism and consumer citizenship for youth, some feminist scholars have wondered whether a politically engaged feminism can emerge from such a cultural context (Harris, 2010).

Popular assumptions about girls and feminism are somewhat less nuanced, with mainstream media commentators often arguing that contemporary girls are pop culture-obsessed, self-absorbed, and easily influenced by celebrities, producing girls who would rather be famous than feminist. And while journalists like Nussbaum are beginning to challenge these ideas in relation to young women, they often fail to acknowledge how a diverse group of girls have taken up blogging as well. When girls are mentioned as feminist bloggers, they are presented as rare, token individuals, often a white, middle-class and conventionally pretty or "cute" girl, such as *Rookie's* Tavi Gevinson or the *FBomb's* Julie Zeilinger. Even if they blog, most girls, the dominant narrative continues to go, just don't seem to be that interested in feminism.

In this dissertation I want to refute this idea by examining how girls are producing, articulating, and negotiating contemporary feminisms through the practice of blogging. I ask the following three primary research questions: (1) How do girls use blogging as a process to articulate contemporary feminisms and to craft their own identities as feminists and activists? (2) How is girls' feminist blogging situated within a cultural context informed by the competing discourses of neoliberalism and new modes of femininity and agency promoted by postfeminist rhetoric? (3) Finally, how do feminist girls actively negotiate these discourses through their blogging and carve space for practicing a citizenship that allows them to be political actors in the present, rather than as future adults? Thus, I aim to examine blogging as a process that allows girls to produce feminisms that reflect their own concerns from the subject position of girl.

INTERROGATING “GIRL” SUBJECTIVITIES

Given the topic of my research, it is therefore necessary to interrogate what I mean by the subjectivity of girl. Who “fits” into this subject position of girl? Who can claim girlhood? And finally, how can we understand the subjectivity of girl as offering a fresh perspective on feminisms and contemporary feminist activism? I understand the subjectivity of girl through a feminist poststructuralist position, which theorizes girlhood as discursively produced through historical, cultural, and social contexts, rather than a static and biological or age based category that is universally valid (Pomerantz, 2009; Eisenhauer, 2004; Driscoll, 2002). Furthermore, the subjectivity of girl is complicated by intersecting identities, such as race, class, age, sexuality, and nationality, further problematizing the notion that a singular understanding of girlhood is possible or even desirable (Pomerantz, 2009). Thus, I do not limit my research participants by an age cut-off, but instead plan to include participants based upon their own identification with the

discursive construct of “girl,” the definition of which will no doubt vary across participants. Consequently, part of this project will be attempting to understand how girls situate themselves within girlhood and deploy a girl subjectivity within blog spaces and in relation to feminism.

While the above discussion points to the difficulties in employing the category of girl for research purposes, I focus on girls, rather than young women or women, for several reasons. Girls have been historically marginalized within feminist research, leading to a dearth of knowledge on girls’ participation in feminist activism and the continued assumption that girls distance themselves from feminism. In her book, *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change Across the Americas*, Jessica Taft (2011) argues, “Girl activists’ ideas, stories, and theoretical contributions thus remain largely hidden from view. They continue to appear in both the public and academic domain only as occasional images – as visual objects rather than as intelligent and intelligible political subjects” (5). While recent work in the field of girlhood studies is beginning to complicate and challenge these assumptions, girls as historical and contemporary political subjects remain understudied.

In her seminal book *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*, Catherine Driscoll (2002) argues that girlhood must be a focus of analysis for feminist researchers not only because of its previous marginalization within the field, but because of the way girlhood can enable a reflection on feminist relations to dominant discourses. She writes,

As soon as feminist theory – analytic or activist – begins to look only for its own repetition, as soon as it is certain of where it comes from and what its effects are, then it begins to expect merely its own repetition. It also thus ceases to be a vital force in political life, let alone in the daily lives of women and girls. A feminist focus on girls is thus desirable for pragmatic reasons, but it also draws attention to

the model of subjection presumed by feminist theory and the ways the Woman-feminist subject is formed, deployed, or avoided within the experience of individuals (304).

Furthermore, Driscoll's insistence that the process of researching girls and girlhoods must move beyond merely talking about girls to "considering their interaction with discourses that name and constitute them" encourages an analytic mode that can be used to explore how girlhood is mobilized within larger cultural discourses of agency, citizenship, and authority (304). Thus, studying girls and girlhood helps us to understand the production and evaluation of gendered subjectivities and the ways in which major public discourses get folded into the highly visible construction of late modern girlhood (Driscoll, 2002).

This point is particularly salient with regard to this project, as "girls" are highly visible and celebrated within both neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, as I'll describe later in this introduction. Girls themselves recognize this, and several of my study participants spoke specifically about how the word "girl" is often employed in media and commercial discourses to signify hegemonic femininity and/or a "girl power" rhetoric that Emilie Zaslow (2009) describes as being informed by tenets of postfeminism (although curiously, she does not use the word "postfeminism"). Several of the bloggers I interviewed echoed my concern about this problematic equation of girls and girlhood with such a narrow image of hegemonic femininity. Consequently, I employ "girl" in part as a political strategy to counter the limited images of girlhood that we often see in commercial popular culture, with the hopes of depicting alternative girlhood subjectivities being performed by adolescent girls today. In this sense I attempt to take up Monica Swindle's (2011) call to understand girl as an affect with political potential. She writes,

We know that girls have great potential to be affected by their society, the media, relationships, global capitalism, their position within institutions, technology, and by emotions, which are not merely personal but social. However, related to the capacity to be affected is ability to affect, and the pleasurable power that girl now modulates has great ability to affect in the global affective economies of the twenty-first century, especially considering the possibilities for distribution through technologies and new media. (para.47)

Thus, according to Swindle, “girl” has a political traction that we as feminist scholars must pay more attention to, something I will do throughout this dissertation.

Nonetheless, I do want to recognize that while I have chosen to use the term “girl feminist bloggers” throughout this dissertation, I do so acknowledging that some of my participants identify as girls, while others do not. Consequently I employ girl not as an accurate descriptor of my participants, insomuch as an imperfect theoretical concept that allows me to explore the connections between identities such as gender and age, feminism, and citizenship that inform this dissertation.

WHY FEMINISM?

Within the past decade there has been an increasing scholarly interest in young women’s identification with the label “feminist” (Harris, 2010). Much of this work, such as that by Shelly Budgeon (2001), Madeleine Jowett (2004), and Emilie Zaslow (2009), has focused on young women’s attitudes towards feminism, concluding that while most girls do not identify as feminists, many support feminist ideals. It is this seeming contradiction that has perplexed many feminist scholars, who often discuss these findings in reference to the context of a postfeminist culture that celebrates choice and individual empowerment, while distancing itself from feminism as a political movement. While this work has no doubt been important in understanding girls’ attitudes towards feminism and

the more commercially-inclined “girl power,” it has not specifically addressed the actual activist practices of girls.

Consequently, Harris (2010) argues that this focus on young women’s attitudes towards feminism has overshadowed “a more productive investigation into contemporary young feminist practice, including its continuities with the past,” suggesting that feminist researchers must ask different questions in order to get at the complexity of girls’ feminist practices (475). Harris contends that the varied nature of contemporary feminist practices requires researchers to be open to the ways that “narratives of choice and individualization, conditions of decollectivization and globalization, a pervasive media culture and the emergence of new information and communication technologies” shape what young women do, rather than what they merely say about feminism. She concludes, “What is required, I think, is an openness in our ideas about what constitutes feminist politics today, especially a greater understanding of the function of micro-political acts and unconventional activism in this historical moment as well as recognition of links with past practice. Such an approach might enable us to yet move beyond generationalism to forge a new feminism we do not yet know” (481).

Harris’ critique provides the starting point for my own research on girls’ feminist activism, and the ways that girls’ blogging and participation in the feminist blogosphere has the potential to be activist in itself. Consequently, I see this project making an important intervention into the research on girls, feminism, and postfeminism by positioning girls’ media production as feminist activism. I analyze girls’ blogging as not merely girls’ blind acceptance of a neoliberal and postfeminist culture that celebrates entrepreneurial media production and circulated visibility, but as a negotiated strategy that makes the best use of discourses and resources available to girls. My approach also asks new questions specifically about the relationship between girlhood and feminist

activism, an area that has been unexplored in existing research, which often includes girls under the broader category of “young women.” While Taft (2011) provides a useful analysis of girlhood in relationship to identification as an activist, she does not address how girlhood relates to the identity of a feminist activist. Here I model my own analysis after Taft’s (2011) approach; additionally emphasizing girls’ performances of feminist and activist identities through blogging, topics that are the focus of my first and second chapters. I aim to position these ideas alongside a discussion of the history of feminist media production and activism, drawing out continuities and discontinuities, rather than maintaining a strict divide between “second wave” and “third wave” activist practices.

WHY BLOGS?

A “blog” is an abbreviated term for “weblog,” which refers to a website that is organized by reverse-chronological written entries (also called “posts”) usually focused on a particular topic or issue. While writing is certainly an important part of a blog, Jill Walker Rettberg (2008) argues that a blog must be understood holistically as constituting writing as well as layout (including visuals), connections/links, and tempo. I do not believe it’s useful to employ a narrow definition of what constitutes a blog; however, there are some defining features of blogs that are important to highlight. Blogs are frequently updated (and thus constantly changing), personal in nature (often written in the first person), and contain a social aspect via their embedded links to other websites and comment sections. Consequently, Rettberg describes blogs as a social genre that can facilitate conversations within a single blog or between multiple blogs. The connections between blogs addressing a particular topic are popularly referred to as a “blogosphere,” a term that I will occasionally employ in this dissertation. Indeed, I emphasize the social

aspect of blogging here as it is of particular importance to my analysis of girls' feminist blogs, and I'll be returning to an in-depth discussion of it in chapter three.

The feminist blogosphere is certainly not the sole site with which girls are engaging in feminist activism. However, for several reasons I have chosen to use girls' feminist blogs as a productive site from which to ask questions about girls and feminism. First, blogging has been a practice that has been tremendously popular with middle-class North American teenage girls since the early incarnations of the Internet. According to a Pew Internet Research study from 2008, American teenage girls outnumber their male counterparts as bloggers, with 41% of girls ages 15-17 claiming to have a blog (Lenhardt, Arafeh, Smith, and Macgill, 2008). The popularity of blogging amongst girls may be due to the connection between diary writing, a longstanding part of girl culture.

Young women also tend to use social networking sites more than both their male peers and adult generations (Duggan and Brenner, 2013).¹ The increasing popularity of social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, over the past five years has meant that girls will also often use these platforms to blog or circulate their blog posts via these platforms, as I discuss in chapter three with regards to girls' use of Tumblr. Despite these statistics, it is necessary to recognize that blogging is not an opportunity afforded to all girls equally, and that social inequalities continue to limit who has the leisure time, resources, and literacy skills to blog, an issue that I will discuss throughout this dissertation.

Second, writing has been a longstanding part of girls' culture, and writing practices, such as keeping a diary, having a pen pal, and writing fan letters, are dominant girlhood tropes with both historical and contemporary significance (Hunter, 2002; Kearney, 2006). Many of girls' writing practices, from the diaries kept by Victorian girls to the zines created by 1990s riot grrrls, have a liberatory effect on girls, allowing them a

sense of freedom, a source of pleasure, and site of fantasy and identity exploration (Kearney, 2006). Thus, I aim to position blogging within this lengthy history of girls' writing practices, and specifically analyze the importance of writing as a way for girls to foster feminist and activist identities.

Third, there has recently been considerable scholarly and mainstream interest in the use of blogs and social networking sites to facilitate social movements, such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movements, and Slutwalks. In fact, Nussbaum's (2011) article begins by describing her experience at New York's Slutwalk, relating the physical march itself to its online representations. She writes,

And Slutwalk is more public still: Even as we march, it is being tweeted and filmed and Tumblr'd, a way of alerting the press and a way of bypassing the press. I am surrounded by the same bloggers I've been reading for weeks. And though bystanders cheer us on (two gray-haired women dance topless in a window), this is very much a march for young women, that demographic that has been chastised throughout history for seeking attention – and ever more so in recent years, as if publicity itself were a venereal disease, one made more resistant by technology.

Thus, the relationship between digital technology and social protest warrants serious scholarly attention and raises interesting questions about online networks and connections, publicness, and activism; topics I investigate in chapters two and four.

While blogs are my object of analysis in this dissertation, this project is not merely about how girls use the Internet to engage with feminisms. Instead, I strive to draw connections between contemporary culture and feminism, parsing out the ways in which girls' online engagements with feminism are integrally related to their "offline" daily experiences within a neoliberal cultural context. In this sense, I challenge two

dominant discourses that circulate in both academic and mainstream discussions regarding youth and their Internet practices.

While prominent media scholars such as Raymond Williams (1974) have long refuted technological determinism, it nonetheless continues to shape dominant discourses on new technologies, including the Internet. These “effects” centered arguments privilege the presumed properties of the technology itself as producing direct effects on society, excluding the recognition of the social context that gives technologies meaning and the complexity with which individuals interact with technology (Williams, 1974; Marvin, 1990; Gray, 2009). Consequently, we often hear reports in the mainstream media that the Internet has caused deviant youth behavior, such as cyberbullying or sexting.

This discourse has been especially prominent in relation to girls, who are often portrayed in media accounts as “at risk” when online or using other new communication devices, such as mobile phones, potential victims of online sexual predators, “sexting” scandals, or life-threatening cyberbullying from classmates (Shade, 2007, 2011). For example, in a 2009 article in *The Globe and Mail*, Judith Timson writes, “The Internet has made girl-on-girl viciousness so much more virulent, with mass shunnings, false rumour-mongering and online slagging of each other.” Leslie Regan Shade (2011) notes that these discourses have led to a gendered “protectionist” rhetoric that posits girls’ online practices in need of adult surveillance and supervision, denying girls’ autonomy and agency within online spaces. Additionally, I would also suggest that this protectionist discourse fails to address societal power structures by positioning technology as the problem girls face in online spaces rather than patriarchy, sexual harassment, and violence against women/girls. Most recently, we can see this discourse reproduced through public discussions of the Amanda Todd case, which resulted in Canadian government action to implement policy on “cyberbullying” rather than addressing the

sexual harassment and misogyny experienced by Todd.² I will return to further discuss this protectionist discourse related to girls' Internet practices in chapter four.

Williams (1974) is particularly concerned with the ahistorical nature of technological determinism, arguing, "Any cancellation of history, in the sense of real times and real places, is essentially a cancellation of the contemporary world, in which, within limits and under pressures, men (sic) act and react, struggle and concede, cooperate, conflict and compete" (129). Thus, Williams advocates for analyzing technologies as cultural, recognizing the complex intersection of media as a practice, intentionally developed in relation to social needs and historical specificities. By situating my discussion within the competing cultural contours of neoliberalism, postfeminism and third wave feminism, I adopt a framework advocated by Williams (1974) and aim to make apparent the ways that cultural context frames and informs girls' blogging practices.

In this sense, I take a cultural studies perspective to this project, focusing on the interaction between text, production, reception, and sociohistorical context, and analyzing the ways that power is discursively produced and circulated throughout these sites (Kellner, 1995; D'Acci, 2005). While cultural studies has been the dominant approach in television studies, it has been used less widely within Internet studies, resulting in a lack of research that adequately positions Internet practices as part of a complex terrain of social, cultural, political, and economic processes. Critical Internet scholar Mary Gray (2009) highlights this absence, arguing that researchers must "decenter media as the object of analysis in new media research" by employing ethnographic research that will allow us to better understand the use and meaning of media within peoples' everyday lives (xiv). I take up Gray's call by adopting an ethnographic approach to my project and

will return to a more expansive discussion of my cultural studies approach in my theoretical and methodologies sections.

The second, albeit related, assumption about the Internet practices of youth is based on an “escapist discourse”, which posits that youth use the Internet to “escape” their “real lives”, creating online identities that are disconnected from their offline practices and experiences. In her ethnographic study of the media practices of rural queer youth, Gray (2009) problematizes this escapist discourse by drawing on the work of Nancy Baym (2006), arguing that “[f]ocusing on new media as spaces that produce online worlds fails to respond to the call of critical cyberculture researchers to examine how ‘offline contexts permeate and influence online situations, and online situations and experiences always feed back into offline experiences’” (86). Thus, I have chosen an ethnographic approach to my research in order to “contextualize media engagements as part of a broader social terrain of experience”, disrupting the false boundary between online and offline worlds (Gray, 2009, 14). I will further elaborate on this discussion in my methodologies section.

The above discussion alludes to the importance of studying blogs as media that encompass significant ideas about contemporary girlhood, feminism, and new media technologies. Thus, I envision this project as a cultural interrogation rooted in the logic of cultural studies as opposed to merely an in-depth examination of a particular medium, understanding girls’ feminist blogs as a “hub” that centers and makes visible larger cultural narratives about girls’ engagements with feminism today.

NEOLIBERALISM AS A GENDERED CULTURAL CONTEXT

A significant goal of this project is to situate girls’ blogging practices within the larger cultural context of neoliberalism. In *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism,*

Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy, Lisa Duggan (2003) argues that neoliberalism is not a “unitary system” but a “complex, contradictory cultural and political project created within specific institutions, with an agenda for reshaping the everyday life of contemporary global capitalism” (70). Neoliberalism is characterized by privatization, deregulation, a celebration of individualism, and a rejection of the social welfare model of state governance popularized in the early twentieth century. David Harvey (2005) argues that since the 1980s neoliberalism has “become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (3). Harvey’s insistence on understanding neoliberalism as a hegemonic discourse is particularly useful for this project, as I’ll be discursively analyzing neoliberalism in relation to contemporary feminist discourses.

Duggan and Harvey contend that, contrary to popular logic, neoliberalism is not politically neutral, blind to identities, or solely about economics. Indeed, both scholars map how neoliberalism as a project continues to create power inequalities both between nations and among national citizens. Harvey argues that neoliberalism has not generated worldwide economic growth, but has merely redistributed wealth to favor already economically privileged individuals and nations, perpetuating a greater class disparity. He maintains, “It has been part of the genius of neoliberal theory to provide a benevolent mask full of wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice and rights, to hide the grim realities of the restoration of reconstitution of naked class power, locally as well as transnationally, but most particularly in the main financial centers of global capitalism” (119). Harvey’s guiding argument that class power is restored via neoliberalism as an economic and cultural project is convincing, yet must be considered alongside the ways in which it relates to gender.

Research by Lauren Berlant (1997), Angela McRobbie (2009) and most recently Rosalind Gill and Christina Schraff (2011) demonstrates that it is essential to understand neoliberalism as a gendered construct, producing specifically gendered subjects that reaffirm normative gender, race, class, and sexual identities. For example, McRobbie (2009) argues that femininity is being reshaped to align with emerging neoliberal social and economic arrangements. She explains, “From being assumed to be headed towards marriage, motherhood and limited economic participation, the girl is now endowed with economic capacity... [expected to] perform as [an] economically active female citizen” both by working in paid employment and consuming commercial goods (58). Girls and young women then, are “weighted towards capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation” that dovetails with neoliberal discourses privileging individualism, freedom, choice, and consumer citizenship (McRobbie, 2009, 57). I will be returning to these themes throughout this dissertation.

Media scholars such as Laurie Ouellette and Julie Wilson (2011) have examined the relationship between neoliberalism and gender specifically in relation to contemporary media, exploring how new media facilitates the production of gendered neoliberal subjects. Ouellette and Wilson analyze how media convergence – bolstered by new media platforms – often continues to rely on the unpaid domestic and affective labor of women, rather than provide the freedoms, creativity, and flexible interactivity that new media scholars such as Henry Jenkins (2006) have celebrated. Ouellette and Wilson argue,

Converging media technologies and platforms facilitate an expectation that women make enterprising use of books, television and the web as interconnected resources for self-work and successful family management. Women’s ‘active’ participation in the evolving media landscape – including the mastery of new technologies such as the Web – does not liberate us from top-down cultural

control or parallel the labor into women's media reception practices. The implications of this extension are not only limited to the sexual division of labor and the gendering of citizenship but also include the forms of leisure, fantasy, pleasure, and escape available to women in a 'can-do' enterprise culture (559).

This work highlights the importance of examining new media in relation to gendered neoliberal subjectivities, a connection I'll use as a guiding contextual framework throughout this dissertation.

POSTFEMINISM AND NEW FEMININE TECHNOLOGIES

In addition to grounding my analysis within the cultural context of neoliberalism, I also characterize our contemporary moment as being marked by what Rosalind Gill (2007) calls a "postfeminist sensibility." While the term "postfeminism" has been the subject of debate and multiple definitions within feminist scholarship, I find Gill's characterization of it as a cultural sensibility, rather than a theoretical position, a type of feminism after the women's liberation movement, or a regressive political stance, to be most useful for my own analysis. In this sense, I understand postfeminism as a cultural sensibility promoted throughout contemporary popular media culture that takes feminism into account while simultaneously repudiating it as "harsh, punitive and inauthentic, not articulating women's true desires" (Gill, 2007, 162; McRobbie, 2009).

Postfeminism can be further characterized by several themes, including: femininity as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis on surveillance, monitoring, and self-discipline; a rhetoric of individualism, choice, and empowerment; a dominance of makeover paradigms; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference (Gill, 2007). It is beyond the scope of this

introduction to explore each of these themes, however, I will be returning to several of them throughout the course of this dissertation.

Gill and Scharff (2011) argue that postfeminism is ultimately related to neoliberalism in three ways. First, both discourses privilege individualism, regarding individuals as free agents that are unfettered by social, political, or economic restraints. Second, the autonomous, calculating, and self-regulating neoliberal subject is similar to the active, freely choosing, and self-reinventing postfeminist subject. And third, it is specifically women that are taken up by both neoliberalism and postfeminism and encouraged to “work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen” (7). Thus, it is necessary to understand postfeminism as not only a response to feminism, but also integrated within a larger neoliberal cultural climate that shapes the kinds of ideal subjectivities that are promoted to girls and women.

For example, Sarah Banet-Weiser (2011, 2012b) analyzes how girls perform neoliberal and postfeminist subjectivities within new media spaces. Based upon her analysis of girls’ self-created YouTube videos she argues that girls are encouraged to brand themselves through visible displays of normative femininity, which can be circulated on the web. Banet-Weiser (2011, 2012b) builds on the earlier work of Anita Harris (2004) to argue that the ability for a girl to “put herself out there” signifies not only a successful performance of postfeminist femininity, but also an adoption of an idealized neoliberal subjectivity via the opportunity to generate income (such as lifecasters like Jennifer Ringley) and to become an entrepreneur of the self. I will return to Banet-Weiser’s (2011, 2012b) work in chapter four in order to analyze how public visibility functions as an activist strategy for girl feminist bloggers.

FRAMING CITIZENSHIP IN A NEOLIBERAL AND POSTFEMINIST AGE

Scholars such as Anita Harris (2004, 2008a, 2012b), Caroline Caron (2011), Elke Zobl and Ricarda Drueke (2012) have all recently argued that citizenship is an increasingly central concept in an era characterized by globalization, the proliferation of new communication technologies, and other social, cultural, and economic changes produced through neoliberalism. However, citizenship is also an extremely flexible concept and has been employed by scholars in several disciplines (most notably, political theory, social policy and philosophy) over the years to describe a variety of public statuses and civic practices. It is not possible, nor is it my intention, to address all of this literature, therefore I will focus primarily on recent scholarship from feminist and cultural studies perspectives that take citizenship related to women and youth as the central focus. It is from this scholarship that I will define how I employ the concept of citizenship in this project.

In her seminal book *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* Ruth Lister (1997) argues that “behind the cloak of gender-neutrality that embraces the idea [of citizenship] there lurks in much of the literature a definitely male citizen and it is his interests and concerns that have traditionally dictated the agenda” (3). Lister contends then that citizenship is a gendered concept that operates simultaneously as a mechanism of both inclusion and exclusion relating to gender, as well as class, race, ability, and sexuality.³ However, both Lister and Rian Voet (1998) argue that the concept remains a fruitful one for feminist engagement, offering, “an invaluable strategic theoretical concept for the analysis of women’s subordination and a potentially powerful political weapon in the struggle against it” through a focus on (women’s) agency (Lister, 1997, 195).

Indeed, it is Lister’s focus on agency that I’m interested in and which she argues connects definitions of citizenship as a status and as a practice. Understanding citizenship

as a status recognizes the set of rights, including social and reproductive rights, that one carries. Citizenship as a practice, on the other hand, refers to one's political participation, including what Lister calls the "informal politics" in which women are more likely to engage. These informal politics include a range of activities, such as local community organizing around health and education of children, and other actions outside of the formal political sphere of government. One of Lister's key contributions then is to acknowledge the dialectical relationship between these two traditions of citizenship by arguing that "citizenship as the expression of agency contributes to the recasting of women as actors on the political stage" (199). This argument suggests that valuing the multiple ways that women act in and between private and public spheres is essential to a feminist model of citizenship.

While Lister and Voet's scholarship is useful in highlighting the ways in which citizenship has been gendered and recognizing the multiple practices of citizenship, neither book thoroughly addresses girls. In other words, while including gender (as well as race, class, nationality, and sexuality to a certain extent) as a category of analysis, these works retain an adult-centric approach to citizenship. However, as Harris (2012b) notes, citizenship has recently become an increasingly important – and contentious – issue for youth studies scholars. Indeed, citizenship in its most basic and long-standing sense, referring to participation in formal political institutions centered around rights and responsibilities, has always excluded children and youth, understanding them as minor, and thus, future citizens or citizens in training (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Harris, 2012b).

Similar to the feminist scholars I discuss above, cultural studies scholars have challenged this narrow definition of citizenship by arguing for the need to "decenter notions of citizenship" by conceptualizing multiple sites and modes of discourse as representing citizenship practices (Dimitriadis, 2008, x). This intervention has resulted in

a more expansive conceptualization of citizenship that now often encompasses consumer and cultural dimensions (Miller, 2007; Burgess, Foth, and Klæbe, 2006). Consequently, the concept “cultural citizenship” has gained prominence in much of this literature, yet remains somewhat vague in its application to particular practices.

For example, Elisabeth Klaus and Margreth Lunenborg (2012) define cultural citizenship as encompassing

all those cultural practices that allow competent participation in society and includes the rights to be represented and to speak actively. Media as a particular form of cultural production is both an engine and an actor in the processes of self-making and being-made, in which people acquire their individual, group-specific and social identities (204).

Joke Hermes (2005) defines cultural citizenship as “the process of bonding and community building, and reflection on that bonding, that is implied in partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of (popular) culture” (10). Similarly, Caron (2011) draws on multiple theorists to argue that practices of citizenship foster a sense of belonging to a community.

Klaus and Lunenborg’s (2012) definition highlights how producing media both fosters cultural citizenship and can be a practice of citizenship itself. This has significant implications as digital technologies have expanded the opportunity for people to produce their own media, a practice that has been taken up in particular by youth and young adults. In their paper, “Everyday Creativity as Civic Engagement: A Cultural Citizenship View of New Media,” Jean Burgess, Marcus Foth and Helen Klæbe (2006) argue that new media provide fresh spaces for “the greater visibility and community-building potential of cultural citizenship’s previously ‘ephemeral’ practices” (1). To these scholars, the significance of new media lies in its ability to facilitate everyday active

participation in a networked, open, and flexible cultural public sphere that encompasses entertainment, leisure, consumption, and political activities. In this sense, cultural citizenship practices in a new media age means community building through social networking platforms, sharing content through web 2.0 technologies, and conversing about a television program via a popular blog, rather than voting, attending a rally, or even talking about political candidates online.

However, the way that young people in particular fit into these alternative modes of citizenship remains a subject of speculation, and has been further complicated by an increasingly pervasive neoliberal cultural climate over the past fifteen years. Harris (2004) argues that this is especially true for girls, who are depicted as “leading the way for youth citizenship... forging their nations, becoming responsible self-made citizens, and are expected to either lead a revival in youth participation in the polity or make successes of themselves without state intervention” (71).

This conception of consumer citizenship is informed by neoliberal policies that promote citizenship as marked by individual responsibility, active participation in the market economy, proper consumption practices, and the ability to engage in flexible self-reinvention as dictated by a rapidly changing economy (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2009). Ironically, while this model of citizenship appears liberating, Harris maintains that it’s actually highly regulative, promoting managed forms of participation and consumption that limit girls’ engagement to adult-approved initiatives and civic engagement programs. While girls may be highly visible as neoliberal consumer citizens, they have little agency in terms of defining their own politics and enacting their own strategies for change. Finally, it is also important to highlight how postfeminist discourses privilege consumer citizenship for girls via their emphasis on the body and the makeover paradigm. Thus, girls are encouraged to purchase fashion, beauty, and other lifestyle products as an

exercise of “empowered” postfeminist consumer citizenship (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2009).

Based on these discussions, we can see how scholarship that addresses citizenship often leaves girls in a precarious position, excluded from traditional definitions of citizenship, yet hailed as consumer citizens by commercial media informed by neoliberal and postfeminist discourses. Consequently, a central aim in this dissertation is to articulate an alternative conception of citizenship for girls which addresses their particular social and cultural positioning and recognizes the various modes of agency accessible to them. In order to do so I draw on the themes articulated by Caron (2011), Klaus and Lunenborg (2012), and Hermes (2005) to understand a girl-friendly citizenship as a practice of accessing a public sphere by mobilizing one’s critical voice in community with other girls, resulting in the ability to understand oneself as active in the present, yet with an awareness of one’s positioning in relation to both the past and future.⁴ I will elaborate on this temporal element in chapter five where I discuss girl feminist bloggers’ production of feminist history.

The above definition will inform my understanding of citizenship as I map how girls’ feminist blogging functions as a practice of citizenship for girls. In this sense, I take up Caron’s (2011) call for feminist scholars to develop a politicized vocabulary to account for a variety of girls’ cultural practices as generating political identities and political participation. In doing so, I hope to highlight how both a gender-and-age conscious analysis is significant when developing theories of contemporary citizenship.

FEMINIST MEDIA PRODUCTION: CREATING FEMINIST SPACES AND PUBLICS

While women and girls have long been understood as consumers of media, non-feminist media scholars have historically overlooked their participation in media production, reaffirming media production as a masculine-coded cultural activity. As Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) notes, this exclusion has been especially true for girls, who are often positioned as passive consumers of media due to both their gender and age. While Kearney's call for girl studies scholars to study girls' production of media informs my overall project, in this section I will specifically focus on reviewing relevant literature analyzing women's and girls' feminist media production as a practice that fosters the formation of a feminist public. Due to the dearth of research on girls' feminist media production practices, much of the literature I discuss here focuses on women. This gap in research points to the importance in conducting more extensive research on girls' media production, both historically and contemporarily, in order to better understand girls' complex media practices.

As Carolyn Mitchell (1998) notes, it is important to recognize the difference between women's media production and feminist media production. She argues that merely having women produce media does not necessarily mean that the content will be feminist, noting that feminist media production "should be about the politicization of culture in resistance to patriarchal oppression" (75). Feminist media production, in this sense, addresses gender, race, class, and sexual power inequalities and is committed to challenging them. It is this type of media production that I am most interested in here, and will focus on suffrage and other forms of early print publications, feminist radio and film initiatives, womyn's music, and finally, cyberfeminism, as significant examples of feminist media production that raise important questions about the strategies women have used to establish public voices. While zines are also an important part of this history, I will exclude them here since I will discuss them in the next section in relation to riot grrrl

and third wave feminism. I do want to stress their significance, however, not only to riot grrrl culture but also in relation to the history of girls' and women's media production. Obviously, this is not a comprehensive review of all forms of feminist media production; however, I have chosen the following examples to discuss because of their particular relevance to the issues I am interested in, including activism, communities, and the public sphere – themes I will focus on in chapters two, three, and four, respectively.

Early Feminist Media Production

In her chapter, “The History and Structure of Women’s Alternative Media,” Linda Steiner (1992) argues that women have been establishing and operating their own communications media for close to 250 years, demonstrating a lengthy history of women’s communication practices. Several technological and cultural changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries allowed for the creation of women’s publications as early as 1746 in Dublin, including improvement in rail transportation and postal systems, lower paper and postage costs, increased literacy, and developments in print technology that made it both easier and cheaper to use. These shifts made it possible for women and girls to produce and circulate their own publications for distinctively feminist and political purposes.

Steiner notes how central women-produced periodicals were to the American suffrage movement, “crucial in reassuring readers that they were united in a community that gave their lives a sense of significance and purpose, on behalf of a worthy cause that ultimately would triumph” (131). Alison Piepmeier (2009) describes how around the late nineteenth and early twentieth century women were also involved in creating and distributing women’s health publications that discussed feminist issues of sexuality and

contraception, information that was illegal to distribute during this time period. Piepmeier argues that Margaret Sanger, one of these pioneering women's health advocates, "wasn't able to find outlets in existing media for her controversial subject matter, so she created her own publications" (34).

Likewise, Jane Hunter (2002) argues that girls were active in advocating for suffrage and women's rights as editors of their high school newspapers, using their limited social position as students and available print technology to establish a public voice. Piepmeier also recognizes girls' scrapbooking as part of this tradition of feminist media production. She argues that while scrapbooks are often understood as artifacts of personal commemoration, they also offered the opportunity for girls and women to critique mainstream culture and build community and solidarity (Piepmeier, 2009). Scrapbooking, despite common misperceptions, was often a communal activity that consequently allowed each girl or woman to use her "artifacts to communicate and connect with a broader community of women" (32).

While only briefly discussed here, these early examples of women's and girls' media production highlight how the themes of identity and community have long been central to women's use of communication technologies, "revealing that ongoing connection between communication and community, communion, and commitment" (Steiner, 1992, 123). These examples also demonstrate how media production served as a practice that created visible public communities with other women, taking girls' and women's voices beyond the confines of the home and into the public sphere.

Radio, Film, Music and Feminist Publics

The women's liberation movement had significant impact on both feminist radio, film, and music initiatives, all of which developed during the early 1970s and throughout the decade. While feminist radio is a relatively under-researched form of media, it is an important example to consider because of the sense of community and publicness that radio can create. danah boyd (2008) argues that the term "public" cannot have just one definition, and that we must understand how there are multiple publics depending on social context. In this sense, radio significantly expanded women's ability to form a mediated public, which in turn allowed for more women to participate in a feminist public. While women's early media production, such as the suffrage publications discussed above, also functioned to construct a mediated public, the scope of these publics was significantly altered through feminists' use of radio (as well as film and music).

Mitchell (1998) argues that feminist radio programs serve a unique function by renegotiating the private and public divide, providing a "space that enables women to produce programming and meanings that transcend some of the more limiting mediated constructions of their lives" (77). Community radio then, according to Mitchell, has the potential to function as a "feminist public sphere." Mitchell links the possible development of a feminist public sphere with women's empowerment, establishing an important linkage between media production, public voice, and feminist consciousness that can be seen in feminist radio initiatives like the taped consciousness-raising sessions and live telephone responses that aired on WBAI-FM in 1969 (Steiner, 1992).

Research on feminist filmmaking has been significantly more extensive than that on feminist radio. Julie Lesage (1990) draws explicit connections between the women's liberation movement and feminist film production, specifically the genre of feminist documentaries, arguing that many women viewed their film production as an "urgent

public act” with definitive political intentions. The process of making a film, in this sense, was understood as a form of feminist activism, as many of these documentaries specifically addressed feminist issues. Lesage argues, “As feminist films explicitly demand that a new space be opened up for women in women’s terms, the collective and social act of feminist filmmaking has often led to entirely new demands in the areas of health care, welfare, poverty programs, work, and law (especially rape), and in the cultural sphere proper in the areas of art, education, and the mass media” (223). The idea that film production functioned as a collective and social act is particularly relevant to my own research, and challenges the individualist notions that inform auteur theories. I will be examining this issue specifically in chapter three.

The little research that has examined girl filmmakers specifically is more recent, yet revealing in the ways that girls’ film production has been used as a strategy for girls to establish a public voice and address feminist issues. Kearney (2006) contends that girl filmmakers have used film production as a way to address a range of social, cultural, and political issues, including female beauty standards and body image, sex and gender identity, relationships and friendships, race and ethnicity, disability, and age/generation. She argues, “For, by using a form of media that makes visible the unseen and audible the unheard, these [girl] directors are expanding considerably girls’ public representation, complicating the stories associated with their demographic group, and challenging stereotypes of female youth as technically ignorant and culturally unproductive” (237).

In her analysis of teen filmmaker Sadie Benning, Christie Milliken (2002) argues that Benning’s commitment to youth activism and collectivism is apparent in her films and public interviews, leading Milliken to characterize Benning’s work as a “radical feminist inflection of the essayistic” (297). While the teenage Benning, who was raised in Milwaukee by her single mother, was not necessarily involved in feminist activism in the

traditional sense of participation in a feminist group, for example, she was influenced by riot grrrl, which fostered her filmmaking and became the site for her activism. Thus, Benning provides a compelling example of the ways in which media production provides both a public space and a practice for girls' feminist activism, a model I'll be elaborating on throughout this dissertation.

In addition to feminism's influence on radio and film, it also had significant impact on what became known as "womyn's music." Having grown out of the cultural feminist and lesbian separatist politics of the early 1970s, the womyn's music community thrived on a feminist DIY approach to music-making that supported not only women (often lesbian or queer women) musicians, but women-run recording studios, distribution companies, retailers, and concert spaces. Cynthia Lont (1992) argues that the womyn's music scene went beyond merely women making music, but created an "alternative culture" that was supported by feminist bookstores, college campuses, and festivals like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. She writes, "The intersection of women performers seeking a place to play women-centered music, political organizers seeking a cooperative work environment, and feminists and lesbians seeking music to reaffirm their lifestyles and experiences created the energy and space for women's music to thrive" (243).

Nancy Love (2002) notes that in addition to providing a space for women to organize politically, womyn's music culture also served to educate women about feminist issues, including abortion, domestic violence, and poverty. In this sense, a feminist public was formed around the intersection of feminism and music production that once again merged cultural work with political and social activism. It is important to recognize the significance that women-only spaces, such as feminist bookstores, played in facilitating womyn's music and a feminist public throughout this period, providing a physical space

outside the home where women could not only meet, organize, and educate one another, but have leisure time and enjoy the pleasures of music and conversation.

Economic hardships, a saturated womyn's music market and a changing music industry caused the dissolution of womyn's music culture as it existed throughout the 1970s (Lont, 1992). However, as Kearney (1997b) notes, it is important to recognize the ways that womyn's music served as a precursor and influence to riot grrrl. She argues that despite often being aligned with punk subcultures riot grrrl has actually adopted many values and practices from womyn's music, including a pro-female stance, grassroots organizing, DIY cultural production, opposition to sexism and homophobia, and the creation of "safe spaces" for women and girls. I would argue that more recent configurations of riot grrrl values, such as the growing global network of Girls Rock Camps, should also be positioned within this lengthy history of girl and women-only spaces, feminist music production, and feminist community. I will return to a discussion of riot grrrl in the following section.

Cyberfeminism and Online Activism

Despite the assumption that it is men who are early technology adopters, Leslie Regan Shade (2002) notes that some women were active Internet users in the early 1990s. Shade discusses how the Internet was often used as an organizational and networking tool by a range of feminist organizations from both Northern and Southern countries, connecting women through networks of listservs, email, and websites. Artistic interventions were also commonplace among these early women users, who often drew inspiration from 1970s feminist performance and body art, using the web as an alternative exhibition space (Shade, 2002). These diverse initiatives were often labeled as examples

of “cyberfeminism,” which Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein (1999) describe as “acknowledg[ing], firstly, that there are differences in power between men and women specifically in the digital discourse; and secondly, that cyberfeminists want to change that situation... [C]yberfeminism is political, it is not an excuse for inaction in the real world, and it is inclusive and respectful of the many cultures which women inhabit” (as cited in Shade, 2002, 46). The political stance inherent in cyberfeminism is important to recognize as it frames media production as a political act that has the potential to alter social power relations.

Indeed, many of the early cyberfeminists were utopic in their insistence that the Internet as a disembodied medium may provide unparalleled power to women users. For example, Gillian Youngs (1999) argues,

Virtual voices are by their nature disembodied. They help to hinder assumptions about the real lives to which they are connected. They allow space for alternative imaginings and projections and they permit paths of shared discovery to and from the virtual and the real. The virtual space of the Net transgresses traditional public/private frameworks which have contributed in multiple ways to the fixing of gendered identities. Importantly, it also transgresses the national boundaries within which such identities are predominantly shaped” (66).

Contemporary scholars have complicated many of these claims, pointing to the ways in which unequal power relations between men and women continue to be reproduced online, and problematizing the rigid divide between “virtual” and “real” worlds (Gray, 2009). However, the online practices of these early cyberfeminists highlight a key linkage between the production of media and the creation of public networks and feminist communities, a relationship further explored by third wavers later in the 1990s.

Doreen Piano (2002) describes online technology as central to third wave feminists' practices. She argues third wave feminists have created "feminist pockets or zones in cyberspace" that foster alternative feminist economies based around the distribution of DIY products, such as zines, buttons, tapes, and other woman-produced products. According to Piano, these spaces serve as "congregating spaces" for women, leading to the development of activist communities that use subcultural production as a tool for political intervention. Ednie Kaeh Garrison (2000) also argues for the recognition of what she calls "democratized technologies" like the Internet as integral to contemporary feminist activism and community building. She convincingly argues,

Democratized technologies become a resource enabling young women to get information to other young women, girls, and boys, a means for developing political consciousness, and a space that can legitimate girls' issues. Technology that is accessible to young people alters the controlling role of adults and other authority figures in the production of youth cultures and in the selection of political issues in which young people become involved (152).

While Garrison is careful not to suggest that the use of technology is unique to third wave feminists, her argument that new developments in communication technology have allowed significantly more opportunities for girls' and women's media production and raised political consciousness is significant to my project.

Danah Boyd's (2008) use of the concept "networked publics" is useful to consider here in relation to Piano's and Garrison's arguments. Boyd discusses networked publics as "the spaces and audiences that are bound together through technological networks," such as the Internet, and mobile networks (125). She argues that networked publics differ from mediated publics due to the fundamental architectural differences that affect the social interaction within the publics, particularly with regard to searchability and the

recirculation of texts. Consequently, the boundaries of networked publics, such as those described by Piano and Garrison, are less constrained by geography and temporal location than other publics, creating new spaces for community and activist formations. It is these networked publics that I am interested in further exploring throughout this dissertation in relation to girls' blogging communities.

While it is impossible to review all of the relevant literature here on feminist media production, the above work is particularly pertinent to my research because of the ways it establishes links between women's and girls' media production, a public voice, and feminist activism, connections that function as the foundation for this project. I will now turn to examine girls' recent feminist activism, specifically focusing on riot grrrl and third wave feminism.

RIOT GRRRL AND THE THIRD WAVE: GIRLS, FEMINISM, AND ACTIVISM IN THE 1990S AND BEYOND

An important aim of this dissertation is to situate girls' feminist blogging within a longer history of girls' feminist practices. Unfortunately, there is a lack of scholarship investigating girls and feminism prior to the 1990s. There has been, however, a significant amount of research into girls' feminist practices in the 1990s, most notably in relation to riot grrrl; a punk feminist movement that developed in the early 1990s in Olympia, Washington and Washington, DC. Because this work informs my project I outline some of it here and will be drawing on it throughout this dissertation.

In her introduction to *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism*, Anita Harris (2008a) argues that subcultures function as a form of new citizenship for many young people, creating activism that merges the cultural with the political. This can clearly be seen within riot grrrl, which fosters citizenship not only through activist

practices, but also through an emphasis on community. Thus, subcultures such as riot grrrl offer the opportunity for girls to enact feminist activism as girls, be cultural producers and consumers, and develop connections and community with other girls outside of a larger culture that often problematically promotes female competition and individuality. I will return to discuss the importance of subcultures and other cultural spaces for youth politics and activism in chapter two.

Riot grrrl warrants special attention in this project because of its conscious construction as a feminist community and its specific focus on girls and cultural production. With roots in both the punk subculture and feminism, riot grrrl drew on the politics of both, advocating for girls to become politicized through the cultural production of music, zines, style, and a host of activities, including music festivals, girls-only self defense workshops, and the founding of record labels. As Kearney (2006) notes, music functions as a political medium within riot grrrl and such practices as joining a band or starting a zine were framed as viable activist strategies.

While riot grrrl drew on the DIY cultural production advocated by 1970s feminists, participants in the subculture often critiqued mainstream feminism for its lack of attention to girls and girlhood, reframing the identity of “girl” as a position of strength and agency. While it is beyond the scope of this literature review to document all of the ways in which the girl identity was repositioned, some of the central strategies include the adoption of the “grrrl” label, the use of girlhood symbols as part of ironic gender performances, and the incorporation of girlhood themes into songs. These “girl-specific” forms of cultural production positioned riot grrrl as a useful space for girls to enact feminism and politics as girls (Schilt and Zobl, 2008). And as Kearney (2006) notes, participation in riot grrrl often led girls to other feminist and activist practices and

alternative subcultures, and I would argue, thus functioned as a “gateway” to other feminism(s) beyond riot grrrl itself.

Riot grrrl’s privileging of DIY cultural production was particularly important for girls, allowing them – some for the first time – to become active producers of culture through easy and accessible means. Piano (2002) notes that DIY practices have a lengthy history of being used as political tools within marginalized communities, functioning as “a mode of resistance to mainstream culture as well as a form of creative and political expression” (2). For example, riot grrrls advocated for girls to pick up a guitar and just play – no need for lessons, practice, or perfecting chords. This idea made learning an instrument easy and accessible to many girls intimidated by rock instruments. Thus, as Piano argues, “Riot grrrl signified an important attempt to use women’s subcultural production as a tool for political intervention” and breaking down the binary between cultural producer and consumer was one of the ways this was done (para. 11).

Zinemaking is another cultural practice that showcases girls’ creative blending of cultural production with political activism. While zines were common in punk subcultures in the 1970s and 1980s, resurgence of their popularity in the early 1990s amongst riot grrrls is notable, due to both the quantity of zines that were being produced by girls, and also the cultural attention that these zines received. Kearney (2006) notes that because zines are easy to make from one’s bedroom and limited supplies and money are needed, it makes sense that they’d be a significant form of cultural production for girls. While I would not describe these zines as “mainstream”, some certainly had a popular following, due to monthly zine reviews by glossy teen magazine *Sassy*, and promotion by riot grrrl bands, some which were breaking into the mainstream music scene. Girls’ zines have thus been an important media to study for girls’ scholars interested in girlhood, feminism, and activism.

According to Alison Piepmeier (2009), zines also draw on the feminist legacy of media production, which include scrapbooks, health pamphlets, and second wave mimeographs, and must be considered within this historical continuity. However, the taking up of the discursive position of “girl” and the politics of girlhood by many riot grrrl zinesters provides a key point with which to think about zines as offering a unique space for girls’ feminist activism (Kearney, 2006). For example, Kristen Schilt (2003) argues that zines are “unique in that they exemplify a girl-driven strategy for empowerment... that teaches girls how to be cultural producers rather than consumers of empty girl-power products” (79). While I am unable to provide a comprehensive discussion of zines here, I would like to specifically focus on how zinesters utilize what Schilt calls “(c)overt resistance” as a central strategy for feminist activism.

As Kearney (2006), Piepmeier (2009) and Schilt (2003) note, zines have often focused on personal issues, allowing girls to speak about taboo subjects, such as sexual assault, violence, and eating disorders. Many girl zinesters also use their zines to challenge traditional feminine subjectivities and critique limited media representations of girls. Schilt (2003) calls these practices “(c)overt resistance,” a strategy that is a balance between “overtly expressing their anger, confusion, and frustration publicly to like-minded peers [while remaining] covert and anonymous to authority figures” (81). In this sense, zines are often formed around their creator’s personal experiences, ideas, and feelings; reflecting a critical consciousness and engaging with feminist themes that can be highly personal and reflective.

This focus on the personal has often left zines subject to critique and questions about their usefulness as an activist practice. However, Piepmeier argues that the emphasis on the personal should not disqualify zines as an important site for politics. She argues that “[t]o a certain extent, the focus on the personal operates like second wave

consciousness-raising, allowing individual girls and women to recognize inequalities in their own lives and then begin to articulate them to others so that outrage – and then activism – can emerge” (121). Similarly, Schilt notes that (c)overt resistance creates a safe space and support network for girls, often leading to more overt and traditional feminist activism in the future.

While I agree with Piepmeier and Schilt regarding the usefulness of zines as a site for politics, I question the implication they both make, which positions zines as *potentially activist*, functioning to encourage (seemingly more traditional notions of) political activism, rather than recognizing the practice of zinemaking as political activism itself. My critique points to a larger intervention I hope to make with this project by questioning how definitions of activism have been constructed to exclude the activist practices that girls are able to engage, due to the limitations that structure their everyday lives. I will be further analyzing this issue in chapter two.

While I have primarily focused on zines in my discussion due to the way that zines, like blogs, usually privilege writing (although visuals are also a very much present and significant part of many zines), it is important to emphasize that riot grrrl also fostered other forms of girls’ cultural production, most notably music, but also film. Indeed, as Kearney (1997b) argues, riot grrrls were most often linked to their music production in mainstream media accounts of the community, where riot grrrl bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile were regularly mentioned. Like the early women punk musicians discussed by Helen Reddington (2003), riot grrrls challenged dominant notions that positioned males as musicians and females as fans and spectators. In riot grrrl the ability to play proper chords or to pen the best melody was disregarded in favor of encouraging girls to get onstage and be loud. In this sense, music-making for riot grrrls was less about the final musical product, and more about the process that encouraged

girls to cultivate voice, confidence, and control. Thus, in addition to riot grrrl musicians, a network of independent labels, producers, distributors, and venues developed in order to support and promote riot grrrl bands, fostering a larger community that extended beyond the bands themselves (Kearney, 2006).

As Kearney (2006) notes, the development and distribution of riot grrrl zines and music were influential in encouraging girls to engage in other cultural production practices, including filmmaking. Consequently, a group of girl filmmakers also emerged from riot grrrl, including Sadie Benning, Miranda July, and Maria Maggenti. According to Kearney, many of these girl filmmakers utilized riot grrrl music and performers in their films, making “a notable attempt to move beyond the formula of studio-produced female-centered teenpics, which continue to rely on the music of male performers to construct their soundscapes, while also positioning boys as girls’ main role models and objects of desire” (2006, 78). These filmmakers not only challenged representations of girls in their films, but some, such as July, actively worked to create independent distribution networks for girl filmmakers in order to make girl-produced films more accessible. Like zines and music then, riot grrrl films served as a way to connect girls on both a national and even international scale, and became another space for girls to develop their politics.

The feminist focus of riot grrrl coincided within a broader shift in contemporary feminist politics, most clearly visible by the emergence of “third wave feminism” in the early 1990s. While the term has been used to describe a myriad of trends in popular culture, from riot grrrls to the Spice Girls, third wave feminism is typically understood as racially and sexually inclusive, global and ecological in perspective, influenced by poststructural notions of identity and subjectivity, having an interest in popular culture as a site of resistance, as well as a focus on sexuality and pleasure (Karlyn, 2003). The third wave’s privileging of a multiplicity of issues and, as Dicker and Piepmeier (2003) note,

an understanding that “identity is multifaceted and layered” has resulted in the third wave eluding easy categorization and description by both the general population and feminist activists and scholars alike.

While a comprehensive discussion of third wave feminism is not possible due to space limitations, there are several aspects of the third wave that are particularly relevant to my project that I will highlight here. First, the third wave’s privileging of popular culture as a site for feminist activism has significant implications for the kinds of feminist practices being undertaken by girls. While commercial popular culture was often shunned by the women’s liberation movement as promoting sexist, derogatory, and limited portrayals of women, many third wavers have been eager to insert their voices into popular culture, using it as a space to challenge gender representations, debate feminist issues, and subvert dominant readings of media texts. Consequently, the third wave is often represented by their interventions into popular culture, such as the publication of *Bust Magazine*, the adoption of fictional girl icons, like Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the Powerpuff Girls, and the adoration of a diverse array of mainstream feminist musicians such as Tori Amos, Courtney Love, and Kim Gordon.

Second, drawing from riot grrrl’s interest in girl-specific articulations of female agency, third wavers (which include the riot grrrls previously discussed) also have used the figure of girl as a position for agency within popular culture. Gayle Wald (1998) argues that popular female musicians have used strategic performances of girlhood and “girlish” identities as an aesthetic and strategic response to carve a space for alternative female identities within a corporate-controlled popular culture. However, Wald (1998) makes an important intervention here, arguing that scholars must interrogate the ways that popular performances of girlhood may enforce whiteness and naturalize national and racial identities, a critique that has been commonly levied at riot grrrls. This critique has

significant implications for my own research on girl bloggers' articulations of girlhood and the ways that girlhood intersects (or not) with their feminist politics. While the third wave's use of girlhood distinguishes it from older feminisms in that it takes seriously the identity category of age, it also makes visible the importance of continually questioning the ways that power hierarchies can be replicated and enforced within potentially progressive popular culture spaces.

Third, a significant aspect of third wave feminism is its use of technology, what Ednie Kaeh Garrison (2000) has dubbed "technologic," signaling a particular practice of communicating information over space and time, the creation of temporary unified political groups made up of unlikely collectivities, the combining of diverse technologies to construct oppositional cultural expressions, and the construction of feminist politics of location "weaving between and among the spaces of race, class, sexuality, gender, that we all inhabit" (187). Of course, as Piepmeier (2009) notes, feminists have always used media technology to further their causes; however, Garrison argues that the dispersed nature of the third wave has resulted in the need to reevaluate feminist activist politics,

in spaces that cross over and between what is called the 'mainstream' or what is recognized as 'a social movement.' We need to consider the potent political movement cultures being generated by feminists... who are producing knowledge for each other through the innovative integration of technology, alternative media, (sub)cultural and/or feminist networks, and feminist consciousness raising. Such dispersed movement culture spaces are vital as are the networks constantly being formed and reformed among them. (397)

I will return to Garrison's discussion in the third chapter, as it enhances my conceptualization of the connected networks characteristic of girls' feminist blogs.

Finally, the third wave must be understood less as a unified “social movement” with defined goals and strategies, and more as a diverse web of shifting coalitions and multiple practices, a “work in progress” (Zeisler, quoted in Piepmeier, 2009, xiii). This does not mean that community is not important to the third wave; rather it manifests in various formations, a theme that I will take up in chapter three. This more fluid understanding of feminism has been characterized as “doing feminism everyday” (Naples, 2005), “micropolitics” (Budgeon, 2001), “doing feminism” (Piepmeier, 2009), and “living feminist lives” (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000), recognizing the blurred boundaries between “activist practices” and “everyday life” favored by many third wavers. This third wave understanding of activism allows us to think about girls’ media production practices, like creating a zine, writing a blog, or playing in a band, as feminist acts in themselves, allowing girls to model independent, agential, and creative subjectivities that often challenge traditional gender norms, as well as traditional understandings of feminist activism. I will be returning to this discussion in the second chapter.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I adopt what Chris Weedon (1997) calls a feminist poststructuralist theoretical perspective in this dissertation. Drawing heavily on Foucauldian theory, this perspective understands subjectivities as discursively and historically produced, positioning the individual as the site of conflicting and contradictory forms of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). Power, in this sense, is exercised through discourses that are not fixed, but circulate through multiple social institutions, rendering both hegemonic subjectivities as well as discursive space from which individuals can resist dominant subject positions.

The discursive structure of subjectivity offered by this perspective has significant implications for thinking about gender.

Judith Butler (1990) most famously advocated a feminist poststructuralist position by arguing that gender is performative, suggesting that it is not a stable identity or natural category, but “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts... and other discursive means” (191). In a similar vein, Teresa de Lauretis (1987) argues that media function as “technologies of gender,” producing, reproducing, and circulating gender through representation. To these scholars then, gender is not an innate property of bodies or the end product of socialization, but something being continually performed and produced through multiple discursive fields, and it is this understanding of gender I take up in this dissertation.

I further describe my feminist poststructuralist positioning as “third wave,” which relates to both my own social historical context and my object of study. While I agree with such scholars as Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (2003) and Angela McRobbie (2009) who rightly critique the wave metaphor, I nonetheless choose to employ the term “third wave” as demarcating a cultural context, rather than a neat generational divide (Garrison, 2000; Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003). Growing up in the 1990s, I became familiar with feminism through distinctively third wave cultural productions, such as riot grrrl music, zine culture, and books like *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. This late 1990s cultural context has no doubt shaped my own identification as a third wave feminist and the ways in which I approach feminist politics.

My decision to write about contemporary feminism by focusing on girls’ blogs as significant forms of contemporary feminist activism reflects both the third wave’s recognition of popular culture as an important site for the circulation of feminist politics and its attention to girlhood as a potential feminist subject position (Heywood and Drake,

1997; Piepmeier, 2009). Furthermore, I am particularly interested in exploring what Heywood and Drake (1997) call the “lived messiness” of contemporary feminism, marked by shifting coalitional politics, multifaceted and intersectional identities, and playful practices of resistance and activism, all which have been described by scholars such as Kathleen Rowe Karlyn (2003), Heywood and Drake (1997), and Harris (2008a) as defining features of the third wave.

Finally, I approach the study of media from a cultural studies perspective, informed by my position as a poststructuralist feminist scholar. Since the 1980s, there has been a strong tradition of cultural studies scholarship amongst feminist media scholars, and I position my own work as part of this legacy. Douglas Kellner (1995) argues that a cultural studies approach “insists that culture must be studied within the social relations and systems through which culture is produced and consumed and that the study of culture is therefore intimately bound up with the study of society, politics, and economics” (6). Similarly, Julie D’Acci (2005) advocates for a cultural studies perspective that understands the cultural artifact, production, reception, and sociohistorical context as sites that allow for the convergences of discursive practices, mobilizing conjunctures of economic, cultural, social, and subjective discourses. D’Acci’s approach thus “not only precisely points to seeing the conjunctural aspects of each individual site but also to seeing industries and their specific economic imperatives in relation to the other three areas” (434). While it is impossible to comprehensively address each site in a single project, D’Acci’s model for doing cultural studies provides a key guide for thinking about girls’ blogging as having social, political, and economic implications.

I am also drawn to taking a cultural studies approach because of the critical and political commitment that is inherent to the goals of cultural studies, which distinguish it

from other empirical and apolitical research approaches and theoretical positions (Kellner, 1995). Both Kellner and D'Acci note that an analysis of power structures using such concepts as hegemony, ideology, and resistance are central to cultural studies, making it a particularly useful approach for studying marginalized and politicized groups, such as girl feminist bloggers. By adopting a cultural studies perspective I am recognizing this project as informed by my own political goals as a feminist researcher, and having political stakes that I hope to elaborate as I work through my research.

The theoretical position I have outlined above is particularly useful to my project because it allows for the possibility of agency, resistance and eventually social change. Using Foucault's insistence that "points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network", Wheedon suggests that, "Even in these instances [of institutional adoption of hegemonic discourses] there is room for resistance by subjects who refuse to identify with the subject position which they are offered and to which they are forced to conform at least externally" (Foucault as cited in Weedon, 1997, 121, and Wheedon, 97). Likewise, de Lauretis argues that "[t]he terms of a different construction of gender also exist, in the margins of hegemonic discourses. Posed from outside the heterosexual social contract, and inscribed in micropolitical practices, these terms can also have a part in the construction of gender, and their effects are rather at the 'local' level of resistances, in subjectivity and self-representation" (18). This space for agency and resistance is a significant aspect of a feminist poststructuralist position and will provide a useful lens for me to understand girls' feminist blogging as a potentially resistant practice.

METHODOLOGIES

In this dissertation I utilize ethnographic methods, as well as discursive and ideological textual analyses, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of girls' feminist blogging practices. This approach is based upon a cultural studies perspective, which I have outlined above. Cultural studies scholars have used ethnography as a way to understand how people use and interpret culture (Kellner, 1995). Jessica Taft (2011) notes that ethnography provides more "detailed, textured, and complicated data that is lively and engaging [and] incorporates the voices of a group whose words and ideas are not quite what most readers expect, giving space for their own understandings and interpretations" (193).

The idea of girls' voices as speaking in unexpected ways powerfully suggests that our dominant assumptions about girls and girlhood are often problematically formed without the input of girls. Thus, ethnography has become increasingly important for girls studies scholars who want to privilege the voices of girls themselves within their research and aim to understand the complex ways that girls interact with their cultural surroundings. Consequently, an ethnographic approach that privileges the voices of girls is indicative of Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh's (2008) concept of "girl-method," which describes the methodology in girl-centered research that "assumes a political stance of defending and promoting the rights of girls" (214). Unlike other feminist methodologies, this approach makes explicit age and gender in relation to both the researcher and to the researched, a central issue that guides this dissertation.

Recently, several girls' studies scholars have published rich ethnographic studies that provide useful models from a cultural studies perspective for conducting ethnographic research with girls. Jessica Taft's (2011) *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism & Social Change Across the Americas*, Emilie Zaslow's (2009) *Feminism, Inc: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*, and 'Girl Power' *Girls Reinventing Girlhood* by Dawn

Currie, Deirdre Kelly, and Shauna Pomerantz (2009) all utilize ethnographic methods including focus groups, interviews, and participant observation to examine issues such as girls' activism, interaction with girl power media culture, and enactment of girlhood, femininity, and feminism, respectively. These studies inform my own ethnographic approach that takes girls' voices as a starting point for my research inquiry, and I have modeled my own project, specifically the use of open-ended interviews and focus groups, after them.

While the above studies are useful because of their focus on girls, none offer a sustained and focused discussion on the relationship between girls and new media. Here, Mary Gray's (2009) book *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* offers an excellent methodological model for thinking about the relationship between girls and new media. Gray's ethnography examines the ways in which rural queer youth navigate their identities through new media engagements, relationships, and their local cultural context, demonstrating her commitment to "ethnographic approaches that contextualize media engagements as part of a broader social terrain of experience" (14). This specific ethnographic approach - what Gray terms "in situ" - differs from the more common ethnographic approach to media reception by broadening the focus of study beyond the relationship between media text and audience in an approach similar to D'Acci's. Gray explains,

Instead of examining audiences' reactions to specific programs or websites, I attempt to map the relationship between rural young people's experiences of a cluster of media engagements and a milieu that is constitutive of its meaning. An in situ approach to media takes as the object of study the processes and understandings of new media among people within the context of their use... [and] focuses on how media engagements fit into a larger mosaic of collective identity work (127).

While other scholars, such as Angela McRobbie (1991) and Kristin Drotner (1994), have advocated for similar approaches to media research, Gray's work is particularly pertinent to my own project because of its focus on new media, specifically youth Internet practices. Thus, this "in situ" ethnographic approach allows me to better investigate questions of girls' media production practices and the cultural context that informs them, rather than solely their media reception. The questions that guide my ethnographic work will then be informed by this specific methodological standpoint.

My use of ethnographic methods is twofold, consisting of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five self-identified girl feminist bloggers, as well as what I'm calling an "online focus group blog" with an expanded group of eight bloggers (Appendix A). Using a snowball sampling method I was able to locate five girl feminist bloggers who were interested in the project and agreed to commit to four personal interviews via Skype or phone over the six-month research period (April 15, 2012 – October 15, 2012).⁵ I requested that all participants must identify as a girl and be between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one years of age at the start of the project (Appendix B). The participants were asked a range of questions related to feminism, activism, and blogging and were given leeway to raise issues they saw pertinent to our conversation. This open-ended interview structure is a favored methodological approach for feminist researchers who privilege active listening, relational knowledge, and reflexivity as an integral part of the research process (DeVault and Gross, 2006; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Often times I used these interviews to clarify things the bloggers said in the online focus group blogs or to continue conversations that were started there. Each interview generally lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and was recorded and transcribed prior to data analysis.

In addition to my individual interviews, I created an “online focus group blog” on Blogger, a free blogging platform, which functioned as the second part of my ethnographic research. The goal of this space was to facilitate a conversation amongst a diverse group of girl feminist bloggers, which supplemented my interview data. In addition to the participation of my primary five research participants, three other bloggers agreed to participate in the focus group part of the project.⁶ I viewed my role in the focus group as a participant observer, in somewhat of a similar role to a traditional ethnographer. Thus, I posed questions and participated in a limited way in resulting conversations. I posted new questions to the blog approximately every two weeks, yet encouraged bloggers to continue conversations for as long as they saw relevant. I grouped questions under the primary categories of feminist identities and “click moments”; feelings and affect; community; girlhood; feminist waves/history; activist identities and practices of activism; citizenship; media representations; blogging in everyday life; and the future of feminist politics (Appendix C).

My discursive and ideological textual analysis focuses on ten purposefully selected blogs authored by girl feminists, including my eight research participants. I primarily focused my analysis on the written text, including both the blogs posts and comments. However, I also analyze images that are incorporated into blog posts, blog logos, color schemes, links, and other visual content when relevant to my discussion. I read the entirety of each blog up until the end of my data collection period (October 15, 2012), and purposefully selected entries to analyze based upon their relevance to the themes I am addressing in this project. Unfortunately I came across many interesting discussions throughout my research that I am unable to include due to space limitations, and I hope to return to these in a future research project.

Before outlining the chapter layout of this dissertation, I want to acknowledge a primary methodological issue that shapes the reading of this dissertation. Due to IRB regulations I am unable to incorporate identifying details of the blogs I analyze (with the exception of the *FBomb* and *Rookie*), as they are connected to participants whose identities I must protect. For example, several of my participants include images of themselves and biographical details on their blogs, making it impossible to maintain their anonymity if their blog URL is revealed. This is unfortunate, as blog names and logos often reveal fascinating instances of identity performance. I raise this issue here as I believe that it highlights a larger issue for feminist scholars of digital media whose girl participants may want their ideas and activism publicly recognized. Indeed, as I discuss throughout this dissertation, most of my participants are eager to be publicly recognized for their politics and view this recognition as an activist strategy in itself. By denying girls this opportunity to be “public” through academic research are we constraining girls’ agency in ways that are antithetical to their politics and to our role as girls’ studies scholars? This question is worth considering as I suspect this will continue to be an area of concern as digital media research becomes more established as a significant area of inquiry across multiple disciplines.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

In the first chapter of this dissertation, “This is What a Feminist Looks Like: Exploring Feminist Identities through Girl Feminists and Their Blogs,” I draw on theories of identity to demonstrate how girls use blogging to “try out” feminist identities, which are often portrayed as undesirable for girls in mainstream culture. In this sense, blogs function as a discursive space for the performance of feminist identities, including identities that challenge stereotypes of feminists, and those that privilege

intersectionality. I argue that identifying as a feminist helps girls to perform a political agency that not only allows them to navigate the challenges of adolescence, but also encourages and legitimates their performances as active citizens in the present, rather than merely as adults in the future.

Chapter two, “Becoming Activist: Girl Feminist Bloggers’ Activist Identities and Practices,” addresses girl feminist bloggers’ performance of activist identities and analyzes the ways in which they mobilize these identities to engage in activist practices. In order to do this I consider literature on resistance and youth politics, which suggests that activism has changed in relation to a neoliberal cultural context and new media technologies. I consider what this may mean for girls who have been historically excluded from performing political activist identities, arguing that feminist blogging in itself constitutes a form of accessible activism for girls. I outline three key activist practices in which feminist girls engage via blogging and through which they build on longstanding feminist activist practices: education, community-building, and making feminism visible. I contend that recognizing girls’ feminist blogging as activism decenters masculine and adult-focused conceptions of activism, opening space for girls to perform citizenships that are accessible to their social positioning as girls.

In chapter three, “‘Loud, Proud, and Sarcastic:’ Young Feminist Internet Communities as Networked Counterpublics,” I frame girl feminist bloggers as a networked counterpublic in order to highlight the collective politics of girls’ feminist blogging communities. In doing so, I also recognize how the multiple connections that sustain girls’ counterpublics differ from traditional notions of community. I trace how networked counterpublics develop around particular feminist identities and issues, analyzing teenage feminist identities, reproductive rights and Slutwalk as three examples of this. I contend that affective relationships and friendships are an important part of the

functioning of these counterpublics and often serve to sustain girls' activism. These findings challenge much of the scholarly literature that continues to compare "online communities" with those "offline," failing to take into account the fluidity across online and offline spaces that these networked counterpublics exhibit. I argue that the bloggers' networked counterpublics disrupt neoliberal, individualized, "can do" girlhood and the "disarticulation" of feminist organizing promoted by postfeminist discourses (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2009). This framework then allows us to understand blogging as cultivating a collective and relational citizenship practice anchored in the idea of belonging, a significant aspect of feminist citizenship theories (Caron, 2011; Lister, 1997).

The fourth chapter, "'Pint-Sized Internet Phenom?' Feminist Girl Bloggers and the Politics of Public Space and Voice," focuses on how, in addition to producing their own political spaces via blogging, some girl feminist bloggers, such as Julie Zeilinger, Jamie Keiles, and Tavi Gevinson, are also intervening in public space in order to perform their feminist politics for a wider audience. I use teen fashion-turned-feminist blogger Tavi Gevinson as a case study to explore the anxieties around girls as agential public figures. I discursively analyze the mainstream media coverage of Gevinson's four-year ascent to celebrity status, focusing on how her eventual mobilization of feminism allowed Gevinson to defend her place in public life, despite her adult critics. I use this case study to consider how girl bloggers simultaneously challenge normative girlhood subjectivities while embracing commercial girl culture as a place where feminism can be enacted and made accessible to girls. I argue that girl bloggers' emphasis on public intervention as an activist strategy reflects a desire to "speak authoritatively in public" which Elisabeth Klaus and Margreth Lunenborg (2012) suggest as crucial to cultural citizenship.

Chapter five, “ ‘I’ve really Got a Thing for Betty Friedan:’ Girl Feminist Bloggers and the Production of Feminist Histories Online,” maps how girl bloggers are engaging with feminist history. I argue for understanding girl feminist bloggers as historiographers who are not only learning about feminism online and educating their readers about feminist history, but are actively producing feminist history through their blogging. This argument complicates both the wave metaphor and other postfeminist discourses that “generationalize” feminism, demonstrating the crucial role that feminist history plays in girls’ blogs and feminist politics (Scharff, 2012). By learning about and producing their own feminist histories, girl bloggers are able to locate themselves as historical subjects that belong to a larger movement, a feeling that is powerfully articulated by my participants throughout this dissertation. In other words, feminist blogging as a practice of citizenship allows girls to access feminist histories in ways that may be otherwise unavailable to them. Consequently, this sense of belonging provides new modes of imagining oneself as a citizen outside of neoliberal conceptions of the individualized, consumer citizen that is rooted in the present via the consumption of commercial goods.

I conclude this dissertation by outlining the primary contributions that this project makes to the fields of girls’ studies, feminist cultural and media studies, digital media studies, and citizenship studies. First, by theorizing girls’ feminist blogging as a practice of cultural citizenship I mobilize a politicized language often absent in girls’ studies, through which we can understand girls as citizens in the present. This move extends adult-centric theorizations of citizenship to recognize how media production (and other cultural practices) can function as a political, activist, and feminist project accessible to girls. Second, I complicate recent feminist scholarship characterizing our contemporary cultural context as “postfeminist” by arguing that there are indeed girls who are not only feminist, but also committed to challenging postfeminist representations of girlhood

through creative feminist activism, such as blogging. Finally, I put forth a model of conducting online ethnography from a feminist perspective that emphasizes collaboration. I view the research project, particularly the focus group blog, as a form of feminist community building and media production. This contribution builds on new media scholarship by cultural studies scholars such as Mary Gray (2009), while considering a specifically feminist and girl-centered approach to conducting online ethnographic research.

Endnotes

¹ This recent study surveyed only those over 18 and therefore this statistic refers to young women between the ages of 18-29. Nonetheless, several of my participants are 18,19, and 20 and would therefore be included in this cohort.

² Amanda Todd, a fifteen-year-old British Columbia high school student committed suicide on October 10, 2012 after being sexually harassed online. For three years an unknown man continuously circulated a topless photo of Todd to her family, classmates, and teachers. The photo led to Todd being harassed, threatened, and physically assaulted at school. A month before her suicide, Todd created and posted a video to YouTube explaining her situation through the use of flash cards, which quickly went viral upon news of her death. In response to Todd's suicide a motion was introduced in the Canadian House of Commons that proposed more funding for anti-bullying organizations and a study of bullying in Canada.

³ Curiously, Lister (1997) does not recognize age as an identity that shapes one's citizenship.

⁴ I have specifically chosen to use the term "citizenship" rather than "cultural citizenship" in order to blur the false binary between culture and politics and highlight the ways in which girls' cultural practices can be political.

⁵ I had already developed several email relationships with girl feminist bloggers based upon prior research, therefore I used these connections to find other interested participants.

⁶I originally had nine focus group participants, but one unexpectedly had to discontinue her participation in the project.

Chapter One: This is What a Feminist Looks Like: Exploring Feminist Identities through Girl Feminists and Their Blogs

I'm a feminist. Man, that feels good.

I've been a feminist all my life but didn't realize it until a few weeks ago when I checked out a twenty-pound stack of books from the library... Somewhere along the line something clicked; maybe it wasn't as glamorous as the whole light-bulb-over-the-head charade, but it was pretty dang life-changing.....

When I realized I was a feminist I thought "what do I do now"? I was honestly scared to tell anybody about my new "discovery" because I wasn't sure how they'd react.... But why did I have to feel this way? Like I was unearthing a dirty secret, my own straight girl's version of coming out of the closet? Why am I scared for the future, of what people will think of me? The fact is, today's world is dangerous for teenagers like me (and you, if you're reading this) because the "f-word" is marred by too many stereotypes to count.....

So I wanted to write a blog about something I actually understand. I'm not an award-winning physicist or world-renowned psychologist (yet!), but what I do understand is the stuff swishing around in my noggin. I want to write about life from my perspective - a feminist teen just trying to make sense of the world - and hopefully appeal to others who feel the same way (but who haven't necessarily found their "feminist outlet").

-Renee, Sunday June 27, 2010

I've quoted the inaugural post of Renee's blog at length because it provides a useful introduction to many of the issues I will discuss in this chapter: the private process of identifying oneself as feminist, the public assertion and performance of a feminist identity, the unique needs of teenage girl feminists, and their desire to do something about gender inequality as activists. It also reveals how girls like Renee adopt blogging to explore – and, as I will argue, perform - emerging feminist identities. It is this relationship between feminist identities and blogging that informs the guiding research

questions for this chapter: How do girl bloggers understand their own feminist identities? In what ways do girls use blogging to better articulate and explore these identities? How do girls' feminist identities challenge normative constructions of both girls and feminists? What benefits do girls receive from performing a feminist identity? Finally, how might girls' performances feminist identities inform practices of citizenship in the present, rather than as future adults?

I begin by framing the primary stakes of this chapter by asking how we may think about girls' identity performances as a practice of citizenship in the present. I argue that by consciously and publicly performing political identities, girl feminist bloggers produce a politicized subjectivity that suggests it is their responsibility to speak up and act on their beliefs as youth. Consequently, girl bloggers complicate traditional practices of citizenship, such as voting for example, because their identities as feminists encourage their participation as political actors before their eighteenth birthday. In this sense, I am suggesting that girls' feminist identities are intimately related to citizenship practices, and this chapter sets out to better establish this relationship.

I then turn to briefly outlining the cultural studies literature on identity that shapes my theoretical approach in this chapter, drawing on the work of Stuart Hall (1989, 1996), Angela McRobbie (1994), Barbara Crowther (1999) and Mary Celeste Kearney (2006). I emphasize the importance of identity for adolescents and track how identity exploration has been privileged in various girlhood cultural practices. Next, I review literature exploring how feminist identities have been understood within a postfeminist cultural context. Much of this scholarship undertaken within the past decade draws on ethnographic research with girls and young women who repudiate a feminist identity in their daily lives. I position my own ethnographic research as a direct response to this

body of work, focusing instead on a group often absent in this literature - girls who explicitly identify as feminist.

I then move on to discuss my research findings, drawing on personal interviews with bloggers, focus group conversations and a discursive and ideological textual analysis of girls' feminist blogs. I outline girls' own definitions of feminism and moments of feminist identification, analyzing these in relation to their blogging practices. Following this discussion I interrogate girl bloggers' "affective investments" in a feminist identity, drawing on the previous work of Alison Piepmeier (2009) and Jessica Taft (2011) (Gunnarsson Payne, 2012, 69). By investigating the relationship between girls' feminist identities and blogging, I take up Jenny Gunnarsson Payne's (2012) call to "take seriously the ways in which gendered identities are transformed into *feminist* identities" through feminist media production (66, emphasis in original). In doing so, I ultimately argue that girls' blogs become spaces for politicization through the "trying out" of feminist identities (Crowther, 1999). Consequently, adopting a feminist identity is not merely a playful experimentation, but serves as a politicized strategy for girl bloggers to legitimate their voices as active citizens in the present.

NEW CITIZENSHIP PRACTICES: CONSIDERING FEMINIST IDENTITIES

My interest in citizenship encourages me to ask how girls' performances of feminist identities through blogging may function as a citizenship practice in the present. As I outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, there is a lack of politicized language to talk about girls' citizenship projects, resulting in a silence around how girls view themselves as citizens and how they practice citizenship in their everyday lives (Caron, 2011). When citizenship is addressed in relation to girls, their identity performances have

been theorized more as a “pathway” to citizenship, rather than an articulation of citizenship in the present. For example, Anita Harris (2008b, 2012a) begins to make a connection between girls’ online media production on social networking sites and citizenship when she argues that online cultures and social networking “are about creating a public self, which is the first step in seeing oneself as a citizen” (2008b, 489). While Harris does acknowledge the importance in valuing online media participation as a practice in itself, her project does not analyze the ways in which publicly adopting particular identities, what she calls “public selves,” may function as a practice of citizenship for girls.

It is important to recognize that public visibility in itself does not constitute a practice of citizenship. I will take up this issue in more detail in chapter four of this dissertation, however, here my interest is in specifically feminist identities. By consciously and publicly taking on political identities, the bloggers I discuss in this chapter produce a politicized subjectivity that suggests it is their responsibility to speak out against legislative measures restricting abortion in Michigan, or to give a speech about feminism at a school assembly, for example. While their stances may not be popular - indeed they resist many normative conceptions of girlhood, femininity, and even activism (as I’ll discuss in the following chapter) - several girl bloggers tell me that they view these resistant identities as the necessary actions of citizens.

For example, Renee says, “As a feminist I’m trying to incite positive change in our society via promoting equality. Equality will only make our country stronger – for example, more women in positions of power will [generate] new ideas and perspectives, innovation, and creative change – so I feel that I’m being an engaged responsible citizen!” Here, Renee calls upon her feminist identity as a primary way that she engages in citizenship, constructing herself as a citizen through not only her dissent to current

gender inequalities, but through her activism that works to make her community and country more “equal” and just. In other words, Renee’s citizenship came into being and is legitimated through her performance of a feminist identity, a relationship that I will be exploring throughout this chapter.

THEORIZING IDENTITIES IN CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies scholars have always been interested in issues of identity, and indeed, the concept is foundational to the field. As Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) notes, cultural studies scholars working from a poststructuralist theoretical approach reject Cartesian notions of a unified and coherent subject, rather understanding discourse as a primary mechanism for constituting identity. Stuart Hall (1989) explains, “Perhaps, instead of thinking of an identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which ... discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (68). In this sense, identities are always “becoming” through discourse, rather than already “being” or able to be discovered (Hall, 1996).

While this poststructuralist approach presents the danger of depoliticizing identities and the role they may play in politics, Hall’s emphasis on and inclusion of a historical materialist perspective negates this risk. Identities, according to Hall, are discursively constructed historically, culturally, and politically, and thus informed by the contextual location of a subject (Hall, 1996). Consequently, cultural studies scholars argue that identities cannot be analyzed in isolation from their historical, geographical, and social context. This idea is emphasized throughout this dissertation through my own attention to postfeminist and neoliberal discourses that dominate contemporary popular

culture in the United States. In this chapter I am concerned with how girls' feminist identities are performed in such a context through blogging.

Angela McRobbie (1994) recognizes that young people are particularly invested in experimenting with identities and that this often occurs within the realm of cultural participation and production. She argues,

Different, youthful, subjectivities, for all the reasons of generational and institutional powerlessness which are the product of age and dependency, require and find in youth cultural forms strong symbolic structures through which 'who you are,' 'who you want to be' and 'who you want to go out with' can be explored, not in any finalized way, but rather as an ongoing and reflective social process (192).

McRobbie's assertion of the importance of cultural space as a site for the performance of identities echoes the significance that cultural studies scholars have long placed upon cultural spaces as a site of politics for youth. Thus, McRobbie reminds us that not only can we understand youth as a period of one's life where the exploration of identity is privileged, but that cultural spaces have been significant to this process both historically and contemporarily.

For girls, who often experience more limitations on their participation in cultural practices than their male peers, identity exploration often occurs through the practice of writing, which can be done from the security of one's home. I raised this idea in the introduction and will be continually referencing it throughout this dissertation, as it usefully allows me to place contemporary girls' blogging in conversation with the practices of previous generations of girls. Barbara Crowther (1999) theorizes girls' diary writing as both a public and private performance of identity. She writes,

[S]ome of what is going on in diary discourse is a kind of performance in front of a mirror, seeing how things look, trying out poses and voices ... This is performing to oneself, not one's better self, maybe one's worse self, a performance they themselves can watch, as it were, in a mirror. At the transitional stage of adolescence – when both one's subjectivity and one's style are unsettled and maybe open to experiment – it must help in the development and strengthening of identity, not only 'defining the self by objectivating and the observing it' but extending and manipulating its boundaries too (208, 214).

Crowther's notion of "trying out" identities as a type of performance through the writing process is significant to consider in light of the ways that girls use their blogs as sites of identity exploration. Therefore, I draw on Crowther's analysis throughout this chapter to illuminate my own research findings.

One of the crucial implications of cultural studies' theorizations of identity to my own project is the way in which girls have utilized identity exploration to challenge and subvert hegemonic girlhood identities. In her research on *grrrl* zines, films and websites, Kearney (2006) demonstrates how zines provide a space for their creators' exploration of nontraditional identities, "especially those that may be deemed inappropriate for individuals of their sex and age and thus are rarely permitted public expression" (146). Similarly, Stephen Duncombe (1997) describes zines as a space to "try out new personalities, ideas, and politics" (43). Ashley Grisso and David Weiss' (2005) exploration of girls' performances of sexual identity on the *gURL.com* message board also reveals how girls use writing and media production to experiment with identities that resist hegemonic femininity, such as lesbian, bisexual, and sex-positive identities. This research suggests that nontraditional and political identities like those of "feminist" don't exist inherently, but can be cultivated, negotiated, explored, and performed via cultural production practices such as creating a zine or a blog.

GIRLS CONFRONT THE “F WORD:” WHO IS A FEMINIST AND WHAT IS FEMINISM?

Renee’s blog post that introduces this chapter reveals the tension that the feminist label continues to carry in contemporary culture. Indeed, stereotypes of man-hating, bra-burning, and hairy-legged “feminists” still exist within popular consciousness, including within high school environments where feminism is often not part of the daily lexicon. Feminism itself is too often misunderstood as a movement about taking away men’s rights, promoting women as better than men, or a politics of times past, no longer relevant to North American women who supposedly have achieved equality. These dominant discourses inform the cultural climate where contemporary teenage girls grow, and the way they understand feminism and their own feminist identities must be viewed in relation to this context.

As I outlined briefly in my introduction, within the past fifteen years there has recently been significant scholarly and popular interest in girls’ understandings of feminism, particularly in what has been dubbed the “I’m-not-a-feminist-but” phenomenon, characterized as a popular stance amongst girls and young women (Budgeon, 2001; McRobbie, 2009; Harris, 2010; Zeilinger, 2012a). The seemingly contradictory identity positions taken up by young women – supposedly desiring feminist gains for equality yet ambivalent about feminism as a political movement – have been confusing for scholars and have led to a focus on the cultural contexts that inform such subjectivities. For example, Shelley Budgeon (2001) maintains that contemporary young women may not choose to identify as a feminist, but their actions or “life politics” and identities remain informed by feminist ideals. She argues that it is the cultural tensions, contradictions, and fragmentation of our late modern cultural context (what I am referring

to as “neoliberal”) that prevents young women and girls from adopting the feminist label.

She writes,

Non-identification may display a refusal to be fixed into place as a feminist, but may also be a sign of the inability to position oneself as feminist because of confusing and contradictory messages about what feminism really is. This is a point of major significance. What is feminism? When an answer to such a question is so difficult to produce is it surprising that young women do not identify themselves as feminist? (23)

Likewise, recent ethnographic work examining girls and feminism, such as a large-scale study with eighty girls conducted by Emilie Zaslow (2009), also highlights the complexity of the feminist label for many contemporary girls. Zaslow found that while most teenage girls will often agree with feminist ideals and are not hostile to feminism, many are ambivalent about embracing the feminist label, and instead describe their beliefs using a discourse of individual rights and choice, rather than a collectivist or redistributive approach to feminism. She understands this finding in relation to the postfeminist commercial girl power rhetoric popular during her participants’ youth, which focuses on individualism and choice as markers of an empowered feminine identity.

In a similar vein, Christina Scharff (2012) argues that young women are encouraged to repudiate feminism through prominent cultural discourses of postfeminism and neoliberalism, both of which privilege an individualist rhetoric that is in tension with the collectivist approach to structural inequalities that feminism takes up. Her study, based upon interviews with forty young women in the UK and Germany, reveals the “contested space that feminism occupies within the cultural space of postfeminism,” making visible two interpretive frames through which young women understand

feminism; as valuable, but no longer necessary, or as extreme and ideological (Scharff, 2012, 40). Scharff's most significant intervention, however, is the way in which she theorizes repudiations of feminism within the heterosexual matrix, arguing that the "trope of the feminist" as unfeminine, man-hating, and lesbian is imagined as a constitutive outside of the heteronormative order, "haunting" her participants, despite the lack of tangible evidence that such a feminist exists. According to Scharff then, the trope of the feminist is not merely a negative stereotype, but reveals the complex ways that performances of gender and sexuality shape dis-identification with feminism.

The above studies highlight how problematic both defining feminism and defining who is a feminist can be, issues that are certainly not new but are constantly shifting in relation to both broader cultural contexts and particular social situations (Scharff, 2012). Can a young woman who chooses to have children at a young age and forego paid employment be a feminist? What about a teenage girl who loves commercial hip hop music? Is feminism about promoting radical political change? Or should it focus on socializing girls into traditionally male sphere of employment? While it is clear that limited definitions are not desirable for this kind of study, it nonetheless remains important to have a focused understanding of the word "feminism." Consequently, I add my own voice to this debate with caution, and anchor my discussion on how my participant bloggers define feminism and their own feminist identity, rather than my own understanding on these terms. Indeed, I take up Scharff's (2012) insistence that feminism must be approached "flexibly" and that we should understand feminism as a discursive category, which recognizes the multiple iterations of the word, better understood as feminisms in the plural (Scharff, 2012; Butler, 1990).

This approach is necessary in part due to the varying responses I received from bloggers when I asked them to define feminism. Several of my research participants

articulated definitions of feminism that align with a liberal feminist ideology, while alluding to the complexity that arises when putting feminism into practice. For example, Courtney says that “[m]y definition of feminism is simply gender equality. Not only under law, but also socially. Just because we have laws that say everyone is equal, not everyone is treated as such.” Here, Courtney recognizes that feminism must be more than just formal laws, but a cultural shift in attitude that involves “treating a woman who works and a woman who stays home with the children with the same respect. It’s accepting women who don’t shave or wear makeup as well as those that prefer those things [sic]. It’s seeing an equal distribution of women of different colors, shapes, and sizes in the media.”

In a similar vein, Madison claims, “My definition of feminism is the belief in women’s economic, social, and political equality.” However, she stresses an attention to intersectionality as a central part of her feminism. “I think it’s important to remember that there are lots of different types of women. Feminism should help ALL women. We cannot be free if one of our sisters is still bound by her race, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Intersectionality plays a large role in the feminism I practice and believe in.” It is not surprising that liberal feminist ideology informs much of my participant’s understanding of feminism. As Bonnie Dow (1996) notes in her study of television programming from the 1970s and 1980s, it is liberal feminism that is most often incorporated into popular media, making the tradition’s individualist discourse of equality, opportunities, and rights the most familiar feminist discourse to many Americans.

Liberal feminist values also align with perceived American values, and are consequently more palpable to the public than the rhetoric of radical or socialist feminists, for example. Because liberal feminism emphasizes legislative changes in order

to open up opportunities to women rather than a more substantial alteration of unequal social relations, it is non-threatening to the status quo, particularly men. Indeed, scholars such as Lisa Duggan (2003) have analyzed the ways in which “equality” has recently become a central part of conservative neoliberal rhetoric that privilege a “ ‘color-blind’ anti-affirmative action racial politics, conservative-libertarian ‘equality feminism,’ and gay ‘normality’” (44). And while Duggan’s discussion of the neoliberalization of equality is markedly different from the liberal feminism that supported suffrage, the Equal Rights Amendment and sexual harassment lawsuits, it is important to recognize how discourses of equality remain prevalent in both ideologies.

Nonetheless, comments like Courtney’s and Madison’s also point to the influence of third wave and U.S. third world feminisms to my participant’s definitions of feminism. As Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (1997) note, third wave feminists acknowledge the necessity of complicating the category of “woman” by recognizing the multiple experiences and oppressions women face based upon race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, religion, national identity, ability and other identities. This third wave perspective owes much to the U.S. third world feminists who have rightfully problematized the notion of “sisterhood” and made visible the experiences of women of color within feminism since the early 1980s (Sandoval, 2000; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981). As a result, I’ve discovered that the language of intersectionality is common amongst young feminists today.

Given that the rhetoric of choice is a central part of postfeminist culture, I was surprised that only one of the bloggers I interviewed emphasized choice as a central part of her definition of feminism, although others, such as Courtney, certainly allude to it (Scharff, 2012; McRobbie, 2009; Gill, 2007). Amandine suggests that “[f]eminism is all about giving people choices. Women can keep or terminate a pregnancy without being

judged either way. Men can become fashion designers without people automatically assuming they're gay. Women can become CEOs and balance a healthy family life too.” While Amandine’s definition problematically glosses over the structural inequalities that present certain men and women with more choices than others, her definition makes sense considering not only the potential influence of postfeminist discourses on girls today, but also the ways in which third wave feminism has conceptualized feminism as more fluid, flexible, and individually-shaped (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003; Karlyn Rowe, 2003; Heywood and Drake, 1997).

In their introduction to *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* Alison Piepmeier and Rory Dicker (2003) caution against what they call a “feminist-free-for-all,” where any choice a woman seemingly makes is positioned as feminist, without an analysis of broader social power structures. Indeed, scholars such as Zaslow (2009) have demonstrated that this “free for all” stance towards feminism is prevalent amongst their young research participants. It also shares some similarities with Tavi Gevinson’s articulation of feminism. While I will discuss the sixteen-year-old blogger and her feminist publication, *Rookie*, in chapter four, her definition of feminism is important to consider here. In a March 2012 TedxTeen talk, Tavi argues that, “feminism is not a rulebook, but a discussion, a conversation, a process.”¹ I asked my participants for their comments on Gevinson’s take on feminism, and their thoughts reveal important elements of their own understandings of feminism.

For example, Kat says that she “semi-agree[s]” with Gevinson, explaining that “[w]hile [feminism] isn’t a book of rules, I think there are certain things you have to believe in order to be a part of the feminist community, including equal pay, reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, etc. There are certain things you have to agree with.” Kat’s comments reveal that to her, feminism must address larger structural inequalities (e.g.

equal pay), and attention to intersectional oppressions (e.g. LGBTQ rights). Kat's feminism then, is not about only individual choices and actions, but is tied to a social analysis that recognizes the complex ways that power works, revealing the influence of both third wave and radical feminisms.

While Renee agrees with Kat, maintaining, "there are certain beliefs that basically come with the feminist job description," she stresses a definition of feminism that still leaves room for growth and, as she states, "ever-changing identities." She explains,

When I first started writing, for example, I saw feminism more as a set of rules or beliefs that I should follow and explore. But as I blogged more and started having conversations with other feminists, I started seeing feminism as something much more broad and abstract that could be applied to many areas of my life – whether as a confidence boost, a sense of internal drive and accomplishment, or a lens through which I could view the things life was throwing at me. In this way, feminism has become much more personal. It's no longer a club I feel I have to prove myself to be a part of, it's something I can mold and shape to work for me.

Renee's comments suggest how important accessibility is to her understanding of feminism, something that seems appropriate considering her age. To Renee, discourses of feminism must be something that she can access and apply to her own life in order for it to make sense to her.

The responses I have described above point to what Scharff (2012) calls the "multiplicity of engagements with feminism," and reveals the diverse ways that feminist identities and feminism is imagined by the bloggers I interviewed. There are numerous reasons for these varying understandings of feminism – race, class, sexuality and other identities, home environment and social location, specific interests and activist engagements, and education – to name a few. I will address these issues throughout this dissertation, parsing out the multiple ways that girl bloggers negotiate, produce, and

articulate feminisms in order to demonstrate that girl feminist bloggers are not a homogenous group or subculture, but representative and productive of the differences folded into contemporary feminisms. However, I now turn to discussing some of the similar sentiments about feminism shared by the bloggers I interviewed, including an enthusiastic investment in their own feminist identity.

Because my study consists of a purposefully chosen sample of girls that identify as feminist, it is not surprising that a feminist identity is a significant part of their lives. Nonetheless, I believe that it is important to stress the enthusiastic response I received when I asked girls about their feminist identities, as these expressions reflect an affective dimension of a feminist identity that I will take up later in this chapter. Renee tells me, “I’m not exaggerating when I say that feminism is a HUGE part of my overall identity” and that she views her feminist identity as “a very, very positive thing.” Likewise, Amandine describes her feminist identity as “extremely important” to her overall identity. While my participants’ experiences cannot be generalized across girls as a group, their interest in identifying as feminists remain significant in light of dominant discourses suggesting girls today are not interested in feminism, complicating some of the claims made by scholars such as Budgeon (2001), Zaslow (2009), Scharff (2012) and others. Thus, it is my hope that this discussion contributes to this body of work through highlighting the voices of girl feminists rather than non-feminists.

This interest in and enthusiasm for thinking about their own feminist identities, including the “click moments” when girls discovered that they’re feminist, and tales of “going public,” when they publicly share their new identity, is clearly reflected in many of the girl-authored blogs I analyzed. Similar to Renee’s posting with which I opened this chapter, many girls choose to blog about how they became feminist and what their newfound feminist identity means to them. Several of these stories are detailed on the

FBomb, an online community for teenage girl bloggers to which several of my participants regularly contribute. For example, in a June 2, 2010 post called “My Click Moment,” Julie Z. recounts, “I can’t pinpoint a moment, let alone a day, week or month, but I eventually ‘clicked’ sometime near the end of my freshman year of high school. I wasn’t afraid of being a feminist, and I wasn’t afraid to tell people that I was. And I’ve been happy with myself and my life ever since.”²

Similarly, an *FBomb* post titled “Why I Became a Feminist” by Rachel F. on October 26, 2009 details how the author became a feminist after receiving a sexist comment from a male classmate. And a November 2, 2010 posting by Anna R., a sixth grade girl, begins with, “In fourth grade I had my first dose of feminism. I had read an article in a local feminist magazine that spoke of the expected roles and stereotypes of a modern female. The issues they were talking about bothered me. I could feel it.” These types of stories are a regular part of the *FBomb* and other feminist blogs, and suggest the importance of these first experiences with feminist identities in the lives of feminist girls. Indeed, many of these experiences are described as transformative to the blogger’s identity, and become the first necessary step in connecting with a larger feminist community, an issue I will discuss in more detail in chapter three.

But despite the enthusiasm with which my participants talked about their feminist identities – a finding that I will return to throughout this chapter - they were very much aware of the potential tensions that their feminist identity could raise in their daily lives. For example, Renee explains that once she realized that she wanted to identify as feminist she felt like she was hiding a secret. She tells me, “I wondered how my family would react, or my friends, or what this new label meant for my life as a whole.” And while she was pleasantly surprised by her own family and friends’ reactions to her going public as a feminist, she maintains that, “Once you put yourself out there as a feminist you WILL

deal with mixed reactions, but [you can't] let that get you down." In fact, Renee claims that the positive experiences she's had – like receiving a hand-written letter from a girl thanking her for introducing her to feminism through her blog – far outweigh the negative comments that she's received on her blog's comments section.

Other bloggers reveal more contentious experiences with family and friends upon disclosing their feminist identity. Courtney tells me that her religious family tried to curb her feminist leanings by telling her "the Church isn't an advocate of feminism." (Luckily, she didn't care!) Likewise, Kat claims that her classmates and even her teachers in her rural conservative Midwestern high school would give her "crap" about being a feminist, mocking her feminist beliefs in AP History class. And while Amandine found her mom to be "totally cool" with her feminist identity, her friends think feminism is "a load of garbage," although Amandine admits that some are actually what she calls "practical feminists," interested in women's rights, like equal pay, rather than the feminist theory which fascinates her.

Eve Sedgwick's (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet* provides useful insight into how girls' disclosures of their feminist identities constitute a key part of transformative identity work. Indeed, we must ask what the difference is between Amandine and her friend who may support equal pay but refuses the feminist identity? Sedgwick reminds us that the act of "coming out" does not require the revelation of new information or actions, but the discursive articulation of a subjectivity that may or may not be known. In doing so one's identity is produced as "discursive fact" that carries both transformative potential on an individual and social level, as well as risk (Sedgwick, 1990; Foucault, 1978). In other words, while girls like Amandine and Renee may have always espoused feminist values and actions, the public performance of a feminist identity within the discursive framework of a revelation, constitutes a shift that carries both power, and, as

Renee mentions in her inaugural post, danger. And while several of the bloggers did mention negative experiences upon disclosing their feminist identity, the power that many felt upon identifying as feminist suggests an empowering transformation that several bloggers experienced, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

We don't know much about Amandine's friend whom she describes as a "practical feminist," although Amandine claims her friend doesn't personally identify as such. Of course, it is not my objective to state that her friend is or is not a "real" feminist. Nonetheless, Sedgwick claims that "[c]losetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (3). Thus, the speech act of not identifying as feminist – remaining closeted so to speak – reflects the ambivalent positioning of many feminists within contemporary culture. The silence around identifying as feminist – whether one believes one is or not – must then be considered as "a weighty and occupied and consequential epistemological space" worthy of careful analysis (77).

Scharff's research on young women's disavowal of feminism accomplishes this and even suggests a productive link with Sedgwick's scholarship. Scharff argues that young women's refusal of a feminist identity is rooted in maintaining the heteronormative order, whereby "the 'feminist' acts as a constitutive outside of the heterosexual matrix" (87). In this sense, "coming out" as a feminist – language that Renee herself uses in the blog post that opens this chapter – is very much situated within discourses of sexuality that can be acknowledged or unacknowledged. Although none of my participants specifically mentioned a fear that they'd be assumed to be lesbian once they publicly identified as feminist, the pervasive nature of the "lesbian feminist" stereotype may indeed have caused some of the bloggers anxiety about "coming out,"

suggesting some productive scholarly commonalities between being out of the closet as gay or feminist.³

These stories I discuss above point to the diversity of experiences that girl bloggers have had with regard to going public with their feminist identities and suggest, once again, that it is impossible to generalize across even this small group of girl feminist bloggers. Indeed, social contexts informed by geographical location and familial beliefs appear to shape the responses that my participants received to their identity claims, and research also suggests that identity categories such as race, class, and sexuality inform engagements with a feminist identity (Scharff, 2012; Kearney, 2006). What connects my participants however, is how they have used blogging as a strategy to “try out” feminist and activist identities (Crowther, 1999). I will turn to this now in the next subsection in order to discern how blogs function as a discursive space for the performance of feminist identities.

FEMINIST IDENTITIES IN FLUX: EXPLORING FEMINISM THROUGH BLOGGING

While several scholars have explored the connection between girls’ identity exploration and media production, most of this research does not focus on the political identities that girls cultivate through media production, inadvertently reinforcing the notion of girls as apolitical (Mazzarella, 2005, 2010; Stern, 2007; Stern, 2002). Of course, there are some notable exceptions including some excellent analyses of riot grrrl culture by Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo (1998), Mary Celeste Kearney (2006), Kristen Schilt and Elke Zobl (2008), and Alison Piepmeier (2009); as well as Dawn Currie, Deirdre Kelly, and Shauna Pomerantz’s (2009) study of girl skaters and “Online

Girls.” I build on this work by focusing on the relationship between feminist identities and blogging, and the productive possibilities of this relationship.

While all of my participants acknowledge an important link between their feminist identities and their blogging, the process of becoming a feminist blogger varies. In some cases, it was the process of identifying as a feminist that directly led some girls to start blogs in order to perform and experiment with a feminist identity. “The whole reason I started my blog was to document the life of a new feminist, and all the mistakes and misgivings I might have along the way. Writing, blogging, and receiving feedback from older feminists has allowed me to understand and appreciate the movement more,” Renee tells me.

Other girls, like Madison, claimed that her own transformation to feminist blogger “just sort of happened.” Madison, who began blogging four years ago at the age of fifteen, originally wrote about a variety of topics while following other feminist blogs because of her general interest in feminism. She recalls, “I slowly started to blog about feminism [myself] and then it totally blew up in my face! I went from having, like, twenty followers that were mainly friends from school to having a thousand followers in two months... I realized that I was the only – or at least one of only a few – teenagers blogging about feminism on tumblr.” She changed her blog’s name to reflect the new focus on feminism and has considered herself a feminist blogger since. Four years later, her blog continues to be a hub for feminist activity on tumblr and she has been actively using her position as a blogger to advocate for the reproductive rights of women in her home state of Michigan.

Like many of her blogging peers, Madison’s commitment to feminist blogging was only the beginning of a process of engagement with feminism that would result in multiple, shifting, and complicated feminist identities, what I’ve referred to as “feminist

identities in flux” (Keller, 2012a). Indeed, several of my participants revealed that the blogging process itself, including writing one’s own posts, but also reading others’ posts and commenting on others’ blogs, has changed the ways in which bloggers perform their feminist identities. For example, Madison claims that just connecting with likeminded peers has made her more confident in her feminist beliefs. She says, “I thought I was the only one when I first started. I really thought it was me and Jessica Valenti and that was it. I love blogging because now I know all these people – tons and tons of people who agree with me, which is great. I’ve become more sure [of myself] and less apologetic I think... it has made me more confident.”

While I will elaborate on the connection between feminist identities and one’s sense of self later in this chapter, I do want to highlight how Madison’s comments can allow us to think productively about the ways that blogging can facilitate a shift from understanding one’s feminist identity as an individual feminist identity to part of a collective feminist identity. Likewise, Courtney tells me, “Since beginning my blog, my feminist identity became a lot more than just being [a] personal [thing]... Up until then it was just something that I identified as because I believed in gender equality, but I think after that as a feminist I can be part of a larger community and actually share what I think and talk to people about these things and get other people interested in these issues. So it became more about community issues than just about myself.” Thus, while scholars such as Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012b) have described digital media as inherently narcissistic, implying that young women who use these technologies are more interested in individualized identities and actions, the comments I have been analyzing complicate these assumptions; suggesting that blogging may facilitate communal feminist identities, something I will discuss further in chapter three.

Courtney's comments also relate to the other main point that several of my participants made when I asked about how blogging has changed their performance of a feminist identity; namely, that blogging has served to complicate their performances by introducing them to a range of new feminist issues. For example, Kat admits that she learned a lot about LGBTQ issues once she began blogging, and can now understand her feminist identity as supportive of LGBTQ rights. Madison also claims that her participation in the feminist blogosphere has complicated her own feminist identity by exposing her to the experiences of women of color and queer women. In this sense, many of these bloggers began to learn about issues like intersectionality and privilege through their blogging and have had to reconsider their own feminist identities and values in relation to this new knowledge. In Madison's case, this knowledge has altered her definition of feminism to recognize the importance of difference and intersectionality, which I described above. Finally, Renee summarizes her own changing identity as follows:

Blogging continually shapes my feminist identity. Blogging requires one to research topics they may not be familiar with and also consider the views of those responding to their writing via comments, emails, etc. Blogging, then, allows us to continually learn and form new opinions. These revised opinions help mold our ever-changing identities.

We can make sense of these identity changes and shifts described by the bloggers by returning to some of the existing research on identity by girls' studies scholars that introduced this chapter. While Renee uses the word "experiment" to describe her blog, the similar idea of "trying out" identities has been employed by Crowther (1999) in regards to girls' diaries and Kearney (2006) in regards to grrrl zines, films and websites. Both scholars discuss how these mediums serve as performative spaces for girls' identity

work, facilitating the expression of fluid, shifting, and experimental identities. While I'm suggesting that girls' blogs work in similar ways, I'd like to build on Crowther's and Kearney's ideas by thinking about the performance of feminist identities as being a resistant, political, or even an activist act, an idea I will elaborate on in the next chapter. I employ this move in order to recognize how identities function as political markers that girl bloggers are mobilizing in order to produce social change in their daily lives.

PRODUCING "NEW" VISIBLE FEMINIST IDENTITIES

The bloggers that I interviewed were very much aware of the dominant discourses about feminism, particularly those about feminists. Several of my participants referred to "the feminist stereotype" which suggests feminists are masculine, lesbian, and "man hating" as being the prevalent characterization of feminists within popular culture and high school life. Theoretically, I return to Scharff's (2012) work, which conceptualizes the "trope of the feminist" as mobilizing a range of affective responses and performances that suggest "the feminist" must be understood as more than a negative stereotype that must be eradicated, but instead as an identity intimately bound within larger normative discourses about sexuality and gender. However, I have chosen to utilize the language of my participants here, most of which use the term "stereotype" to talk about the ways that feminists are commonly constructed in public discourse within the U.S. I suspect that this term is employed due to their familiarity with it, as it is a concept often taught in primary and secondary education.

While it may be easy for adult feminists and scholars to dismiss problematic feminist stereotypes as indicative of ignorance, these stereotypes serve as the awkward backdrop against which girl feminists often articulate their own feminist identities and

therefore warrant scholarly attention. Indeed, several of the bloggers I spoke to were very concerned with challenging feminist stereotypes and asserting their own feminist identities in ways that demonstrate the diversity the feminist label carries, or “new” feminist identities. Of course, as Scharff (2012) details, feminist stereotypes and challenges to these stereotypes have a lengthy history in Western feminisms dating back to the early suffragette movements. Consequently, I employ the term “new” with a knowing wink, fully realizing that contemporary girl bloggers are perhaps only the most recent cohort of feminists to rally against the stereotype of the feminist. Yet we must recognize the need to take their concerns about and challenges to the stereotype of the feminist seriously, as these objections may reveal further insight into the cultural positioning of young feminists.

For example, Renee tells me, “I would say that feminism for me is advocacy for young people, telling them what [feminism] is [because] it’s a scary word to a lot of people. Just trying to dispel those stereotypes is what I’m focusing on through my blog.” She describes her blogging as an attempt to present a more realistic picture of what a feminist is with the goal of helping younger girls to identify with the movement. This strategy can be clearly seen throughout the two years her blog was active. For example, several posts point to Renee’s interest in encouraging others to think about feminists beyond the narrow stereotypes as hairy-legged man-haters. In “This is What a Feminist Looks Like,” Renee blogs, “My point is, you can’t make assumptions about an entire group of people just because they call themselves something. So instead of assuming that I hate men (yes, I have actually been accused of hating men), take a minute to really hear me out. Look at what I am fighting for. Me. Renee. Not those so-called “feminists” on TV.”

Her references to “feminists on TV” suggest that Renee is very much attuned to media stereotypes of feminists and is particularly invested in asserting her own performances of feminism in contrast to these so-called media stereotypes. Interestingly though, Renee makes a plea to her reader as an individual – as Renee – drawing on her individual attributes to challenge feminist stereotypes. Here, she mobilizes a discourse of individual agency that suggests we can understand feminism through her own image and actions, without having to deal with the messiness of feminism as a larger social movement.

In a November 24, 2011 posting called “The Faces of Feminism,” Renee published pictures she solicited from over 100 people that identify as feminist (Figure 1.1). However, in contrast to the individualistic framing I describe above, Renee discusses her feminist identity within this context of a broader community of feminists. She introduces the post as follows:

I’ve said this in the past, but I’ll say it again: sometimes identifying as a feminist can be tough when there are so many people in this world dead-set on tearing you down. This post is for any feminist who’s ever felt alone in their struggle. The 100+ people pictured below are here to tell you that you’re not alone.

Feminists: We're out there. Everywhere.

One of my main hopes for this post is to show how diverse the feminist community really is. Scroll down and you'll see we've got quite the eclectic mix of nationalities, styles, genders, pets (heh), etc. It sounds lame, but as I scroll through these pictures I'm overwhelmed by a sense of awe and admiration. These are real people, dangit. They're not airbrushed. They're not paid spokesmodels. They're just like you and me.

It is important to recognize the way in which Renee employs the visual element of her blog in this posting, relying on images rather than words to suggest the diversity of

the feminist movement. We see pictures representing different races, ages, genders, abilities, and body sizes that not only reveal feminism as diverse, but also function as a public declaration of readers' feminisms. By sending Renee one's image, readers are explicitly "coming out" as feminists in much the same way that I previously discussed in relation to the bloggers. However, by grouping these images together as one posting (rather than individual revelations) Renee draws attention to the "constitution of collective feminist identities" and the affective power they hold "to tell [readers] that [they're] not alone" (Gunnarsson Payne, 2012, 69).



Figure 1.1 "Face of Feminism" blog post, author screen shot

Renee is certainly not the only girl blogger concerned with feminist stereotypes. In addition to discussions of "click moments," feminist stereotypes are also a popular and frequent topic of conversation on the *FBomb*. In a February 1, 2011 *FBomb* post called

“This is What a Feminist Looks Like,” Liz P. writes, “I know that my Miley Cyrus CD-buying, perezhilton.com-reading, shaved-legs self breaks a lot of feminist stereotypes. I am also aware that my yelling-at-people-across-tables, giver-of scary-looks-after-offensive-comments, opinionated self keeps some of these stereotypes up... but, what can I do?” She concludes:

With more awareness, more people will come around to calling themselves feminists. And having friends and role models (like YOU all) who are fun, funny, interesting and nice who identify as feminists will certainly speed up that process. So don't get frustrated. Perceptions change, and the pride you feel in being a teenage feminist will only grow.

Likewise, in a September 17, 2012 posting titled, “Dealing with a New Type of Feminist Stereotype” Jane G. argues that feminist stereotypes are “evolving” to include feminists being depicted as “angry women just looking for something to be angry about,” “women who can't take a joke” and “women who are bitter towards one ex-boyfriend and are taking it out on all of mankind.” While I would suggest that these stereotypical characteristics are actually not new, the author's main point remains consistent with much of the other commentary on feminist stereotypes written by girl bloggers, namely, that feminist bloggers must consistently work to dismantle these stereotypes by educating others about feminism and making visible feminist identities that do not align with the supposedly negative feminist stereotypes. Blogging, according to several of these pieces, is an excellent way to do this because of the public nature of the practice.

I am particularly interested in what it means for girl bloggers to be so invested in combating negative feminist stereotypes, and why they may choose blogging as a practice by which to do so. Indeed, as Scharff (2012) demonstrates, “the spectre of the

man-hating feminist” may lead even well-intentioned feminists to redefine feminism in ways that may inadvertently position “older” styles of feminism as emblematic of man-hating, lesbianism, and unfeminine behaviour in contrast to “newer” feminist image which seemingly includes consumption of popular culture and smooth legs. Drawing on these theoretical interventions by Scharff (2012) as well as Angela McRobbie’s (2009) theorizations about postfeminism, I am arguing that girl bloggers’ investment in challenging what they call “feminist stereotypes” reflects the postfeminist cultural context in which they grew up, where girls and women are rewarded for performing a visible heterosexual femininity (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). When bloggers claim that they shave their legs or post a photo of themselves with makeup, they publicly perform femininity. However, in contrast to Scharff’s participants, most of whom did not identify as feminist and therefore claimed femininity and heterosexuality as reasons for their disidentification with feminism, my own participants’ public claiming of both feminism yet rejection of many feminist “stereotypes,” reveals a key negotiation that is resistant to traditional femininity without rejecting all hegemonic gender and sexuality norms. In this sense, many girl feminist bloggers use blogging as a tool to negotiate the conflicting cultural expectations placed on themselves as girl feminists in order to live publicly as a feminist. I will return to this issue in chapter four of this dissertation.

EXPLORING INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST IDENTITIES

While feminist identities are clearly important to girl feminist bloggers, it is imperative to note that girls’ feminist identities do not exist in isolation from girls’ other identities, and must be understood “intersectionally” (Crenshaw, 1989). This was

constantly emphasized by one of my participants in particular, Amandine, whose religious and cultural identity as Orthodox Jewish greatly influences the way in which she understands her feminist identity. During our first interview Amandine tells me, “I usually use the terminology Jewish feminist [to describe myself] rather than just feminist since Judaism is as integral to my identity as feminism is. Another word I jokingly use is “femidox” – feminist Orthodox!”

While Amandine seems confident with her “femidox” identity, she claims that it was her experience with feminist blogging that made her more thoroughly consider the ways in which her feminist and Jewishness intersect. In a September 2011 posting on her blog about the recent makeover of the feminist blog *Jewesses with Attitude* Amandine describes why the site was so influential to her own identity as a Jewish feminist. She writes,

I first became involved in feminism the year before I went into high school, when I was working on a paper about the Second Wave. Dorky as it sounds, reading books like *The Feminine Mystique* lit a fire in me that I couldn't extinguish. As a result, I began to identify as a feminist. I didn't think it was compatible with Judaism, though, especially not Orthodoxy. It made me feel uncomfortable to think of one when I thought of the other. I completely compartmentalized myself: one box was for my devotion to women's rights, and the second box was where I kept Judaism. The two were equal parts of my identity, but separate, never overlapping....

While I loved the [Jewish Women's] Archive at first sight, it was the *Jewesses with Attitude* blog that fascinated me. I had never seen any sort of blog or website dedicated to celebrating Jewish women from a feminist perspective, and the idea drew me in. I began borderline-obsessively reading past posts, drinking in the Jewish feminism that I had been isolated from for so long. Since it was the first Jewish feminism I was exposed to, and the first feminist blog I officially followed, it greatly shaped my attitudes and opinions. Because feminism is something I want to dedicate my entire life to, I don't think it's melodramatic

when I say that JWA truly changed my life. (Okay, maybe it's a little melodramatic. But it's still true.)

I quote from Amandine's post at length because her narration highlights the importance of blogs as creating a space where intersectional identities can be performed in new ways. Amandine clearly recognizes that in many mainstream spaces her Jewish and feminist identities seem incompatible, however, she discovered that they are in fact compatible within the space created by *Jewesses with Attitude*. This has important implications for thinking about feminist blogs as spaces for intersectional, political identity performance and suggests that blogs may facilitate this process in unique ways.

The issue of intersectional identities complicating feminist identities is certainly not new and has a lengthy history within feminist movements. However, the above case study suggests that intersectional identities may be performed more flexibly online because of the ease in which girls can produce their own media and network with other media producers. It is useful to think about Alison Piepmeier's (2009) analysis of intersectionality in zines here. Piepmeier argues that while most contemporary feminist scholarship acknowledges the importance of intersectionality, fewer "grapple" with intersectionality in a way that tracks "symbolic and institutional power structures and their influence on individual lives" (127). For the purpose of my discussion, I am most interested in Piepmeier's assertion that zines provide the opportunity to "describe and mobilize identities that are so unspoken in popular discourses they they're often invisible" (130). In this sense, it is zines' (and, I'd suggest, blogs') ability to make invisible identities visible to both mainstream culture and the feminist community that becomes a central way that they facilitate the performance of intersectional identities.

For Amandine, it was the visibility of a Jewish feminist identity – a subjectivity that had previously seemed impossible to her – that encouraged her to rethink her identity in new ways. In a phone interview Amandine explains how blogging became the next logical step in trying to understand and verbalize her identity as a Jewish feminist: “I hadn’t yet become a Jewish feminist, I was more like a feminist that happened to be a Jew, and then I found Jewish feminist blogs like *Jewesses with Attitude*, and they really impacted a lot of my philosophies... [Then] writing my blog has really made me explore my connection to both Judaism and feminism and develop my own philosophy.”

This idea of developing her “own philosophy” is important to consider in relation to the idea of a feminist identity. Indeed, several of the bloggers that I interviewed revealed a fear of not enacting a proper feminist identity, or in other words, not performing feminism “correctly.” In Amandine’s case, she was convinced that a feminist could not be religiously Jewish, and that being a Jewish feminist would somehow mark her as a lesser feminist. Amandine navigated this dilemma by creatively using the space of her blog to work out her own philosophy of feminism that takes into account both of the political identities that she privileges in her daily life.

Of course, the identity work described by Amandine is an on-going process, something that several of the bloggers I spoke to discuss. For example, in a February 2012 post Amandine discusses the upcoming U.S. election, weighing the pros and cons of each party’s stance on women’s rights and Israel. Realizing that neither party sufficiently meets her feminist and pro-Israel leanings she writes, “So this leaves me, as a pro-Israel Jewish feminist, in a bit of a pickle.” Nonetheless, it is this “pickle” that makes Amandine’s blog such an interesting case study for thinking about the complex nature of feminist identities.

While Amandine's blog provides a rich example of intersectionality because of the way she performs four marginalized identities (a young, female, feminist, Orthodox Jew), it is important to consider how intersectionality functions for bloggers who may possess normative identities. Amandine's own recognition of her marginal ethnic and religious status meant that she considered the intersection with her feminist identity early in her feminist journey. But what about bloggers who may possess privileged identities, such as whiteness, heterosexuality, or normative body type? Has participating in the feminist blogosphere altered the ways in which they think about and perform these identities?

It was significantly more difficult for me to discern how feminist bloggers with privileged identities navigated intersectionality through blogging. This is not surprising considering that normative identities are often invisible to those who possess them, and therefore my participants did not verbally articulate their normative identities in the same explicit ways in which they addressed their marginalized identities. For example, few bloggers commented on their whiteness or heterosexuality, without being specifically asked. However, several conversations revealed that blogging did encourage some girls to begin to recognize their privileged identities, specifically in terms of race, sexuality, and gender identity. For example, Courtney describes how her own privileged position as a white, cis-gendered college student allowed her to easily perform a feminist identity without confronting issues of exclusion or tensions within feminism. She explains,

Eventually I started to discover a lot of feminist blogs on the Internet and I learned more about the history of feminism, which was a shocker. I learned about the whiteness of feminism, the cis-genderedness of feminism. At that point, it made me feel selfish because up until then, feminism had always just been a personal identifier. After I read accounts of women of color in feminist movements who had largely been ignored or trans* men and women and other

who don't fit binary genders being excluded, I started to feel ashamed that I wasn't doing anything about these issues and I had been largely ignorant of them because I am white and cis-gendered.

Courtney tells me that recognizing her privilege has changed the ways in which she performs her own feminist identity by becoming more “proactive” in confronting injustice in the movement and recognizing the complexity that a feminist identity may carry for others. She reflects, “[My participation as a blogger] has helped me get over the whole ‘if you believe in equality you HAVE to be a feminist and identify as such’ phase” (caps in original).

This discussion highlights the worrisome fact that while blogging provides a useful opportunity to explore intersecting identities, girl feminist bloggers tend to focus on their marginalized identities of gender and age rather than reflecting on privileged identities. Of course, this doesn't mean that bloggers are ignorant of issues of race, sexuality, class, ability and other identities. As I will discuss in the third chapter, all the bloggers recognize the predominantly white young feminist blogosphere as being problematic. Nonetheless, it is apparent that while bloggers are well versed in critiquing a lack of diversity, they also lack a language to reflect back upon their own privilege and how this may shape their feminist and activist identities. This issue is worthy of further exploration by feminist media studies scholars.

“A LICENSE TO BE ME:” THE POLITICS OF “FEELING FEMINIST”

The bloggers I spoke to were clearly keen on mobilizing their feminist identities to critique their relationships with others, a finding that is not necessarily surprising, considering the emphasis that feminism places on relational equality, such as the

importance of equality between girls and boys in educational settings. For example, Courtney tells me that her feminist identity “solidified” after being in an abusive romantic relationship in high school. “It was awful and it makes me so sad knowing that I let all of these things happen because I didn’t know what abuse was. I wish I had been stronger, and I know now that feminism really gives me a much stronger attitude than I had before...It’s almost as if feminism made me realize my worth as an actual person.” This comment indicates that gaining a feminist consciousness provided Courtney with both an understanding of structural power and the language (what she calls a “stronger attitude”) to critique her previous abusive relationship. Today she is in a fulfilling relationship with a supportive partner in part because of the confidence, self-respect, and understanding of power she gained from feminism.

In addition to providing girls with the conceptual and discursive tools to critique relationships, several of the bloggers emphasized that feminism’s influence on their own sense of self was one of the most positive aspects of their feminist identity. Madison’s discussion of this is worth citing at length:

Oh my god. I can't even begin to describe how calling myself a feminist has changed me. I've always had body image issues. I used to do extreme things in order to lose weight. Binging and purging and the like. I was never formally diagnosed with an eating disorder, but I probably could have been. Becoming a feminist introduced me to a whole new sector of society that told me there was nothing wrong with the way I looked. It brought out a totally new side of me.

Discovering feminism answered so many questions for me. I have a very tough abrasive personality, and a lot of people have called me a "bitch". It always frustrated me that my male best friend could get away with things I could never try without being chastised, especially in leadership positions. Being a feminist made me realize that it's not me who is the problem, it's society.

Madison also often writes about feminism's positive influence on her life on her blog. For example, in a 2011 post she describes her struggle with developing large breasts at age ten and how awful she felt when adult men would stare and leer at them. She writes, "The feeling of being leered at and cat-called is not a pleasant one... This is what happened to my boobs. I hated the attention they brought to me. I have since recognized that the men leering are at wrong, not my body. I now understand that my body is mine... I love my boobs, and I love feminism."

Madison is not unique among these bloggers in her insistence that feminism has been an overwhelming positive force in her life. Renee also elaborates on how identifying as a feminist gave her the tools to understand social power structures. She explains,

On a personal level, I think that feminism is one of the most positive forces in my life, if not the most positive ... Simply put, feminism has given me license to be who I am and treat myself better... Once you start reading more feminist books, checking out feminist blogs and websites online, and learning about various causes pertaining to women's rights, your priorities begin to change. My feeling was almost like, 'Well, if feminists accept me the way I am – intelligent, sarcastic, compassionate, bigger than a size 0 – why can't others accept me this way, too? Maybe I'm not the problem. Maybe society is the problem. Maybe, just maybe, I'm already good enough.

Abby, a fifteen-year-old newly self-identified feminist concurs, reflecting, "My feminist identity has impacted my sense of self mainly by helping me name an aspect of myself, the part of me that yearns for equality and justice. This is such a crucial part of me, and it makes me proud that most of my friends see "feminist" as an integral part of who I am."

These conversations were particularly interesting and inspiring to me, as they draw attention to the emotional strength that a feminist identity gives to several of the bloggers. I return to Piepmeier's (2009) research on girl zines here, as she convincingly

argues that girl zines contain an affective dimension, which she describes as a “pedagogy of hope,” drawing on bell hooks’ use of the phrase to describe the hope and progressive possibilities generated within the classroom environment. Piepmeier’s key intervention here is recognition of the political work being done by the pedagogies of hope articulated in girls’ zines, functioning as “small-scale acts of resistance” to a cynical culture that disregards girls’ cultural practices as political. According to Piepmeier, the affective responses generated via zinemaking – hope for a better world, the pleasure of struggle for social change effort, an empathy towards others – function as a “new mode of doing politics” that explicitly shows that social change is possible.

Jessica Taft (2011) articulates a similar idea in her research on girl activists, arguing that a “politics of hope” and “positivity” informs her participants’ activist strategies. She writes, “Hopefulness as a political strategy and set of practices fuses strongly with girls’ identity claims, particularly their narratives about their youthful and girlish idealism” (154). While Taft (2011) discusses these affects as outward looking – imagining a better world and believing that it is possible, for example – I’m interested in the ways in which these feelings operate as discursive resources that girls use to perform and maintain feminist identities.

Drawing on Piepmeier’s framework and Taft’s findings, I am suggesting that the affective dimension of a feminist identity produced through blogging has important political implications that have been overlooked by feminist scholars. In other words, we must ask how might the positive feelings about oneself generated from a feminist identity be politically useful. Based upon my interviews with girl feminist bloggers, I am proposing that an introduction to feminism and the subsequent performance and maintenance of a feminist identity may encourage girls to view themselves more positively by providing them the language and tools to better understand themselves

through social structures rather than the individualized frameworks commonly used in consumerist and psychological approaches. To reiterate Madison's significant realization: "Being a feminist made me realize that it's not me who is the problem, it's society."

This finding is especially important in light of the public discourses about girlhood that are constantly circulating within mainstream media. For over twenty years there has been considerable public debate about a perceived loss of girls' self esteem as they enter adolescence. First articulated by psychologists Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan (1992) and later popularized by Mary Pipher (1995) in her bestselling book *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, these works described girls' transition to adolescence as a difficult process resulting in a loss of self confidence, voice, and ambition. Pipher's (1995) book stressed that girls require adult intervention to "save" them from this process; which she argued could result in poor body image, and unhealthy habits, like dieting, drinking, drugs, and self harm. Adolescent girls, according to this discourse, are "in crisis" and can be best guided towards safety by experienced adult women (Schilt, 2003; Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz; 2009).⁴

This girls' "loss of voice" framework has been critiqued by girls' studies scholars who have suggested a recognition of girls' agency is excluded from such a perspective that problematically assumes girls as passive victims who must be "empowered" by well-meaning adults (Kearney, 2006; Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz, 2009; Schilt, 2003). According to these scholars, we must instead recognize the power and cultural agency that girls already possess and express in creative and innovative ways. For example, Kearney (2006) demonstrates how girls' media production provides an opportunity for girls to challenge female beauty standards, negotiate racial and ethnic identities, and gain technical skills, amongst other resistant practices. However, she notes that feminist identities often remained marginal within these media production practices, despite such

texts often addressing what we might deem “feminist issues.” Similarly, Kristen Schilt (2003) argues that zines “exemplify a girl-driven strategy for empowerment” that creates a safe space to articulate their feelings amongst girl peers and develop political consciousness and action (79). In a different subcultural context, Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2009) allude to the feminist potential of the “skater girl” culture they studied, yet acknowledge that while they “heard a feminist subjectivity at work,” their participants did not identify as feminist (130).

Research on riot grrrl is also useful in illuminating how performing a feminist identity may generate positive feelings of power, confidence, and inner strength. Indeed, Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo (1998) note that the term “riot grrrl” was chosen to “reclaim the vitality and power of youth with an added growl to replace the perceived passivity of ‘girl’” (809). This performance of strength is importance to riot grrrl’s feminist politics, which aimed in part to “reinvent” girlhood as a powerful subjectivity from which girls could speak, rather than one marked by the hegemonic notions of girlhood as a position of victimhood and dependence (Kearney, 2006). This sense of power, confidence and agency can be seen in the responses of riot grrrl participants when asked how being part of the movement has affected them personally. For example, one riot grrrl tells Rosenberg and Garofalo (1998),

[Riot grrrl} has changed who I am and my opinions. It gave me the ability to say, ‘I’m not going to kill myself. I’m not a victim.’ Made me more obnoxious. Speak out and say whatever. Opened me up to a lot of stuff that I’ve been reading – books, authors, political issues. I’m Indian; Riot Grrrl has given me a sense of self and identity. Before I was uncomfortable being nonwhite in a 95 percent white suburb. It has changed my life. (840)

Another participant reports, “For the longest time I was always the girlfriend. I just took up space, told a joke once in awhile. Now I can say what I mean. I don’t care if people disagree. I’ll listen, but I don’t care” (Rosenberg and Garofalo, 1998, 840). And another riot grrrl claims,

Riot Grrrl’s crucial. It’s saving girls’ minds. There’s so much messed-up stuff in your life from society. You can’t really change things that well. Riot Grrrl has changed core things about me, allowed me to change things around me... Riot Grrrl has been successful in making girls have revolutions within their lives. It carries it out to people they know. As long as they continue spreading their ideas, Riot Grrrl will continue to be effective. (839, 841)

These responses are important to consider, as Kearney (2006) argues that they demonstrate how a riot grrrl identity has functioned as a “preliminary step for female adolescents attempting to regain the confidence, assertiveness, and self-respect they lost due to abuse or the onset of puberty” (83). However, she notes that this is different from the “girls in crisis” approach advocated by psychologists such as Pipher. Instead of individualizing girls’ problems and offering adult-initiated solutions, riot grrrls develop their own voice within a community of peers via feminist social critique and do-it-yourself punk ethos (Kearney, 2006).

Kearney contends,

Because of its affiliations with and historical legacies in other counter hegemonic communities, Riot Grrrl helps to facilitate girls’ critical awareness of identity, power, oppression, and social relations. Like feminist consciousness-raising groups, Riot Grrrl’s meetings, workshops, concerts, and conventions allow female youth to share their persona experiences with others, this helping girls to produce an assertive and expressive identity, while also creating a common knowledge of the larger systemic problems associated with being young and female in a predominantly adultist, patriarchal, capitalist, and heterocentric society (83).

This research on riot grrrl points to positive feelings, including confidence, assertiveness, and a sense of agency that the performance of a riot grrrl identity – arguably a specific type of feminist identity – generates for girls. My own research builds on this scholarship by suggesting that identifying as a feminist helps girls to perform political agency that allows them to navigate the challenges of adolescence in ways similar to riot grrrls. However, I'd like to highlight that a feminist identity within our contemporary postfeminist culture differs from the social positioning of a riot grrrl identity in, say 1991, or even later in the 1990s. Scharff (2012) explains, “Many young women in the postfeminist climate may abstain from calling themselves feminists because the use of the label is profoundly policed as signifying a somewhat transgressive and abjected political identity” (36). Consequently, we must analyze bloggers’ feminist identities in relation to our contemporary culture context rather than a direct comparison to other points in time.

The bloggers I interviewed often frame the “feminist feelings” of agency and confidence they derive from performing a feminist identity as helping them resist the pressures of hegemonic femininity promoted by postfeminism (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). For example, Renee tells me, “As a plus-size gal, [feminism has] also given me license to see beauty beyond pant sizes and accept it in many forms. Though I'd be lying if I said I felt like a goddess every second of every day (you know how it goes), for the most part feminism has made me feel better about my body than any cheesy commercial telling me to ‘love my curves’ ever has.”

Renee often expresses this sentiment on her blog as well. For example, in a June 2010 entry Renee describes how her experiences as the “fat girl” in elementary and middle school left her self-conscious and feeling as though she failed at proper bodily femininity. She explains how a feminist consciousness, evident throughout her post as

she critiques impossible hegemonic feminine body norms, has increased her confidence and respect for herself and her accomplishments. She writes,

I'm a lot different than I was in elementary school, even middle school. I'm not a wallflower. I speak my mind. I don't put myself down. I try not to care what people think about me. I respect myself. I surround myself with people who really care about me, and work hard to be a good student, citizen, sister, daughter... you catch my drift. In other words, I'm proud to be me! It just sucks it's taken me a decade to realize it.

Both Renee's comments to me and those in her blog post are significant because they suggest that her feminist identity serves as a resource that she can draw on to be more confident and resist normative femininity. Conversely, her confidence continually produces her feminist identity, making her more comfortable in publicly performing feminism. I'd also like to draw attention to Renee's recognition of herself as a citizen, which suggests that she links this politicized identity to self-respect and speaking her mind, as well as the feminist consciousness that encouraged her to become more confident – an important finding considering my interest in establishing an alternative model of girls' citizenship. Consequently, Renee doesn't need postfeminist advertising campaigns like Dove's Campaign for Beauty telling her to love her body while attempting to sell her "body-improving" products, or self-esteem workshops to tell her that her ideas matter. Instead, feminism provides her with the discourse, knowledge, and agency to do these things.⁵

Similarly, Courtney reports that her feminist identity has made her much more confident in herself and her ability to resist the bodily maintenance prescribed by postfeminism. "I don't freak out if I haven't shaved in a few weeks and I'm less afraid to speak up about what I believe in," she tells me. I'd like to return to Madison's comment

about her struggle with body image and weight previously discussed as another example of how performing a feminist identity has generated feelings that have inspired her resistance to social pressures to be “perfect.” She explains, “Before feminism I was always frustrated or angry or upset because I couldn’t fit into what society wanted me to be. I wasn’t submissive or skinny or popular, but I was constantly trying to fit into those things. Feminism is what told me that I didn’t have to be those things, so it finally brought me happiness. I feel like feminism allows me to be myself.”

FEMINIST IDENTITIES AS A PRACTICE OF RESISTANCE

Bloggers also discussed how their feminist identities have provided them a language to critique media representations of girls and women, an issue that is of particular importance to young feminists, according to my study participants. Abby says, “I now have feminist critique so ingrained in myself that I cannot watch a movie or tv show or read a book without analyzing the portrayal of women and their relationships, and this has only been for the better for me.” Additionally, participants described how their feminist identity has encouraged them to engage in intersectional media analyses that take account how race, sexuality, and class intersect with gender representations. Renee says, “The teens in [popular television] shows... are usually attractive, well-dressed, middle-to upper class, heterosexual, white and focused on fashion and dating. I want to see more diversity, more authenticity, and more body sizes (and not that size 10 is plus size crap!).” My textual analysis of girls’ blogs reveals a similar sentiment, with posts such as one on the *FBomb* by Elizabeth M. entitled “Female Bodies and Positive Rhetoric,” exemplifying the ways in which young feminist bloggers are gaining the power and confidence to critique media representations of women and girls in sophisticated and thought-provoking ways.

Renee also points out how her feminist identity has helped her to resist the notion that girls shouldn't be smarter than boys in the classroom and simultaneously "nurture her internal strength." The discussion that the girls and I had about this in the focus group reminds us of the continual pressure that girls feel to hide their accomplishments in order to appeal to male classmates, something that we may overlook as adult feminists outside of high school classrooms. Renee explains,

From my experience, there seems to be a subtle yet pervasive phenomenon in high school girls: many of them don't want to be seen as over-achievers. I can't count the number of times I've seen girls 'play dumb' in class rather than admit they do have ideas to share. Are these girls scared that boys won't like them if they have a better handle on the material or get higher test scores?... I never want to deny all that I've accomplished in school or pretend I don't know an answer when I actually do. I wish more girls could experience this internal strength and pride brought on by feminism. I wish more girls knew that it's okay to dream big.

Based upon these examples, I am suggesting that the performance of a feminist identity can be viewed as a resistant practice in itself, as it provides bloggers a platform from which to resist hegemonic femininity, specifically body image, media representations of women/girls and "playing dumb." In this sense, a feminist identity offers girls a political subjectivity to make sense of the world that few other normative girlhood identities offer. As Julie aptly summarizes, "Basically the movement gave me confirmation that I wasn't crazy!"

The idea of performing a feminist identity as a practice of resistance builds upon a feminist cultural studies model that understands resistance at the level of everyday practices and emphasizes the power of collective strategies of resistance rather than merely "resistant reading" models (McRobbie, 1994; Durham, 1999). By positioning feminist identity performances as resistant in themselves, I open the possibility for girls

to practice citizenship in the present, rather than understanding their practices as potentially inspiring future political action, as discussed by both Schilt (2003) and Harris (2008b). Thus, I aim to recognize the value for girls in performing a feminist identity in a cultural context that suggests feminism is no longer necessary (Scharff, 2012; McRobbie, 2009).

CONCLUSIONS: THE POWER OF FEMINIST IDENTITIES

In this chapter I have begun to map girl bloggers' relationships with feminism. I demonstrate how girl feminists use blogging as a practice to better understand feminism and to "try out" ever-changing feminist identities that are central to these girls' senses of self. However, I depart from other established feminist scholarship on girls' identities by framing these identity performances as not only resistant, but political, producing a political subjectivity and "affective attachments" from which girl bloggers challenge discourses of neoliberal individualism and postfeminist empowerment.

While girls' studies scholars have always been interested in issues of girls' identities, this chapter suggests the importance of understanding girls' performances of political identities via blogging as a practice of citizenship in the present. This departs from traditional notions of citizenship that position youth as future citizens or citizens-in-training (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Harris, 2012b). Connecting the production and performance of political identities via blogging with citizenship also suggests a productive way to envision youth civic participation beyond model of consumer citizenship promoted by postfeminist and neoliberal discourses.⁶

Consequently, I call notice to the lack of attention paid by girls' studies and new media studies scholars to the ways in which girl feminist's blogs become spaces for politicization through their performances of feminist identities. This is significant, as I

demonstrate how a politicized vocabulary using the theoretical concept of citizenship allows us to better understand and appreciate the significance of girls' feminist identities to contemporary feminism.

Endnotes

¹ Since I use only first name pseudonyms to refer to the bloggers in my study, I have also chosen to refer to Tavi by her first name as well throughout this dissertation.

² All posts from the FBomb are cited as they appear on the blog, with the author's first name and last initial. These names may or may not be pseudonyms used by individual writers.

³ I do not want to suggest that a gay and a feminist identity are directly comparable, as I do not believe they are. For example, the systemic discrimination LGBTQ people continually face is not at all comparable to the shunning of feminists within contemporary culture that I describe here. Nonetheless, some of the affective responses discussed by my participants can be better understood using Segdwick's framing, paying attention to how the heterosexual matrix structures both "coming out" experiences.

⁴ This "girl in crisis" discourse has been followed more recently by moral panics about girls' sexualization in the media, which adopt similar protectionist rhetoric. Over the past year, this concern has focused specifically on the online practices of teenage girls and potential risk from "cyberbullying" and cyberharrassment. Again, these discourses often stress the need for adult surveillance and monitoring in order to keep girls away from potentially troublesome situations. I will be returning to this issue in chapter four.

⁵ See Banet-Weiser (2012a) and Dye (2009) for critiques of Dove's Campaign for Beauty.

⁶ I will be returning to discuss consumer citizenship in relation to the "can-do" girl later in the dissertation (Harris, 2004).

Chapter Two: Becoming Activist: Girl Feminist Bloggers' Activist Identities and Practices

“I think an activist is anyone who works towards any kind of societal change. This definition allows for more people to claim the word ‘activist,’ which I think is a good thing... The activist label is important to me because I like to feel that I am making a change. I’ve written before about how feminism helped fill a void in my life, well activism helps ensure that the void stays full.”

-Madison, focus group blog

“I guess I’m an activist. I’ve never been to a protest yet, but I’m dying to. I’ve been to a number of speeches and webinars and conferences and panels on feminism. I suppose that I would classify myself as an activist because I’m so involved in making sure that women have all the rights we deserve, whether it’s by talking about feminist candidates on my blog or going to a webinar about pregnant students’ rights. I don’t know if I ever consciously took on the label of activism but I guess it’s important to me. I don’t think the title of it is important, what’s important is that you get stuff done.”

-Amandine, focus group blog

I begin this chapter with Madison and Amandine’s comments, as they hint at the precarious positioning of activism within our contemporary society. Indeed, the proliferation of new media technologies in most countries around the world have added to this uncertainty about what types of actions are needed to produce social change. Amandine’s comment points to the continued privileging of the protest in many people’s imaginings of activism, even as she concedes that her own activist practices vary from this dominant image. In contrast, Madison suggests the need to think of activism in broad terms, understanding the practice of working towards social change as the defining feature of an activist. Yet, what constitutes “working towards” social change? How do girl feminist bloggers come to perform an activist identity and why is this identity

important to them? How does the performance of an activist identity by girl feminist bloggers challenge normative modes of activism? What activist practices are undertaken by girl feminist bloggers? And finally, how is this activism part of girls' citizenship practices?

I address these questions in this chapter by analyzing how girl feminist bloggers understand their activist identities and how they mobilize these identities to engage in activist practices. I begin by outlining key scholarship analyzing activism, focusing in particular on how cultural studies scholars have understood youth politics, and how women have been both excluded and privileged within different types of activism. I also highlight how recent feminist cultural studies scholarship has suggested that activism has been shifting in response to cultural changes, resulting in decentralized activist networks that may employ strategies ranging from commodity activism to culture jamming.

I then move on to analyze my data in relation to this literature, suggesting that the discrepancy between girls' perceived notions of an activist and their own experiences of activism reveals particular gendered and aged cultural narratives about activism that shape the ways that girls understand their own practices. I explore my participants' experiences with coming to perform activist identities in relation to this discussion; demonstrating how their feminist and activist identities are intricately related, yet often yield tension within the larger feminist community due to girls' preference for using new media technologies for feminist activism.

Based upon this analysis I argue that feminist blogging constitutes a form of accessible activism for some girls that acknowledges how girls often have limited resources – often due to age, but also perhaps gender, class, race, location, and ability – to participate in activism. I outline three key activist practices that include education, community-building and making feminism visible; strategies in which feminist girls

engage via blogging and build on longstanding feminist activist practices. I contend that recognizing girls' feminist blogging as activism decenters masculine and adult-focused conceptions of activism, opening space for girls to perform citizenships that are accessible to their social positioning as girls. I now turn to reviewing some of the literature on activism that contextualizes my arguments in this chapter.

THEORIZING THE CHANGING PRACTICES OF ACTIVISM

Activism has been - and continues to be – a contentious concept within both scholarly literature and mainstream culture. A basic definition suggests that activism is the action of advocating for political, social, economic, or environmental change via any of an array of possible strategies (Klar and Kasser, 2009; Corning and Myers, 2002). In this sense, activism involves the goal of improving some aspect of society through active political intervention (Klar and Kasser, 2009). Joss Hands (2011) also argues for recognizing *power* as a contested part of activism, which is “directed against prevailing authority as domination and exploitation, whether in personal relations of micro-power, or in the form of institutional domination” (5). But what constitutes *political* intervention? Or *improving* society? Or even *action*?

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an extensive historical analysis of changing modes of activism, it is worthwhile to consider briefly how scholars, primarily in the disciplines of political science, psychology, and sociology, have conceptualized activism. Pippa Norris (2009) notes that early North American and European research during the 1960s and 1970s on “traditional political activism”

understood activism primarily through the lens of participation in electoral politics, such as voting, campaigning, and party membership. Participation in trade unions was also often considered political activism during this time. According to this traditional conceptualization, which continues to linger even today, *girls cannot even be activists* since they are prevented from engaging in political activism due to their minor status. While girls may be able to campaign and lobby despite not being eligible to vote, their contributions remain marginalized since their opinions are not formally recognized through the voting process.

Civic activism is defined by participation in voluntary organizations, community associations and social movements, such as the women's liberation, environmental, and anti-globalization movements (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Ronald Inglehart and Norris (2003) distinguish such forms of civic activism from traditional activist organizations (primarily parties and trade unions) via their looser networks and decentralized structures, modes of belonging based upon shared issue concerns and identity politics, and "mixed action repertoires" to achieve goals. Nonetheless, civic activism can often be identified through clearly articulated goals and arguably remains representative of activism within public imagination, as we will see later in this chapter. Finally, Inglehart and Norris recognize what they call "protest activism" as another type of activism based around participation in activities like demonstrations, boycotts, and petitions, although civic and traditional activists may also use these types of tactics. While protest activism has gained prominence as a scholarly focus since the early 1970s, Norris notes that it often remains distinguished from literature on "traditional" activism, even as protest activism is now "mainstream" and "widespread" in many countries (639).

The above categorizations of activism reveal a limited focus on what has been considered activism, based primarily around the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual, Western, adult men. Consequently, academic studies of activism often revealed that women participated *less* than men in political activism, reinforcing hegemonic binaries that positioned women as personal and private and men as civic and public (Norris and Inglehart, 2003). Norris and Inglehart provide a rather unsatisfactory explanation for this discrepancy. They correctly suggest that women's unequal status in public and private life has alienated women from conventional politics, yet they fail to adequately address methodological issues related to definitions of activism, data gathering techniques and historical analyses that privilege men over women, and adult over youth.

Indeed, Jessica Taft (2011) maintains that feminist sociologists of social movements have argued for expanded conceptions of activism in order to better understand the various ways in which women, including women of color, girls, working class and poor women, as well as non-Western women, have participated in activism. I'd also suggest that the primarily quantitative methodology employed by political scientists, sociologists, and psychologists neglects to capture the diverse experiences of women activists. For example, it excludes women who may be participating in activism that falls outside of narrow survey definitions or questions based on traditional activism. Finally, the quantitative approaches often privileged in these disciplines do not historicize their findings, erasing the historical activism of women, such as the suffrage movement in the early twentieth century or mobilizing for public childcare after World War II.

I outline traditional definitions of activism above in order to contextualize my analyses of girl bloggers' activism, as well as to better distinguish my own approach from dominant studies of activism. I conceptualize girls' activist identities by employing a

cultural studies approach, which moves beyond definitions of traditional and civic activism to account for the vast array of activist practices including *cultural* practices used by (often marginalized) people. As evident by my previous discussion, youth have been excluded from traditional and civic definitions of activism, resulting in cultural studies scholars' interest in studying how youth practice politics – a focus that became foundational to the field of cultural studies.

Since the 1970s, cultural studies scholars have researched youth subcultures, which soon became a dominant framework for studying youth politics and resistance. British studies, such as *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* by Dick Hebdige (1979), *Learning to Labor* by Paul Willis (1977) and *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subculture in Post-War Britain*, an edited collection by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (1976) were foundational in this burgeoning field and continue to be influential for cultural studies scholars. While it is not possible to discuss these texts comprehensively here, it is the attention that this work paid to various forms of youth politics that is important for my discussion. This literature was the first to address issues of the social meaning of style, the oppositional politics embedded in cultural practices such as rock shows and cultural objects such as motorbikes, and the ways in which marginalized groups (primarily due to class and race) exercise creativity from their subordinated positions to enact cultural agency within subcultures. Significantly, this research created new ways to think about youth, culture, and politics, as well as methodological approaches such as action research and ethnography (McRobbie, 1991).

However, while these early studies often addressed issues of class and race, they ignored gender as an identity category, resulting in the exclusion of girls as agential subjects from many of these youth studies. In her critique, “Settling Accounts with Subcultures: A Feminist Critique” Angela McRobbie (1991) argues subcultural theorists’

lack of attention to the ways that gender hierarchies structure subcultures has allowed for youth cultures to be understood as *male*, and issues such as sexism, violence, the sexual division of labor, and heterosexism to be made invisible in subcultural analysis. Despite her criticism, McRobbie (1991) nonetheless recognizes the potential that subcultures hold for girls' feminist politics, arguing, "To the extent that all-girl subcultures, where the commitment to the gang comes first, might forestall these processes [early marriage, child birth, housework] and provide their members with a collective confidence which could transcend the need for 'boys', they could well signal an important progression in the politics of youth culture" (42). Thus, McRobbie's insistence that feminist scholars must not dismiss work on subcultures, but instead "read across" these works, highlights the relevance that these subcultural theories may have for studying girls' cultural politics.

Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber's (1991) foundational study of girls' bedroom culture provided an important intervention into early subcultural research by recognizing girls as agential subjects who often enact their own means of resistance based upon their own social locations. Girls' practices, they pointed out, need not look like boys' resistance in order to be regarded as significant. According to McRobbie and Garber, girls' teenybopper culture, often enacted in the private space of the bedroom, should be taken seriously as a cultural practice on par with boys' street-based subcultures. While I do not have the space to examine bedroom culture in depth here, it is nonetheless important to recognize how their intervention highlighted the ways that girls' (sub)cultural practices have been problematically marginalized within cultural studies research, and reproducing the notion that girls are apolitical or not culturally savvy. I will be returning to bedroom culture again in chapter four.

Despite critiques such as the one described above by McRobbie (1991), there remains a dearth of work on girls within male dominated subcultures, both historically

and contemporarily. The work that does exist, however, provides important insight into the feminist practices of girls in these alternative spaces. For example, punk is one subculture where girls have enacted political agency. Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) argues that girls' participation in the 1970s punk subculture provided a space for girls to exercise feminist activism and agency through the production of music, fashion, and punk fanzines, in addition to their consumer roles that sustain punk's alternative economy. Kearney notes that this was particularly significant, as girls were able to create their own feminist and activist identities *outside of the mainstream women's movement*, which many girls found alienating due to their age, race, class, and sexuality (Kearney, 2006). Thus, punk became a space for girls to resist both normative feminine and feminist identities, while often exercising political critiques that were indeed, feminist.

For example, Lucy O'Brien (1999) reflects on punk as a space that *encouraged* girls to be political activists, with female punk bands singing about rape as an unrecognized social issue, and punk girls finding solidarity through pro-choice marches and campaigns such as Rock Against Sexism. O'Brien writes, "One of the attractions of punk was having an outlet for that political outrage, that disaffection with the status quo which was cemented by the early years of a Conservative Government hostile to dissent... For women this revolt was present not just in words, but music that deliberately veered away from standard rock 'n' roll time" (486). Punk, in this sense, offered girls multiple ways to exercise politics and oppositional dissent.

However, as Helen Reddington (2003) notes, it is those who left recorded music that become regarded as punk pioneers, earning a place in punk's history while constructing a narrative that often excluded the participation of women and girls, who may not have recorded songs or achieved mainstream fame. But despite these common perceptions that girls were merely aesthetic fishnet-clad objects within punk, Reddington

(2003) argues that this was far from the truth, documenting the large numbers of female instrumentalists and all-female bands within British punk. Of course, audience members and critics did not always easily accept female instrumentalists, as Reddington (2003) maintains that male journalists often scrutinized the musical abilities and appearance of girl punks, subjecting them to critiques that male musicians rarely received. However, it is necessary to recognize that despite these obstacles, girls' adoption of the privileged role of musician within punk challenged dominant perceptions of instrumentalists as male, allowing them to be cultural producers and creative agents in their own right.

In addition to their roles as musicians, O'Brien contends that many girls used punk to critique the dominant heterosexual model of femininity endorsed by the hippie movement and feminine beauty norms through dress and style, many appearing in unflattering bondage pants, dowdy dresses, or displaying unkempt hair and black lipstick. This refusal to display normative femininity through diet, fashion, and beauty products was a primary avenue of activism for many punk girls, who used their bodies in this way to make a public statement to mainstream society (Leblanc, 1999; O'Brien, 1999). Punk fashion designers such as Vivienne Westwood also played significant roles within the subculture, blurring the lines between cultural production and consumption and allowing girls to participate in the alternative economy of punk through the selling of second hand fashion at urban street stalls (McRobbie, 1994).

Finally, O'Brien argues that punk gave girls a space to "rage." In punk, unlike most other mainstream and subcultural spaces, it was okay for girls to be angry. O'Brien argues that, "Before the mid-1970s women who expressed seething anger were ostracized as misfits, Janis Joplin being a prime high-profile example of the girl whose refusal to be first the good prom queen and then the acquiescent rocker left her isolated, with a deliberating anger that had nowhere to go. It cannot be over-emphasized then how much

punk in the 1970s was a visible threat” (484). This point is significant, as girls continue to be socialized in ways that discouraged them from being angry.

Punk was not the only youth subculture that served as a space for political mobilization of young people. In his book *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* S. Craig Watkins (2005) notes that hip hop’s “oppositional ethos” allowed hip hop culture to be a “political resource” for youth, fostering a political consciousness rooted in urban racial politics (149). While Watkins (2005) rightly critiques contemporary commercial hip hop as often promoting misogyny and degrading images of women, Nancy Guevara (1987), Tricia Rose (1994), and Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) all note that girls and women have always been participants in hip hop culture, often acting as cultural producers through practices such as rapping, graffiti art, and breakdancing. In fact, Guevara (1987) argues that it is women’s participation in hip hop that makes it a truly radical space, and that “the political challenge that hip-hop represents as an expression of oppressed groups in the United States is magnified significantly when the women involved are brought into the real picture” (162).

While many black and Latina girls in hip hop were uncomfortable with identifying as feminist due to its connotations as a white movement, they were able to use the subcultural space of hip hop to practice a reconfigured feminist and activist agenda related to their identities as women of color (Rose, 1994; Kearney, 2006). Thus, Kearney (2006) argues that “Like punk, hip hop provided an alternative place for girls’ resistance to both patriarchal and feminist constructions of femininity during the 1970s, as well as a space for their more active engagement in cultural production” (45). Interestingly, many of these girls utilized “girl” signifiers as part of their cultural expression, such as girl graffiti artists who tag New York City subway trains with big lips, roses, and other

“feminine” landscape themes (Guevara, 1987). Guevara (1987) argues that to many girl graffiti artists, “a style that is consciously, deliberately ‘feminine’ will help lead to the recognition of girl writers, and will contravert the oppressive attitude of their male peers” (165).

Likewise, Rose (1994) argues that despite not necessarily identifying themselves as feminists, black female rappers in the 1980s challenge sexism in hip hop by establishing a strong public voice. She writes,

The presence of black female rappers and the urban, working class black hairstyles, clothes, expressions, and subject matter of their rhymes provide young black women with a small culturally reflective public space. Black women rappers affirm black female popular pleasure and public presence by privileging black female subjectivity and black female experiences in the public sphere” (182).

Thus, the subcultural space of hip hop has been a rich site of activism against sexism and racism for black and Latina girls marginalized within the larger public sphere.

While these examples of girls’ activism within subcultures is useful in demonstrating a lengthy history of girls’ involvement with feminist activism, recent cultural studies research has complicated the concept of the subculture in order to better analyze contemporary youth politics. Indeed, David Chaney (2004) argues that the once accepted division between subcultures and dominant culture has dissolved, giving way to a “plurality of lifestyle sensibilities and preferences” that facilitates a widespread engagement with media and consumer industries once limited to niche subcultures (47).

Other scholars have also discussed this shift, forming a rather large body of work since the mid-1990s under the term “post-subculture studies.” As David Muggleton and

Rupert Weinzierl (2003) argue, much of this research focuses on the limitations for subcultural theory, as articulated by early British cultural studies scholars, to understand contemporary youth cultures that are situated within a globalized world marked by fluidity, mobility, shifting identities, and new consumption patterns characteristic of neoliberalism. For example, in her review of post-subculture literature Anita Harris (2008a) argues, “Subculture theory, which marked out youth cultures as flamboyant expressions of resistance enacted within clearly demarcated groups, has collapsed under the weight of forces of individualization, the breakdown of class-based identifications, and the emergence of a global, technologized commercial youth market” (3).

New concepts such as neotribes, lifestyles, scapes, scenes, networks, citizenships, and communities have become more favored frameworks of analysis because of their ability to account for the lack of structure found in many contemporary youth cultures, such as ravers, Goths, or online fan cultures (Harris, 2008a). Consequently, even the less formal practices of civic activism as discussed by Inglehart and Norris (2003) appear markedly different today than they did thirty or forty years ago. Harris (2008a) continues,

Whereas once young people’s resistance politics, and young women’s feminist activism in particular, could be easily identified, today these seem obscure, transitory and disorganized... young women have new ways of taking on politics and culture that may not be recognizable under more traditional paradigms, but deserve to be identified as socially engaged and potentially transformative nonetheless (1).

For example, Carly Stasko (2008) describes her participation in “culture jamming” around Toronto as “more than just subvertizing, but as a whole way of approaching creative resistance in the broadcast sense” (207). Culture jamming works to reclaim public space by subverting the symbols and slogans used by marketers and

includes such practices as writing speech bubbles coming from the mouth of billboard models that say, “feed me.” Stasko explains, “It was culture jamming that kept me playful and optimistic, and ultimately fuelled my involvement with more traditional forms of activism. Through culture jamming I was able to express my own resistance and critical awareness so that as I traveled through my environment I could feel authentically engaged and empowered” (207). To Stasko, culture jamming is both related to traditional forms of activism, yet also exists as a significant activist practice in itself.

Similarly, in “Tramps and Bruises: Images of Roller Derby and Contemporary Feminism,” Elizabeth Garber and Erin Garber-Pearson (2012) argue for understanding women’s roller derby as an oppositional feminist practice. While they contend that watching or playing roller derby may not “change the social order,” they maintain that roller derby can, “empower us personally to contest norms, to take other risks, and to resist expectations that confine and repress women” (103). While certainly not activist in the traditional sense, Garber and Garber-Pearson’s analysis suggests that roller derby is indicative of an activism that encourages girls and women to challenge gender norms, physically take up space, and gain pleasure from their own active body.

Alongside these shifting practices of feminist activism, Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) note how “commodity activism” has gained prominence as an idealized mode of social action in neoliberal discourses. Based on the self-interest of the individual consumer citizen, commodity activism reflects a co-opting of activism and resistance by the market, whereby participating in capitalism as a consumer is framed as a political act. This conceptualization of activism further confuses what activism today might mean, although I will not be addressing commodity activism in depth in this dissertation. Nonetheless, these multiple modes of activism that challenge and align with

neoliberalism are important to keep in mind as I discuss my participants' performances of activist identities.

ACTIVIST IDENTITIES AND THE POLITICS OF “DOING SOMETHING”

In addition to feminist identities, the bloggers I interviewed articulated an investment in an activist identity, often understanding this identity as being intimately connected with their feminism. Madison mentions that for her, feminist and activist identities are “so ingrained with one another” that she “finds it hard for someone to claim one without the other because I personally can't separate those identities.” Activism, for many of the bloggers, was the part of feminism that involved “doing something.” This sentiment was repeated in both the focus group and in personal interviews when many of the bloggers adamantly argued that being an activist involved not just being passionate about an issue, but *acting* on it.

For example, Amandine tells me that her definition of an activist is “someone who has a cause and does something about it.” Likewise, Carrie claims, “My definition of an activist is someone that responds to an issue they care about with action. Though thinking and talking about issues privately is important and a legitimate form of responding to issues, I don't think that doing that makes someone an activist.” While these explanations are rather simple, my further conversations with the girls and analysis of their blogs reveal more complex articulation of their activist identities, consisting of certain activist practices made possible through the girls' roles as media and cultural producers. This will be the focus for the remainder of this chapter where I will interrogate how girls take up activist identities and practices through their blogging.

While being an activist is now a significant part of how many of my participants think about themselves, it is important to note that most of them did not take on the activist identity until they began to blog. Similar to becoming feminist, taking on the activist label was a process that involved navigating dominant perceptions of activism with the bloggers' own experiences and feminist goals. Julie explains,

I think of myself as a somewhat reluctant activist. Before I started blogging, I never really thought of myself as a leader or really as somebody terribly involved in 'causes.' I identified as a feminist of course but that came more from a place of trying to describe my ideologies and finding a community than actively trying to change policies. It was through blogging that I realized changing policies isn't the only way to define activism -- I think activism is also about changing hearts and minds, which is what I do (or try to do) when I blog.¹

In this sense, the activist label was made intelligible for Julie through the practice of blogging, a relationship that is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

The above quote from Julie highlights a key tension that was continually raised throughout our conversations about activism and centered on what practices are legitimately "activist." This tension was made clear when I asked the bloggers to describe what they think of when they hear the word "activist." Amandine tells me that she visualizes a "person standing outside an official-looking building with a protest sign" and most likely protesting environmental issues, animal rights, or gay rights. She elaborates, "it's funny, but the first thing that comes to mind isn't in terms of women's rights or civil rights. I think that might be because environmentalism and gay rights are things that are very publicized when people are protesting about them now, but civil and women's rights are depicted by the media as more of a thing of the 1960s and 70s." Amandine wasn't unique in this regard, as several of my participants characterized activists as people who

protest, leaders of social movements, like Martin Luther King, Jr. (a figure that several bloggers mentioned), or those who attract media attention because of outrageous acts, such as members of the Westboro Baptist Church. The bloggers' associations reflect the prevalence of protest activism as a dominant signifier of activism in public consciousness. Interestingly, when these bloggers imagine an activist, they don't immediately picture themselves -- or even other girls or women.

ACTIVIST AS A GENDERED AND AGED CONSTRUCT

I am suggesting that this discrepancy between girls' perceived notions of an activist and their own experiences of activism reveals particular gendered and aged cultural narratives about activism that shape the ways that girls understand their own practices. As I previously noted, girls are often characterized as apolitical, reflecting larger traditional gendered binaries that position the public sphere of politics and activism as a masculine domain. Even within the realm of feminist politics, girls, as "the other' of feminism's womanhood" have been regarded as not sufficiently feminist (Currie, Kelly, Pomerantz, 2009, 4). In order to understand girls' political engagements, we must look beyond normative expressions of political participation, as defined by adults. Indeed, girls' feminist activism has often looked different than activist practices taken up by adult women and men. Harris (2008b) argues that girls' political participation has often taken place through less formal activities and private spheres, becoming invisible if we understand activism as a solely public activity within a public/private binary (a binary that is also, as Harris notes, highly gendered). In addition to their gendered identities, girls are also subject to age-based exclusions, marginalized as political subjects within both formal politics, and also often, social movements (Taft, 2011; Harris, 2008).

Finally, both Harris (2008b) and Taft (2011) argue that adult-centric notions of what activism should be and where it should occur will often dismiss girls' activism as "generational rebellion" rather than serious, meaningful political action, or will problematize girls' actions as dangerous or inappropriate. Harris writes,

Often, 'good participation' is defined as young people's membership, taking part, or sharing decision-making in pre-existent programs, forums, bodies and activities that have been crafted by adults, such as youth roundtables, liaison with government representatives, and involvement in local council initiatives. Young people's participation in activities with one another, outside adult control, is often trivialized and/or problematized... Similarly, the decision of many young people not to participate in conventional civic and political activities is frequently constructed as apathy and cynicism that can be corrected through education and access, rather than as a rational choice to dissociate themselves from alienating and impotent institutions (484).

While Renee describes her own perceptions of an activist as very "positive," she explains that in contrast, "society's view of an activist is someone who is very annoying, nagging, not grounded in reality." Renee's description corresponds with the figure of the "bad activist," as elaborated by Jacqueline Kennelly (2011), who studied youth activists in Canada in the mid-2000s. According to Kennelly, dominant discourses about young activists often position youth activists as "troublemakers" and "rabble rousers," contrasting them with popular notions of the "good citizen," whose activist practices do not challenge social structures and instead rely on apolitical, middle-class practices like community service, philanthropy, and commodity activism.

However, Kennelly does not adequately analyze the gendered implications of the "bad activist," missing an important opportunity to theorize who may become an activist and who may not. If, according to both Renee and Kennelly, activists are viewed so

negatively, who is willing to take on the label? Renee suggests to me that it is the dominant perceptions of an activist, as abrasive, confrontational, and annoying that may prevent many girls from becoming activists. She elaborates,

High school is really tough, especially for girls. Girls always want to be liked by everybody... I don't want to generalize too much, but I think girls get a lot of stress thinking that people don't like them, they spend a lot of time maintaining relationships. And so, being an activist that is stereotyped as nagging and annoying would really turn girls off because they would think it would be a turn off for other people. That's really sad.

Renee's discussion is interesting because it implies that it is specifically the *unfeminine* qualities associated with being an activist – loud, abrasive, confrontational, annoying -- that are unappealing to girls, who are dealing with tremendous pressures to fit into normative feminine identities within high school environments. While “nagging” may be commonly understood as a feminine quality, it is one associated with an undesirable feminine stereotype – that of that shrill, nagging, and often unattractive wife. Of course, I do not want to portray girls as passively accepting these stereotypes and modifying their own behavior accordingly, and we cannot generalize that all girls are doing this. Indeed, we may understand many girls' hesitancy to avoid the activist label as a conscious and active strategy to make their high school life as easy as possible – understandable to most of us who felt pressure to conform during our formative years. Nonetheless, the tension between dominant understandings of an activist and normative feminine qualities remain important to consider.

Thus, it is not surprising that most of my participants agreed that girls are discouraged from being activists by parents, teachers, or friends. However, several of my

participants discussed how girls *are* expected to participate in *particular kinds of activist practices*. Madison explains: “I think we’re [girls] encouraged to do activism with what I call ‘soft topics’ like animal rights or children’s rights, not harder topics like poverty, racism, or things of that nature.” When I ask her about her own experience with activism while growing up, she claims that despite having a father who was active in conservative politics, she was not expected to be an activist herself. “I think I was always encouraged to help people. To help people, to volunteer, things like that,” she says. My discussion with Madison reveals how activism is commonly understood in gendered ways, with girls expected to take on traditionally feminine practices often involving caring and emotional labor (volunteering at a seniors home, for example), and topics that are apolitical, and relatively non-controversial.

While the gendering of contemporary girls’ activism problematically reinforces gender binaries, it is important to note that historically women activists foregrounded their gendered identities in order to engage in activism publicly. For example, women activists have often employed their identities as caring mothers in order to legitimate their activist work, such as their participation in the environmental justice movement. Shannon Elizabeth Bell and Yvonne A. Braun (2010) argue, “Framing their activism as originating in their concern for their children confers ‘moral legitimacy’ to women’s activism in a way that other justifications – such as concern for their own health or their interest in community work – do not” (797). This notion of women as natural “municipal housekeepers” extends back to the early 1900s when middle and upper class women were expected to participate in environmental campaigns aimed at reducing pollution and improving urban environments as an “extension of traditionally feminine responsibilities” (Rome, 2006, 442). Interestingly, Adam Rome (2006) notes how women’s role as

environmental caretakers was even cited as a reason for women's suffrage, as "men could not be trusted to care for the environment" (444).

This gendered discursive framing of women's activism can also be seen in reference to the community activities of African American and Latina women that Nancy Naples (1992, 1998) terms "activist mothering." The concept refers to the mothering practices these women employ beyond their own biological children to include fighting "against debilitating and demoralizing effects of oppression" in her community (Naples, 1992, 457). Mobilizing tropes of motherhood, this discursive framing of women's activism draws on cultural feminism's privileging of supposedly feminine qualities and most likely allowed women to participate in activism that they may not have been able to otherwise. Nonetheless, this framing also most likely contributed to the critiques of women whose activism was framed in unconventional ways, such as a demonstration in front of the 1968 Miss American pageant where feminists threw symbols of traditional femininity into what was dubbed the "freedom trash can."²

It is perhaps not surprising then that none of my participants were specifically encouraged to participate in *feminist* activism as young girls or teenagers, most likely due to the controversial and political nature of feminism, as well as its connection to adult women. Nonetheless, as children of the 1990s, most of my participants were taught that girls were equal to boys, and told by their parents that they could be anything they wanted to be. Several of the bloggers I interviewed credit this upbringing with making them open to feminist politics as they got older and experienced sexism, despite the word "feminism" itself being absent from their childhood environments. For example, Abby explains how angry she felt as a second grader when her teacher gave out coloring illustrations showing Jewish holiday scenes that featured only boys praying, celebrating, and performing ritual acts – actions that Abby claims are done by both genders in the

religion. She tells me, “My nine-year-old self quickly realized that ‘that’s not fair!’ and on many of those pages, the boys were colored in to look like girls instead!”

While Abby’s action may not reflect dominant – masculine - understandings of activism, her example nonetheless demonstrates an activist trajectory on which Madison elaborates. She says, “I think a lot of girls get into [feminism] through soft issues again... girl power, more women in the government, things like that. I got into feminism through the less controversial end of it and once I got ingrained in the philosophy of it I became more invested in other issues, like being pro-choice and things that are more controversial.” This comment aligns with some of Rebecca Hains’ (2012) findings in her ethnographic study of girl power media. Hains argues that the Spice Girls, probably the most notable girl power media franchise, served as a “pathway to feminism” for several of her research participants.

Emilie Zaslow (2009) offers a more nuanced argument, arguing that her study participants’ engagement with girl power media culture encouraged them to adopt what she calls a “performance of feminist identity” informed by individual strength, confidence, and ambition, rather than a practice of feminist politics or activism. While I am not making an argument here about commercial girl power specifically, I am suggesting that while girls may not be encouraged to be activists in many circumstances, they are nonetheless often taught that they are equal to their male peers and expect to live out this ideal in their daily lives. Consequently, when girls encounter inequality in their lives, feminist consciousness can begin to emerge, as it did for Abby.

Given the many sectors of society where gender inequality persists, we might then expect more girls to eventually become feminist activists; especially since feminism is one political sphere dominated by female activists, making it a space that would be seemingly appealing to girls based upon their gender alone. However, my conversations

with the bloggers revealed that their age is a factor that has prevented several of them from participating in what may be seen as more traditional feminist activism. A conversation I had with Madison reveals that girl feminists often feel not *sufficiently activist* in comparison to their older feminist counterparts whom Madison describes as not taking younger feminists' activism seriously. She claims,

Older feminists do not understand online activism, therefore they don't think that online activism is true activism. If you go to a feminist conference and they're talking about ways to get young people involved, young feminists will say you need to create an online presence ... but they'll say that that's not real, that's not real activism. Or they'll say that bloggers aren't doing anything for our cause, so they don't value them.

And that just pushes young feminists away because that's where we spend the majority of our time, our organizing and our consciousness raising. Especially with consciousness raising – that's a big one. Older feminists are still in favor of getting in a room together and talking about sexism and patriarchy, but that's not how young feminists do it anymore – they do it online, through blogs, and Facebook. And they don't take that seriously... it's very contentious. As a young feminist I blame the older generation and think they need to start taking us seriously.

While Madison laughs as she says this, it is clearly an issue of contention for her – and rightly so. While Madison's activist identity is important to her, she feels as though her practices are marginalized within the larger feminist community. To Madison then, ideas about activism, and specifically feminist activism, are shaped by age in a way that often position younger feminists as not *real activists* or not *sufficiently activist* in practice.

Madison's experience within the feminist community aligns with discourses about other types of youth activism. For example, Taft (2011) argues that activism is generally framed in adult-centric terms that often dismisses young activist's politics as

“generational rebellion” or “just a phase” rather than meaningful political action. Similarly, Kennelly (2011) maintains that the image of the “youth activist” exists in tension with what she terms the “youth citizen,” with the former image attached to notions of “rabbleroising” and “troublemaking” and the latter representing characteristics desirable to the neoliberal state. Consequently, while adult activists are often afforded a certain respect for their supposed rational political beliefs, youth activists are positioned as lacking in knowledge, utilizing inappropriate activist tactics, and/or out to just cause trouble. These discourses exist in contrast to another dominant discourse about youth and activism – that which suggests youth are not interested in being politically active (Kennelly, 2011).

This issue is further compounded by the increasing prevalence of “online activism” over the past decade, including both public and academic debates about the merits of activism that are primarily enacted through digital media and/or new media technologies. Often framed in the press as “slacktivism” or “clicktivism,” online activism is frequently described as lacking in authentic participation and clear, sustainable social change (Christensen, 2011; Chattopadhyay, 2011). For example, in his oft-cited *New Yorker* piece “Small Change: Why the Revolution will not be Tweeted,” Malcolm Gladwell (2010) argues that social media cannot facilitate the “high risk” or direct-action activism of the civil rights movement. He explains this as due to a lack of strong personal connections forged through online media and the decentralized nature of online activist networks. Gladwell concludes, “Facebook activism succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice. We are a long way from the lunch counters of Greensboro.” The older feminist activists mentioned by Madison seem to

align with Gladwell's position, questioning younger feminist's motivation and dedication to the cause because of their reliance on digital media technologies.

New media scholars have also been interested in the possibilities for social change through online activism. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to substantially engage in these debates, it is worthwhile highlighting some of these arguments. Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner (2004) document how activists have successfully used the Internet to organize, facilitating what they call an "international protest movement" against neoliberal institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They conclude their celebratory article by arguing that online activism has created a "vital new space of politics and culture" which have produced "new social relations and forms of political possibility" (94). Similarly, some feminists were also eager to use new media technologies for activism. As I discussed in the introduction, many cyberfeminists active in the 1990s were enthusiastic about the networking and organizational abilities afforded by new media and used these technologies for activist purposes (Shade, 2002).

More recently, new media scholars have been more nuanced in their analyses of online activism, demonstrating how it facilitates connections between online and "offline" activism and raises awareness of political issues, while remaining cautious about the potential for sustained social movements. For example, Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) argues that activists use social media as a means of mobilization, "reweav[ing] a new sense of public space, refashioning the way in which people come together on the streets" (160). Gerbaudo's ethnographic research, which he conducted during popular uprisings in 2011 in Egypt ("Egyptian Revolution/Arab Spring"), Spain ("indignados protest"), and the U.S. ("Occupy Wall Street"), contradicts Gladwell's assertions that social media lacks personal connects and structure. Instead Gerbaudo writes,

Social media have become emotional conduits for reconstructing a sense of togetherness among a spatially dispersed constituency, so as to facilitate its physical coming together in public space. This finding clearly goes against much scholarship on new media, which has tended to locate them in a 'virtual reality' of in a 'cyberspace,' or in a 'network of brains' detached from geographic reality (159-160).

By analyzing social media within its cultural context of depleting public space, Gerbaudo recognizes that social media offers important opportunities for activists that go beyond merely organization purposes; yet he cautions that the continuity of social movements such as the Arab Spring cannot be sustained through social media alone. Unfortunately, Gerbaudo's book does not address gender, race, class, age and other identities as categories of analyses, and therefore, we get little understanding of girls' roles in these movements.

It is also necessary to ask *whom* online activism may benefit most. My suggestion throughout this dissertation, that blogging is an activist practice especially useful to marginalized people (in the case of this study, girls), is supported by other feminist research. For example, Saayan Chattopadhyay (2011) uses the online 2009 Pink Chaddi Campaign in India as a case study to demonstrate how Indian women who may face constraints to organizing in public spaces have successfully mobilized using digital media instead. While Chattopadhyay recognizes the limitations of online activism (e.g., the digital divide), she nonetheless argues that it "opens up innovative modes of belonging and perhaps equally atypical ways of approaching politics, individual communities, and cultural difference" (66). Such studies remind us that online activism cannot be approached through binary logic which suggests that online activism is "real" or "not

real,” but must be analyzed as part of changing cultural conditions that require multiple modes of resistance, avenues of communication, and strategies of knowledge production.

EXPLORING GIRL FEMINIST BLOGGERS’ ACTIVIST PRACTICES

My discussion of activism has so far analyzed the activist identities cultivated by girl feminist bloggers. But how are these activist identities mobilized into actual activist practices facilitated through blogging? Taft (2011) argues that girl activists’ political identities and strategic activist practices are interrelated, and that we therefore must understand girls’ identity claims in order to truly understand how and why they do activism in particular ways. Nonetheless, Taft is careful to avoid the charge of essentialism. She writes, “Identity does not shape strategy due to anything inherent in a group’s identity. Rather, it shapes strategy through a group’s negotiated and active assertion of the political meaning of that identity. I do not argue that identity determines strategy, but I do suggest that there is a relationship between the two, and that this relationship is best understood through looking at the mechanism of identity narratives and identity claims” (182-183).

Thus, I will now turn to a discussion of the activist practices of girl feminist bloggers, drawing connections between their feminist and activist identities and activism. I understand girls’ activism as consisting of three key practices: (1) education, (2) community-building, and (3) making feminism visible through performing feminist identities. While I take up each of these practices separately for the purpose of a clear analysis, it is significant to recognize that these practices are interrelated, and often used in tandem by girl bloggers. Additionally, I will be returning to these practices throughout

this dissertation, as they serve as important foundational concepts to understand girls' feminist blogging.

Education

One of the most important activist practices in which girl bloggers engage is what they describe as “education,” specifically the practice of educating their peers about feminist issues and feminism itself. “There’s a lot of kinds of activism that goes on online, like online protests, signing petitions, organizing, but I think if we were going to look at the number one thing that comes out of online activism, it would be education,” Madison tells me one day on the phone. Indeed, other participants echo Madison’s insistence on the importance of using blog spaces to educate peers on what feminism is, the history of the movement and the benefits of feminism in order to debunk the harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about feminism. Education, in this sense, is understood by bloggers as necessary for feminist social change and best practiced through blogging and other online platforms.

Courtney was one of the bloggers more outspoken about the importance of education as an activist practice. She has been active for the past two years on her blogspot and tumblr blogs and views her ability to spread information via her participation on these platforms, as well as Facebook, as a significant part of her activism. While it is easy to assume that feminist bloggers are merely “preaching to the converted,” an issue I will address in the following chapter, Courtney maintains that this is not the case, especially since her friends who do not identify as feminists often keep up with her tumblr or view Courtney’s status updates on their Facebook feed. Courtney explains that she believes that sharing feminist information online is activism because “I

hear back from a lot of my friends who do get involved or do learn something from what I write and share. It makes me feel that even though I'm just doing something simple that I'm getting other people involved and interested and hopefully they'll go out and do the same - spread the good word of feminism!"

Likewise, Madison views her blog on tumblr as a tool to educate people who are just learning about feminism. "That's who I try to hit, people who are hesitant – I don't try and water things down because I don't believe in watering things down for people who are hesitant – but [I try to keep the blog] sort of informational." For example, Madison's blog has recently been an excellent source for information on reproductive rights legislation, especially in her home state of Michigan. She also offers useful information about feminism more generally, such as an extensive listing of feminist women throughout history, a topic I will address in more detail in chapter five. Madison's idea of teaching readers about feminism implies that many girl bloggers aim to educate other young people specifically, rather than adults. And indeed, most girl bloggers tell me that this is who they are speaking to when they blog. For example, Renee says, "I imagine that 99% of the people that are coming to my blog are going to be girls... so I imagine that I'm talking to that teenage girl, or that tween girl who is on her laptop at midnight just browsing around and she's heard about this feminism thing, but she doesn't know what it is and she's trying to do a little research."

Education for girl bloggers, however, isn't necessarily a one-way flow of "correct" information, but instead is characterized by the "participatory" nature of the web (Jenkins, 2006). For example, instead of posting what she herself deems important, Madison utilizes the question function on her tumblr blog to encourage questions from readers, which she then answers. She receives as many as fifteen questions a day about everything from white privilege to how to deal with sexist messages online. And while

Madison has the power to not respond to certain questions, the question function allows readers to engage with the content in an immediate way that is impossible to do with most other media forms (Figure 2.1).

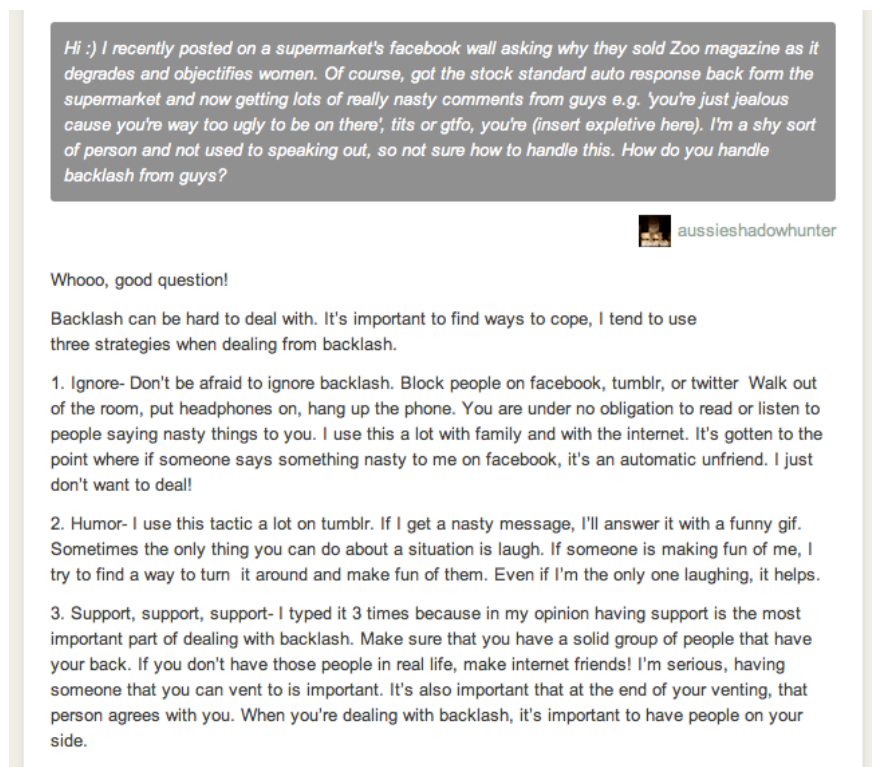


Figure 2.1 A Q&A post from Madison's tumblr, author screen shot

Girl bloggers' desire to educate their peers must also be viewed in relation to the absence of feminism in most high school curricula. The majority of my study participants claimed that they did not learn about feminism or women's rights in their high school classes. When feminism was mentioned, it was primarily framed as a historical

movement in a U.S. History class, rather than an active movement in the present. Even in these cases, feminism is often relegated to sidebars in textbooks and bloggers reported relatively little class time spent analyzing the topic. In this sense, girl bloggers' educational activism can be seen as filling an important void in girls' knowledge of history. I will return to this topic in more detail in chapter five of this dissertation.

In her ethnographic research on girl anti-globalization activists, Taft (2011) found that education was also a significant part of girls' political practices, and girls often designed events and activities with this goal in mind. However, Taft maintains that education involves "not only creating spaces for sharing facts, discussing solutions to problems, and developing philosophies, theories, and vocabularies but also developing dissident feelings, intuitions, and desires" (115). According to Taft, this "feeling production" is a significant, yet often overlooked goal of education as an activist practice, and must be acknowledged as legitimate. Indeed, "feeling production" is certainly evident in many of the images and much of the information circulated by girl bloggers.

For example, about a month before the U.S. presidential election in November 2012, Kat circulated an image on her Facebook profile that reads "92 Years Ago, Women Gained the Right to Vote. This Year, Make Sure You Use It. GOTTA REGISTER.COM." The accompanying images show a black and white photo of suffragettes protesting and then a color photo of contemporary women cheering at what looks like an Obama political rally (Figure 2.2). Not only does the image educate Kat's Facebook friends about suffrage and the fact that women have had voting rights in the United States for a relatively short time, but the image calls upon the viewer to act by registering to vote and then getting out to the ballot box. Perhaps most importantly though, the image circulates feelings of power, strength, progress, and even excitement, suggesting that women have political agency and an important responsibility to participate in this election. It is this

“feeling production” that arguably makes the act of circulating this image on one’s Facebook profile educational. An image such as this posted to one’s Facebook wall may or may not lead someone to actually act (in this case, vote); however, it generates important feelings that benefit young women – such as a sense of political agency and community. Seeking a direct tangible and measurable “effect” of activism ignores results like the production of feeling. That it is women and girls whose activism often involves this emotional labor is not a coincidence, and again reveals the gendered way that we often talk about activism (Taft, 2011).



Figure 2.2 Education as activism on Facebook, author screen shot

Community-building

Although I am focusing on issues of community in the following chapter, it is necessary to briefly discuss here how bloggers conceptualize the community-building that occurs through their blogging as a form of activism. This is particularly important to emphasize within the context of neoliberalism and the ways in which activism is being increasingly understood as an individualistic endeavor (Hearn, 2012; Kennelly, 2011; Harris, 2008a). As a result, I was struck by the ways in which girl bloggers described how fostering a coalition of young feminist bloggers was viewed as activist, in part because it resists dominant discourses of individualism.

For example, when I ask Renee why she thinks that it's important to view blogging as a form of activism, she says, "I think everybody's voice is important. If you can go online and find this mass of feminist bloggers, it's inspiring to the next generation – it just shows you're not alone." To Renee, finding a community is necessary in order to sustain feminism. Participating in this community then ensures its continuation, functioning as activism by motivating oneself and others to continue the struggle. Similarly, Courtney says that being part of a larger feminist community and actively maintaining these ties allow her to be an activist because she feels supported and knows that there are others to back her up if she needs it. While she tells me that it is probably possible to be an "individual activist," she doesn't see how feminism can achieve anything without "women and girls coming together as a community."

Girl bloggers create community through a variety of means, including the promotion of other blogs through blogrolls and post features, sharing other girls' stories through reposting/reblogging, inviting contributions from other girl bloggers, and participating on comment boards. I will be discussing these strategies in detail in the following chapter; however, it is important to note that while all of the bloggers spoke

about engaging in such community-building practices, most described this as happening “unconsciously.” In other words, community-building work was viewed by the bloggers as *just a part of having a feminist blog*, rather than an additional voluntary task. This may be due to the participatory culture fostered by web 2.0 platforms, which functions through the sharing and circulation of content via community networks (Jenkins, 2006).

To bloggers, community-building and education are not isolated, but related practices that mutually reinforce one another. Courtney explains that sharing feminist information through social media “makes the [feminist] community stronger because there’s more people involved and invested.” She gives the example of the 2011 Slutwalk phenomenon, which she claims never would have happened without the social media to connect women and girls all over the world. While Slutwalks educated the public about rape culture both through online conversations as well as the walks themselves, the online discourse also built new feminist communities through this education, motivating a diversity of girls and women (and their allies) to organize. I will return to the example of Slutwalk in more detail in the following chapter.

My participants’ commitment to community-building continues a lengthy tradition of this practice within feminist movements, including through the use of digital media technologies. For example, Doreen Piano (2002) describes how online feminist distros in the late 1990s “create[d] feminist pockets or zones in cyberspace,” serving to connect feminist zine producers and consumers and build communities based on an alternative economic model antithetical to commercial, male-dominated and for-profit spaces. This type of community-building then serves as a activist practice by challenging dominant capitalist logic and extending a gendered, racial, and class-based critique to economics. I will be further developing this discussion throughout the next chapter and only wish to introduce the idea of community-building as an activist practice here.

Making Feminism Visible

I was surprised to discover how invested my participants are in making feminists and feminism visible online in order to challenge stereotypes of feminists, a strategy that I discuss in the previous chapter. In this sense, bloggers alluded to the idea that *being a feminist publicly* was in itself an activist strategy, a type of public relations mission with the goal of getting more young people involved in the movement. For example, Renee says,

By simply calling yourself a feminist you get others into the conversation. Kids at school, people who read your blog (if you have one), friends and family members... once you're a feminist, you're like a little stone that upsets everything around you with a ripple effect. First, it's little ripples. But over time they get bigger and bigger and people start recognizing you for your strong beliefs.

This strategy can be seen in Renee's "Faces of Feminism" project that I describe in detail in chapter one, whereby Renee invited self-identified feminists to send in pictures of themselves, which she then posted on her blog. By making a diversity of feminists *literally* visible on her blog, Renee positions a feminist identity as something desirable and accessible to everyone, inviting others to identify with the movement with the hopes of it growing.

In her book, *A Little F'ed Up: Why Feminism Is Not a Dirty Word*, Julie Zeilinger, (2012) founder and editor of the *FBomb*, puts forth a similar argument suggesting that publicly living as a self-identified young feminist is a necessary strategy

to keep the movement growing. In her book chapter titled “Please Stop Calling Me a Feminazi (Or Houston, We Have a PR Problem)” she argues,

Feminists have been so preoccupied with trying to make the world a better place (silly us) that we’ve kind of forgotten about effectively combating negative stereotypes and projecting positive images of ourselves, in the media and in the world at large. And the thing is that while we can tell ourselves that the way other people view us doesn’t matter, it really does. I’m not saying we should change what we are as a movement because some people reject it. I’m not saying we should let those negative stereotypes impact us, or that we should bend over backward to make people like us. No, I’m saying we need to better package and present who we *are* and who we have *always* been. The product is there. (Hello, worldwide equality? Who wouldn’t buy that?) We just need to sell it better (79).

I quote from Julie’s book at length because I find the language she uses to be fascinating: “images” of feminism, feminism as a “product,” and feminists needing to “sell” it to a mainstream crowd relies on the neoliberal language of branding and marketing consultants to promote a complex, collectivist social movement. I want to be critical of this neoliberal discourse, as I believe it potentially frames feminism to become a series of easily digestible images, dangerously close to the ways in which postfeminism privileges empowered feminine visibility, display, and a circulation of images (McRobbie, 2009; Harris, 2004). Thus, the language of neoliberalism risks emptying the politics out of Zeilinger’s feminism with the hopes of making it easily digestible to a mainstream public.

However, it is not surprising that girl activists may be drawn to construct feminism in such terms. Indeed, the young feminists I discuss here have grown up in a neoliberal cultural climate that emphasizes social change and resistance within the confines of a commercial consumer culture (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser, 2012). A key

part of this neoliberal culture is the branding practices that “produce sets of images and immaterial symbolic values in and through which individuals negotiate the world *at the same time* as they work to contain and direct the expressive, meaning-making capacities of social actors in definite self-advantaging way, shaping markets and controlling competition” (Hearn, 2012, 27). While I’m certainly not suggesting that Zeilinger is advocating for a glossy postfeminist future, her use of marketing discourse produces a discursive slippage that raises questions about the ideal positioning of feminism within contemporary commercial popular culture, an issue I will further discuss in chapter four.

The strategy of “making feminism visible” that I’ve been discussing relies less on mobilizing for specific, tangible changes on particular issues as emblematic of the women’s liberation movement, and instead focuses on what Nancy Fraser (1997) describes as a “recognition” feminism that emphasizes the cultural and symbolic as sites of social change. Third wave feminists have been particularly invested in recognition feminism through their attention to representations, communication, fluid shifting identities, and cultural production (Zaslow, 2009; Harris, 2008a). As a result it makes sense for bloggers like Renee and Julie to be thinking about how feminism is perceived in popular culture and how they may intervene to change feminism’s cultural status, as the cultural arena is a significant space for their own performances of feminism.

However, it is necessary to recognize that this practice did not originate in the third wave and that feminists have always been interested in making their movement visible within the public sphere. For example, some feminists in the women’s liberation movement emphasized the importance of participating in mainstream commercial culture in order to broaden the appeal of feminism to a diversity of women, some of whom may not consider themselves feminist or even political. Amy Erdman Farrell (1998) documents how *Ms. Magazine* was developed in the early 1970s with this mission in

mind by promoting what she calls a “popular feminism” (5). This popular feminism, according to Farrell, refers to a “shared, widely held cultural and political commitment to improving women’s lives and to ending gender domination that is both articulated and represented within popular culture” (196). Because popular culture often intersects with commercial culture, *Ms’* founders envisioned popular feminism as reaching a wide audience through the commercial women’s magazine industry (Farrell, 1998).

In part, feminist’s desire to ensure their public visibility is related to women’s historical exclusion from the public sphere and relegation to the private sphere of the home. In this sense, making feminism visible is a necessary feminist strategy to secure a public voice. Additionally, Farrell emphasizes that many feminists envisioned a commercial feminist magazine as potentially “weaken[ing] women’s resistance to feminism and make[ing] them rethink the stereotypical images they had previously known in mainstream media” (16). Interestingly, this goal is markedly similar to Julie’s investment in improving feminism’s “PR problem” and Renee’s desire to “get others’ into the conversation.” While different language may be employed by contemporary bloggers, the goal remains the same: to make feminism appealing to more girls and women in order to spark a feminist consciousness.

It is important to recognize that this strategy of mainstreaming has always been controversial among activists. Indeed, Farrell notes how not all feminists in the 1970s endorsed the commercial strategy that *Ms Magazine* embraced. Similarly, I have offered a critique of this strategy in relation to contemporary bloggers, warning that their rhetoric of “selling” feminism is informed by neoliberal discourses. Consequently, it is imperative to recognize both the opportunities and limitations of “making feminism visible” with a critical lens to the cultural context and movement goals. Moreover, we can see that while girl feminist bloggers’ strategy of “making feminism visible” appears new,

it actually has a lengthy history within feminism that may provide important lessons for today's girl bloggers.

BLOGGING AS AN ACCESSIBLE FEMINIST ACTIVIST PRACTICE

If blogging plays such a central role in many girl feminists' lives today, it is important to ask *why* girls choose *blogging* specifically as a way to practice feminist activism. Several of my participants described blogging as an activist practice that is accessible to them in their everyday lives, making it a desirable way to participate in feminism. Renee explains:

For those of us who can't drive two hours to protest an anti-choice bill or whip out \$100 whenever a worthy feminist charity comes along, blogging is the next best thing. Specifically, blogging about feminism shows that the movement is still alive and kicking, and gives hope to those who may feel alone in their struggle. I can only hope that *my* blog reaches other young people and shows them that feminism is important, that feminism is empowering, and that feminism is *certainly* not dead.

Likewise, Kat tells me that blogging is "the only kind of activism I've had access to over the past three years... Hopefully you can do outreach in person at some point but [blogging] is good for those of us that... live in communities where there is no other way to participate." Kat has wanted to volunteer at Planned Parenthood because of her interest in reproductive rights and sex education; however, the closest clinic to her family's home in rural Indiana is a half hour away, preventing Kat from volunteering due to a lack of transportation to and from the clinic. This has been frustrating to her because she wants to expand her feminist activism, but is limited by her rural location and positioning as a

young person with a lack of financial resources. “I see all these protests happening all over the country and I’m like, ‘I wish I could go!’” She is excited for next fall, when she will move to a larger urban center to attend university, and plans to participate in feminist groups on campus.

Renee and Kat’s comments highlight how important blogging is as an accessible way for girls with limited resources - often due to age, but also perhaps gender, class, race, location, and ability - to participate in activism. This point is crucial and is often overlooked by adults who have significantly more freedom and personal income than girls, allowing them to participate in a wider variety of activist practices that may not be accessible to girls still living with parents and often with limited finances and transportation. Girls’ activist practices, in other words, are shaped by their social location as girls. But while blogging is an accessible activist strategy for many girls, it is not accessible to everyone. For example, the ability to blog requires regular access to not only a computer, but also expensive broadband or DSL Internet access. Girls must also have some disposable leisure time to create and maintain a blog, which can be a time consuming process. For example, the bloggers I interviewed reported spending between five and fourteen hours a week researching, writing, and editing posts. Because many working-class and poor girls work part-time jobs to help support their families or care for younger siblings while their parents work, some girls may lack the leisure time needed to blog in addition to computer/Internet access. Consequently, while I am framing blogging as an accessible activist practice for girls, it is imperative to remember that some girls remain excluded from this activist practice.

I am suggesting that both feminist media scholars and activists must understand girls’ feminist blogging practices as activism that is related to their own social context and *positioning as girls*. For example, instead of suggesting that educating their peers

about abortion regulations through Twitter is not sufficiently activist, we must understand that education is particularly relevant to their lives as *students*. As Taft (2011) argues, “Given their location as students, it is not surprising that teenagers would place a particular emphasis on education and learning within social movements. To a certain extent, this identity position partially explains why they prioritize this social change strategy” (115).

Blogging as an activist strategy can also be considered in relation to the lengthy history of writing in girls’ culture, which I briefly outlined in the introduction to this dissertation. The practice of *writing* a blog can be seen as continuing longstanding writing practices, such as keeping a diary, having a pen pal, and writing fan letters, that girls have engaged in for many years. Many of these writing practices have provided a space for girls to perform and explore their identities, such as the feminist riot grrrl identities performed by girl zinesters in the 1990s (Crowther, 1999; Hunter, 2002; Kearney, 2006). Hunter (2002) also notes how girls in the early 1900s often acted as political activists through their roles as editors on their school newspapers, advocating for women’s suffrage in their weekly columns. When viewed in relation to this history, it makes sense that contemporary girls are choosing to write blogs as a way to perform their feminist and activist identities, as writing is a central part of girls’ culture both historically and contemporarily.

But understanding the ways that digital culture has fostered girls’ feminist activism requires us to reassess the assumption that a practice such as blogging, for example, only functions as “online activism.” Before concluding this chapter then, I want to turn to a brief discussion of how we must understand girls’ activist identities as beyond the “online/offline” binary.

“ONE OF THE BEST THINGS OF MY LIFE:” ACTIVISM ON THE SCREEN AND OFF

While I am arguing that the practice of blogging itself is a legitimate form of feminist activism, it is also necessary to highlight how feminist blogging serves as a gateway to other kinds of activism for several of the bloggers. Courtney describes her feminist blogging as a “catalyst” for deciding to volunteer at Planned Parenthood and has strengthened her commitment to the Pride Alliance, an organization she was involved with prior to the development of her blog. Similarly, Madison maintains that her feminist blogging has encouraged her to take on other feminist activist practices outside the blogosphere. She explains, “I started blogging and then Walk for Choice happened and that was organized through tumblr and was the first outside feminist thing I’ve ever done, as far as black and white activism... My parents are conservative so I was always nervous to go to these things, but I had a cousin drive me down to Ann Arbor [for Walk for Choice] and it was one of the best things of my life...”

These accounts reveal a connection between blogging and “offline” activist practices that must be better articulated by new media scholars. In fact, it may be harder than expected to classify what is “online” activism in many of the examples of activism that bloggers described to me. For example, the Walk for Choice event that Madison discusses happened only because of its organization through the blogging platform tumblr. In turn, Madison heard about the event and decided to attend only based on her online participation. Indeed, as Mary Gray (2009) claims, “ ‘online’ and ‘offline’ experiences of media constitute one another,” and this is increasingly important for girls, who have less access to the public sphere than boys. Consequently, as I continue to discuss bloggers’ activism throughout this dissertation I aim to complicate further the

activist practices I introduce here by demonstrating the ways in which they are constitutive of the everyday lives of girl bloggers.

CONCLUSIONS: ACTIVISM, AGENCY AND THE PRACTICE OF CITIZENSHIP

In this chapter I focus on how girl feminist bloggers produce and perform activist identities through blogging. I describe how an activist identity is made intelligible for girls via their blogging practices, allowing girls to imagine activism in ways that often challenged their early conceptions of both activists and activism. This is a significant point, and thus, I'm arguing that feminist scholars must more rigorously analyze what I describe as gendered and aged cultural narratives about activism in order to better understand how activist identities are discursively produced in opposition to dominant norms of girlhood. A girl-centered approach to activism allows us to see how education, community-building, and making feminism visible function as key activist practices that girls engage in through blogging. In doing so, I argue that blogging must be understood as an *accessible* activist practice in itself, related to girl bloggers' own social context and positioning as *girls*.

In this dissertation I am suggesting that citizenship must be understood as a *practice*, implying an *agency* and some sort of *action*. Previously I argued that performance of feminist identities are a significant precursor to girl feminist bloggers' ability to understand themselves as citizens in the present. In many ways, this chapter provides evidence of the resulting action; how girl feminist bloggers mobilize their feminist identities into activist identities and practices of activism via blogging. Consequently, I am arguing that girl feminist bloggers exercise the agency afforded by

citizenship when they educate, build community, and make feminism visible; and that these practices employed through blogging reflect a practice of citizenship that is not based upon masculine or adult-defined actions, but one produced by girls themselves.

Endnotes

¹ It is interesting to note that Julie's use of "changing hearts and minds" has a lengthy history in American political thought, as related to the phrase "winning hearts and minds." Dickinson (2009) notes that the phrase was "first associated with democracy in the 19th century, later served as a call to national solidarity during the Great Depression, and finally became a slogan for a policy the U.S. military never quite implemented in Vietnam." While it is unclear if Julie is familiar with its lengthy history, her use of the phrase is an interesting choice considering the relation to both democracy and U.S. interventionist foreign policy the phrase carries. See Dickinson (2009) for further details.

² It was this demonstration where the characterization of feminists as "bra-burners" began, although there is no evidence that bras were actually burned in the "freedom trash can." Nonetheless, this was a significant moment in characterizing feminists as militant, unfeminine, and radical; an image that generated much critique of the movement.

Chapter Three: “Loud, Proud, and Sarcastic:” Young Feminist Internet Communities as Networked Counterpublics

“I can’t see any movement going anywhere without a sense of community. Like, we would have never gotten to where we are today without women coming together as a community.”

-Courtney, phone interview

In July 2009 a new website caught the attention of the feminist blogosphere. The *FBomb* (<http://fbomb.org>) appeared similar to existing feminist blogs; it had a snarky name, a blogroll filled with feminist titles, and postings that tackled issues like rape culture and representations of women in the media. However, it differed from sites like *Feministing*, *Feministe*, and *Racialicious* in one important way: the founder of the *FBomb* was still in high school, living with her parents in suburban Ohio. Hardly the archetype of a feminist blogger – often assumed to be an urban-dwelling, college-educated progressive twenty-something – sixteen-year-old Julie Zeilinger wanted to create a space for the peers she knew existed, but often had trouble finding in the halls of her high school... other teenage girl feminists.

Upon announcing the *FBomb* through a press release to both mainstream media outlets and feminist media organizations, Julie became the topic du jour in the feminist blogosphere, in part because the *FBomb* contradicted dominant postfeminist logic that girls are not interested in feminism. The *FBomb* was dubbed “the blog we wished we had as teens” by feminist pop culture blog *Jezebel* and *Feministing* reported the launch as something “very cool” (Kelleher, 2009; Miriam, 2009). The *FBomb*’s manifesto was forthright:

In this case the “F Bomb” stands for “feminist.” However, it also pokes fun at the idea that the term “feminist” is so stigmatized – it is our way of proudly reclaiming the word. The fact that the “F Bomb” usually refers to a certain swear word in popular culture is also not a coincidental. The *FBomb.org* is for girls who have enough social awareness to be angry and who want to verbalize that feeling. The *FBomb.org* is loud, proud, sarcastic... everything teenage feminists are today.

The website was unique in that it made visible a group of girls often assumed to be nonexistent.¹ And girls were clearly excited about it. After being online for only a couple of months, the *FBomb* was receiving over 13,000 hits monthly and three and a half years later, tops 35,000 unique visitors a month. While Julie continues to edit the site as a college student, she has become somewhat of a “public voice” for young feminists, and as I described in the previous chapter, has recently released a book entitled, *A Little F’ed Up: Why Feminism Is Not a Dirty Word*. Nonetheless, the *FBomb* remains one of the most popular feminist blogs, and continues to be an important online space for young feminists.

I open this chapter by focusing on the *FBomb* because of the significant role that the website has played in creating young feminist communities within the feminist blogosphere. In part, this has been both due to the attention that the *FBomb* has received within feminist and mainstream media, but also because of the way the website is structured as a community space. While Julie began writing most of the posts when the site launched in late February 2009, she invited other girls to contribute their own posts in order to facilitate a diversity of young feminist voices on the website. In an interview she told me, “Beyond anything else, what I really hoped to accomplish by starting the *FBomb* was to create community. I didn’t want the *FBomb* to solely reflect my feminist beliefs,

but to create a comprehensive, inclusive picture of what feminism looks like and what it can be for my generation.”

The *FBomb* publishes posts by contributors from diverse countries such as Jordan, India, France, Iraq, and England, and several of my study participants have written for the site. Consequently, the *FBomb* serves as a fascinating example of how girl bloggers work collectively, which informs the guiding questions of this chapter: What specific practices do girls utilize to foster community through their blogs? How can we better theorize the connections girls are making through feminist blogging in order to recognize their political potential? Finally, how might we regard the collective nature of girls’ feminist blogging as demonstrating a model of citizenship that challenges the individual citizenship models promoted by postfeminist and neoliberal discourses?

I begin to frame the primary stakes of this chapter by outlining how girls’ citizenship has been conceived as an individualistic practice through postfeminist and neoliberal discourses, drawing primarily on Anita Harris’ (2004) conception of the “can-do” girl to illustrate this. In this discussion I suggest that the “can-do” girls’ individualized citizenship is sustained through what Angela McRobbie (2009) calls the “disarticulation” of feminism, whereby the collective alliances that drive feminist politics are systematically broken down. Within this cultural context however, I will argue that the networked counterpublics produced by girl feminist bloggers offer them an alternative citizenship model based upon a sense of collective action that is developed through personal connections, including friendships. Consequently, this chapter will advance an understanding of a relational citizenship through the concept of a networked counterpublic that is central to the practice of girls’ feminist blogging.

I then turn to briefly outlining existing literature theorizing online communities, a common framework used by Internet scholars to understand connectivities formed

through online space. Next, I incorporate a discussion of feminist responses to changing notions of community since the 1970s and problematize these dominant discourses that maintain contemporary feminists lack community structure. I draw on scholars such as Mary Gray (2009) and Susan Driver (2007) to suggest that we must examine communities within digital environments in less rigid terms and mobilize different criteria from understanding how these communities function. I assert that these community formations are not only useful in a cultural context where digital media is an integrated part of everyday life, but also serve to build feminist communities that recognize the importance of difference. Based upon this discussion I frame girls' feminist blogging communities as "networked counterpublics," building on scholarship by Nancy Fraser (1992), Michael Warner (2005), and danah boyd (2008) in order to more accurately account for the complex ways in which these communities form and operate.

I then move on to map out specific issues that girl feminists view as being particularly pertinent to them as young feminists, based upon my interviews, focus group data, and textual analysis of their sites. I demonstrate how discussions of reproductive rights and rape culture facilitate networked counterpublics that often move seamlessly between online and offline spaces. Next, I outline specific strategies girls use to connect on their blogs, followed by a discussion of the often-overlooked issue of girls' friendships as a significant part of girls' organizing. This analysis attempts to narrow in on some of the closer connections established through common participation in a networked counterpublic, something that is often glossed over in both the theoretical discussions of the concept and the literature on online communities. In the following section I offer an in-depth critique of racial diversity in young feminist online communities, drawing on the work of Janell Hobson (2008), Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984)

to suggest why girl feminist blogging communities appear to be predominantly white and the problematic gaps this exclusivity creates.

Based upon my analysis of girls' feminist blogging communities in this chapter, I will conclude by arguing that understanding these communities as networked counterpublics disrupt neoliberal, individualized "can do" girlhood and the "disarticulation" of feminist organizing promoted through postfeminist discourses (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2009). I suggest that the concept of networked counterpublics allows us to understand citizenship as a collective, relational practice articulated through connections between individuals, in this case, bloggers.² In doing so, I hope to constructively intervene in both critical Internet, girls', and feminist studies literature by making visible the collective aspect of feminist blogging that sustains the practice as a viable activist strategy.

INDIVIDUALIZING CITIZENSHIP

Anita Harris (2004) describes contemporary youth citizenship as being "reconceptualized" through neoliberal discourses that privilege duty, responsibility, and individual effort. This is a significant shift away from notions of citizenship that were contingent on an individual's place in the community and the rights that were earned through participation in public life. I want to focus on this shift from citizenship as a collective or relational practice, to one represented by individual acts of consumption, self-invention, and entrepreneurial spirit (Harris, 2004). Within this cultural context, the individualized girl citizen who is economically independent, responsible, self-invented, and a proper consumer is celebrated as a model of successful girlhood, a discursive construct that Harris (2004) refers to as the "can-do" girl.

For my discussion in this chapter, it is important to recognize that the can-do girl citizen is discouraged to participate in feminist politics, while expected to adopt and maintain an empowered, “girl-power” attitude promoted by postfeminism (Harris, 2004).³ Together postfeminist and neoliberal discourses work as part of a process of what McRobbie (2009) calls “disarticulation” (25). She explains,

Disarticulation is the objective of a new kind of regime of gender power, which functions to foreclose on the possibility or likelihood of various expansive intersections and inter-generational feminist transmissions. Articulations are therefore reversed, broken off, and the idea of a new feminist political imaginary becomes increasingly inconceivable. In social and cultural life there is instead a process of unpicking the seams of connection, forcing apart and dispersing subordinate social groups who might have possibly found some common cause (25-26).

The “dispersal strategy” of disarticulation suggests that girls and women no longer need to work collectively to achieve social and political change (McRobbie, 2009; Duggan, 2003). Instead, individual empowerment through participation in the capitalist marketplace is held up as the idealized mode of action for girls and women today, often referred to as consumer citizenship. McRobbie’s argument compliments the new regime of individualized citizenship discussed by Harris, who explains, “This new citizenship delegitimizes other forms of enacting rights such as making demands on the state or participating in political protests” (95).

Consequently, we can see how community and collective action become contentious – yet all the more significant - within our neoliberal and postfeminist cultural context. By focusing on girl feminist bloggers’ privileging of community and collective organizing through their blogs I hope to show how these girls are not only resisting the

individualized citizenship being promoted to them, but performing citizenship as a collective and relational practice, which has implications for enacting social change.

FROM COMMUNITY TO COUNTERPUBLICS: THEORIZING DIGITAL CONNECTIONS

One of the interventions I hope to make in this chapter is to suggest that the theoretical concept of the “counterpublic,” developed by Nancy Fraser (1992), will help us to better understand the way in which girl feminist bloggers function as a collective, rather than an assortment of individual bloggers. I originally planned to use the word “community” to describe these connections, a language I used in my interviews with bloggers. While this move made sense initially, in part due to the attention that both new media and feminist scholars have given to community as an important concept, I realized that “community” provided me with little traction to analyze the multiple connections and associations I saw as important to understanding girl feminist bloggers. Nonetheless, the literature about online communities provides a necessary backdrop for my discussion, as it has been a primary way for new media scholars to analyze online connections and continues to shape many of the dominant discourses I will be discussing throughout this chapter. Thus, I briefly outline some of this scholarship here before I elaborate on how the idea of a counterpublic is mobilized in this chapter.

In his seminal work, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Howard Rheingold (1993) describes “virtual communities” as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationship” (5). While Rheingold’s early work suggests that communities can form in

online spaces, there has continued to be considerable discussion amongst media scholars about the authenticity of these communities.⁴ According to Nancy Baym (2010),

At the heart of this boundary flux is deep confusion about what is virtual – that which seems real but is ultimately a mere simulation – and what is real. Even people who hang out and build relationships online contrast it to what they do ‘IRL’ (In Real Life), lending credence to the perception that the mediated is unreal. Digital media thus call into question the very authenticity of our identities, relationships and practices (5).

Baym’s comments illustrate the tension between simulation and authenticity that is particularly pertinent to a neoliberal cultural environment marked by circulated self-brands, fleeting celebrity, and one’s seven hundred Facebook friends (Banet-Weiser, 2012b). Indeed, the proliferation over the past decade of social networking platforms like Facebook and mobile devices that create constant connectivity, has furthered complicated understandings of social connections via new media technologies. Jan Fernback (2007) argues that the concept of online community has become “increasingly diluted as it evolves into a pastiche of elements that ostensibly ‘signify’ community” but lacks real responsibility and true closeness (49). Similarly, Sherry Turkle (2011) contends,

Online, we easily find ‘company’ but are exhausted by the pressures of performance. We enjoy continual connection but rarely have each other’s full attention. We can have instant audiences but flatten out what we say to each other in new reductive genres of abbreviation. We like it that the Web ‘knows’ us, but this is only possible because we compromise our privacy, leaving electronic bread crumbs that can be easily exploited, both politically and commercially (280).

Scholars working from a cultural studies perspective have been more optimistic about the opportunities afforded by online communities, particularly in terms of how cultural agency is performed through online communities. For example, Henry Jenkins

(2006) argues that online fan communities have encouraged members to not only consume media, but to produce and distribute their own media and cultural productions in new ways, undermining the power of media corporations. Writing about YouTube, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2009), maintain that the video sharing site has fostered the formation of communities that offer a space for the enactment of cosmopolitan cultural citizenship based upon collaboration that is free of commercial interests.⁵ We may also consider Doreen Piano's (2002) analysis of young women distro owners as demonstrating the potential for online communities to generate an alternative feminist economy where girls and women can control their own consumption and production of cultural goods.

The idea that online communities may offer girls new forms of agency and resistance has also intrigued girls' studies scholars. Many girls' studies scholars have framed girls' online communities as "safe spaces" for girl Internet users (Stern, 2002; Reid-Walsh and Mitchell, 2004; Driver, 2007). For example, in her study of girls' "bloggings," Jacqueline Vickery (2010) argues that the communities that form around girls' blogs provide safe spaces for girls to discuss personal issues, get advice, and express their sexuality away from the eyes of their school peers, parents, and siblings. Likewise, Michele Polak's (2007) work on "pro-ana" websites demonstrates how these sites function as communities that offer girls a safe space to talk about their eating disorders, diseases that are often publically stigmatized. Polack observes that, "Within pro-ana, personal interaction concerning dialogue around recovery can occur within censorship or chastisement or being labeled as a bad girl or a sick woman. The key element here is support. I have never seen a member post her desire for recovery and not receive support from the community" (91). Polak notes that community members are expected to participate in both sharing support and personal experiences, and that by opting out of this participation one risks being "trolled out" or marginalized from the

community. Thus, community within pro-ana sites is based upon support and active participation that is central for the sites' operations.

Some of this literature also works to complicate the notion of a distinct separation between online and offline communities, although the language of “real” versus “virtual” continues to be reproduced in public discourses, as quotes from my participants will later reveal. In her book, *Queer Girls and Popular Culture*, Susan Driver (2007) contends that it is “crucial to rethinking simple divisions between real and virtual sociality” (174). In a chapter where she analyzes an online community for “boyish/androgynous girls” (or, “birls”) she writes,

What is at stake is a sharing of experiential stories and visual images that become the basis of a virtual interconnectivity and empathy. In this way, the content of most community discussion is grounded in the material worlds of these youth. Individual fragments of this material get taken up, reworked, questioned, exchanged, and mediated within an online sphere to become the basis of a collective discourse. Crossing between real and virtual is the crux of the birl forum... (192)

Mary Gray (2009) makes a similar argument in her book, *Out in the Country: Youth Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*, an ethnographic study of rural queer youth's engagement with media. Gray articulates new media as “sets of social relations – metaphorical landscapes of social interaction – rather than any given, particular place” (103). In doing so she highlights the social connections forged and strengthened through new media (including internet spaces) without understanding these relationships as “different” or distinct from other spaces of sociality. Drawing on the work of Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine (2003), Gray contends,

[As] argued by researchers of youth media culture, ‘online spaces are used, encountered and interpreted within the context of young people’s off-line everyday lives.’ In effect, ‘online’ and ‘offline’ experiences of media constitute one another. Moreover, presuming new media do something ‘new’ in isolation of other forms of mediation ignores the rich ‘media environment’ of computers, video games, chat rooms, radios, televisions, phones, and music players that saturate young people’s lives and more broadly shape global youth culture (142).

Gray’s argument reminds us that online spaces must be examined within the context of young people’s complex daily lives that contain a variety of mediated and unmediated social interactions. Online community in this sense is not isolated to the computer screen, but is very much related to one’s daily practices, material realities, and lived experiences – and this is especially true for young people.

As I discuss in the introduction to this dissertation, the concept of community has been a significant issue for feminist scholars as well. The idea that women share common experiences has been the basis for much feminist organizing, positioning women as a community bound by the supposedly similar realities of being female, often understood as “sisterhood” in a patriarchal society. This idea was particularly pronounced with the formation of homogenizing groups like that National Organization for Women in the late 1960s, and was later critiqued by U.S. third world feminists who rightfully argued that feminists must recognize how differences between women, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability, intersect to structure women’s lived experiences differently. Gender, in this sense, cannot be isolated from one’s other identities, thereby complicating the notion of sameness of women as a basis for feminist community formation.

While the concept of community has contentious roots within feminism, it remains important for feminists today, many of who continue to recognize collective ethos as a strategy for social change rather than individualized actions. The quote from

Courtney that begins this chapter reminds us that community remains essential to imagining feminism: “I can’t see any movement going anywhere without a sense of community. Like, we would have never gotten to where we are today without women coming together as a community.” Because it is beyond the scope of this chapter to thoroughly describe the ways in which the notion of community has informed feminism throughout the history of the movement, I will focus my discussion here on how feminist scholars have understood the changing forms of feminist community more recently in relation to new media technologies.

As I highlighted in the introduction, Ednie Kaeh Garrison (2000) describes third wave feminist communities as “technologic” signaling a particular practice of communicating information over space and time, the creation of temporary unified political groups made up of unlikely collectivities, the combining of diverse technologies to construct oppositional cultural expressions, and the construction of feminist politics of location ‘weaving between and among the spaces of race, class, sexuality, gender, that we all inhabit’ (187). Of course, as Linda Steiner (1992) and Alison Piepmeier (2009) note, feminists have always used media technology to further their causes. However, Garrison (2000, 2010) argues that the dispersed nature of the third wave, evidenced by a lack of easily locatable goals, has resulted in the need to reevaluate feminist activist politics,

in spaces that cross over and between what is called the ‘mainstream’ or what is recognized as ‘a social movement.’ We need to consider the potent political movement cultures being generated by feminists... who are producing knowledge for each other through the innovative integration of technology, alternative media, (sub)cultural and/or feminist networks, and feminist consciousness raising. Such dispersed cultural spaces are vital as are the networks constantly being formed and reformed among them (2010, 397).

Based on Garrison's characterization, it makes sense to understand contemporary feminisms less as a unified "social movement" or "community" with defined goals and strategies, and more as a diverse web of shifting coalitions and multiple practices. In the introduction to Piepmeier's (2009) *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*, Andi Zeisler describes contemporary feminism as a "work in progress" (xiii). This does not mean that community is not important in contemporary feminisms, rather it manifests in various formations, relying more on vast networks of feminists than close-knit, face-to-face interactions.

Doreen Piano's (2002) research on women's subcultural production exemplifies the changing forms of community and connectivity within the third wave. In her article, "Congregating Women: Reading 3rd Wave Feminist Practices in Subcultural Production" Piano describes how online distros, compilation zines and catalogs connected girls and women through an alternative economy that functioned as political resistance to commercial capitalism. She notes that the production and distribution of products such as compilation zines "created necessary dialogue among the subculture's participants" and fostered "collaboration and community over individual success and profit." These feminist economies thus served a community-building function, creating "congregating spaces" for women who may otherwise lack such connections to fellow feminists.

Similarly, Kearney (2006) argues that feminists active in the early 1990s riot grrrl movement created and maintained community through the circulation of girls' self-produced media products in what she calls a "networked media economy" (68). The idea of "networking" is central to both Kearney's discussion and my own analysis of girls' blogs. Kearney outlines two meanings of the term: the (often privileged) notion of a social and communicative practice that brings people together and; an infrastructural system and a set of practices that use communications technology to connect consumers

with a variety of media producers and their texts – similar to how we think of the broadcasting industry. Considering these two perspectives Kearney demonstrates riot grrrl’s “coterminous objectives to bring girls together and to broadcast the movement’s ‘Revolution Girl Style Now’ message through a variety of technology-based channels” (70). I will return to Kearney’s emphasis on broadcasting later in the dissertation, as this is of central importance to the feminist blogging community.

While the above discussion highlights how some feminist scholars have understood the third wave’s reliance on vast, mediated networks as a positive development in feminist organizing, some in the feminist community remain unconvinced that online feminist communities retain a level of genuine engagement and personal investment needed for successful feminist activism. For example, Linda Steiner (2012) problematically compares the strategies of an NOW-affiliated feminist collective (comprising of primarily fifty-something women), which produces a public access television show to “third wave cyberfeminists.”⁶ Steiner’s argument is worth citing in detail, as it neatly summarizes the argument I will be disproving throughout this chapter:

The [NOW-affiliated collective’s] sense of community is relative and its definition plastic. Mastery of skills and fun accord with research on many Web 2.0 projects, but third wave feminist activity arguably creates an even thinner community... third wave feminists’ favorite media tools require no interpersonal interaction. Third wave cyberfeminists still seek ‘community,’ albeit a mostly virtual community... But the blogosphere does not offer the shared identity or nurturing enjoyed by second wave feminist communities, nor do they provide a specifically feminist structure. Producing online content facilitates self-expression in the moment but neither requires nor encourages group interaction or ongoing loyalty to a shared ‘cause.’ Feminists’ new online social interactivity and networking is largely virtual, anonymous, and accomplished by individuals. In particular, personal blogs (essentially online diaries) have a libertarian essence that is arguably at odds with the feminism of the older generation (190).

Steiner's argument is troubling for several reasons. Not only does her analysis of "third wave" feminist blogs lack methodological rigor, her problematic generalization of feminists into neatly contained "third wave" and "second wave" camps simplifies the complexities of feminist movements, an issue I will address in chapter five. Furthermore, her critique of a lack of a shared identity, nurturing personal relationships, and feminist structure contradicts much of my own research findings that I will discuss throughout this chapter, as well as those of other scholars who have studied girls' and women's online practices (Piano, 2002; Kearney, 2006; Polack, 2007; Driver, 2007).

Steiner's argument is indicative of a viewpoint that, according to the bloggers I interviewed, remains common in the feminist community -- especially amongst older feminists. Madison reports, "Older feminists do not understand online activism, therefore they don't think that online activism is true activism... And that just pushes young feminists away because that's where we spend the majority of our time, our organizing, and our consciousness raising." While I will return later in the chapter to this discussion I had with Madison, her comments make visible the tensions that continue to surround the validity and efficacy of online feminist organizing amongst both feminist and new media scholars.

GIRLS' BLOGGING COMMUNITIES AS "NETWORKED COUNTERPUBLICS"

Based upon the arguments I have outlined above, I am suggesting that we need not feel beholden to the concept of community as the only – or best – way to interrogate the kinds of collective politics that girl feminists cultivate through their blogging practices. This is especially true if we wish to escape the bind of the real/virtual binary that continues to constrain both academic and popular discussions about online communities. Indeed, instead of characterizing her participant's interactions as indicative

of “community,” Gray (2009) coined the term “boundary publics” to understand her participants’ “experiences of belonging that circulate across the outskirts and through the center(s) of a more recognized and validated public sphere” (92-93).

Following Gray’s lead, I draw on the work of Michael Warner (2005), Nancy Fraser (1992), and danah boyd (2008) to argue that the collectives of girl feminists formed through blogging are best understood as what I’m calling “networked counterpublics.” Here, I combine the concept of counterpublic as articulated by Fraser and later Warner, with boyd’s emphasis on the networked nature of Internet-based publics.⁷ I choose to depart from Gray’s notion of boundary public due to the emphasis that many girl bloggers place on visibility within a dominant mainstream public and the success some bloggers have had in intervening in this adult-dominated space. This differs somewhat from the experiences of Gray’s queer rural youth participants, whose use of a variety of rural spaces “go unrecognized or fly under the radar of the formal public sphere” (96). Gray continues, “In fact, it is the lack of formal notice of public recognition that makes these spaces viable. By skirting notice – just barely – they also manage the risk of being recognized or recognizable as queer” (96). I will return to the issue of girl feminist bloggers’ public visibility in the next chapter, suggesting that postfeminist and neoliberal discourses that privilege individual girl visibility aids in creating public space for some girl bloggers, while simultaneously constraining them in particular roles and spaces.

In her influential article, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” Fraser (1992) critiques Jurgen Habermas’ (1991) articulation of the public sphere (originally written in 1962), arguing that his concept is insufficient for understanding the ways in which marginalized groups exercise agency in the public sphere. Instead, she suggests that subordinated groups participate in

“subaltern counterpublics” that she defines as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (123). Furthermore, Fraser’s (1992) articulation of multiple counterpublics is significant, as this more complex understanding of public life “better promotes[s] the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public” (127).

I have utilized Fraser’s work to conceptualize girl feminist bloggers in a previous article (Keller, 2012b). However, here I supplement Fraser’s analysis with Warner’s (2005) excellent discussion of publics and counterpublics. Warner theorizes a public as coming into being through the circulation of discourses, or “the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse” (90). He elaborates: “Publics are essentially intertextual frameworks for understanding texts against an organized background of the circulation of other texts, all interwoven not just by citational references but by the incorporation of a reflexive circulatory field in the mode of address and consumption” (16). In this sense, publics are not about externally organized activity, such as voting, or personal identity, such as being a member of a racial group; but instead publics are produced through discourse circulated amongst strangers that demonstrate at least minimal participation, even if this is “merely paying attention” (71). Consequently, Warner differentiates publics from the crowds, audiences, and communities with which they’re often confused.

Warner is of course not the only scholar to extend Habermas’ initial discussion of publics, nonetheless, his conceptualization of publics is particularly useful for my analysis because of his emphasis on identity and transformation. Warner draws on Fraser’s work to argue that counterpublics are publics that maintain an awareness of their subordinate status in relation to a dominant public. Identity is entwined with this process,

as Warner argues, “The subordinate status of a counterpublic does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere; participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members’ identities are formed and transformed. A hierarchy of stigma is the assumed background of practice. One enters at one’s own risk” (121). In this sense, Warner’s attention to the connection between identity and the workings of a counterpublic illuminates the ways in which the teenage feminist identities of my participants are intricately related to their collective participation in the blogosphere, as I will show throughout this chapter.

Additionally, Warner suggests that social transformation is a significant part of the formation of a counterpublic, which creates a space for a “new sociability and solidarity” (14). He writes that counterpublics “are testing our understanding of how private life can be made publicly relevant. And they are elaborating not only new shared worlds and critical languages but also new privacies, new individuals, new bodies, new intimacies, and new citizenships.... Publicness itself has a visceral resonance” (62-63). Warner’s argument aligns with the history of feminist thought, which has paid particular attention to the ways in which patriarchal power structures women’s exclusion from the public sphere. While an in-depth discussion of feminist theorizing of the public/private binary is beyond the scope of this chapter, it nonetheless serves as a significant context for which to understand girl feminist bloggers as a networked counterpublic.

I include “networked” in the concept of counterpublics, drawing on danah boyd’s (2008) understanding of networked publics being “the spaces and audiences that are bound together through technological networks” (125). According to boyd, networked publics have key architectural differences from other kinds of publics that affect social interaction. For example, she lists persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences as distinguishing networked publics from unmediated publics.

While some of these properties are also present in what she calls “mediated publics,” she maintains that searchability is unique to networked publics, providing the ability for people to easily sift through reams of recorded and stored data to find whatever they seek. While boyd’s use of the term public is more flexible than what I discuss above, it is her attention to the networked quality of many contemporary publics that is pertinent to my discussion in this chapter.⁸ Thus, I take up Warner’s understanding of counterpublics, while paying particular attention to the ways in which mediated technological networks serve as the avenues for the circulation of girls’ feminist discourse.

It is also helpful to return to Kearney’s (2006) use of the term “networking” here, referring to both a coming together and extension of a group outwards. This idea is also emphasized as a primary function of a counterpublic, according to Fraser (1992) who writes, “The point is that in stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides” (124). I want to highlight this aspect of a counterpublic as it is not only crucial to how girl feminist bloggers operate, but why I chose to discuss them as such, rather than a “community.” This is primarily because the language of networked counterpublics recognizes power inequalities that motivate counterpublics to intervene into hegemonic publics, a relationship that is not necessarily part of every “community.”

Based upon the research I outline above, I argue that girl bloggers are best understood as networked counterpublics, forming networks around particular discursive feminist identities and issues, coming together, dissolving, and reconvening in a fluid manner. This is markedly different from how we usually imagine a “community,” often

as a homogenous group with an agreed-upon list of goals and aims. Of course, this does not mean that there aren't communities present within the feminist blogosphere or that there aren't important affective connections generated between bloggers. Indeed, as this chapter shows, both community and affective relationships (particularly friendships) are a part of girl bloggers' networked counterpublics. However, I hope to show that understanding girl feminist bloggers as networked counterpublics both allows us to better understand how contemporary feminism is being practiced, as well as provides a politicized language with which to talk about girl bloggers. As I articulate in the introduction to this dissertation, this politicized language is a necessary step to recognizing girl feminists' blogging as a citizenship practice.

A conversation I had with Kat demonstrates how these networks appear to the bloggers themselves. I ask Kat if the feminist blogosphere is best understood as a community or as communities.⁹ Kat, who primarily blogs about sex education and reproductive rights, responds: "Communities is [a] better [way to describe the feminist blogosphere] because there are different groupings of blogs that blog about different [feminist topics] but they all relate to each other. Usually the people that blog communicate with each other, so I think that for each topic there's a different community but they also form an overall [feminist] community." Kat describes how she considers herself to be particularly connected with bloggers interested in sex education, but that these connections often lead her to other feminist conversations about a range of other topics.

Nonetheless, I want to caution against representing feminism online as completely amorphous. Thus, I am suggesting that several popular blogs (often written by a collective of bloggers rather than a single author) function as the "hubs" of feminist networked counterpublics. The *FBomb*, for example, is one of these, along with other

blogs, such as *Feministing*, *Racialicious*, and *Jezebel*. These hubs often serve as a collection space for reports and commentary on a variety of feminist issues (as well as some original content) that link to other feminist blogs and/or online resources. As Kat tells me, these feminist hubs, “pull from everyone” thereby serving as an aggregate of feminist information and perspectives online.

Consequently, many feminists new to the blogosphere often “enter” through one of the more popular hub sites, as several of my participants discussed. For example, Kat explains, “I had been doing random research on the Internet when I was a sophomore I think, and I came across an article on [Jessica Valenti’s book] *The Purity Myth*, and I clicked on a link and it took me to *Feministing*, which kind of showed me everything else.” Kat’s comment reflects how hubs like *Feministing* serve as an easy-to-locate introduction to the feminist blogosphere, particularly those sites which may be more difficult to find via google searches. It should also be noted that many of the bloggers on these hub sites will often serve as public commentators about feminist issues for the mainstream press, and thus, their blogs also gain new readers through their participation in traditional media, a topic I’ll elaborate on in the following chapter.

Once acquainted with one feminist blog, readers often discover other blogs through the blogroll function. A blogroll is merely a list of other websites, often grouped by theme and hyperlinked to the site itself. As a hub for teenage feminists, the *Fbomb*’s blogroll is an important part of the site, and is divided into “Advocacy” and “Feminist” blogs, listed in red alongside the right hand side of the blog (Figure 3.1). However, the blogroll is not just a list, but a way to make visible the connections that comprise feminist networked counterpublics. *FBomb* readers need only click on any of the links to discover a new online feminist space that may take up one or several feminist issues. Indeed, I used the *FBomb*’s blogroll as a way to find feminist blogs written by teenagers for this

research project and regularly check it as a quick way to find out about new feminist blogs. Consequently, the blogroll function serves as an important tool for building and maintaining the networks needed to circulate girls' feminist content. I will return to this discussion in more detail when I analyze the specific practices that girl feminist bloggers use to maintain and expand their connections.

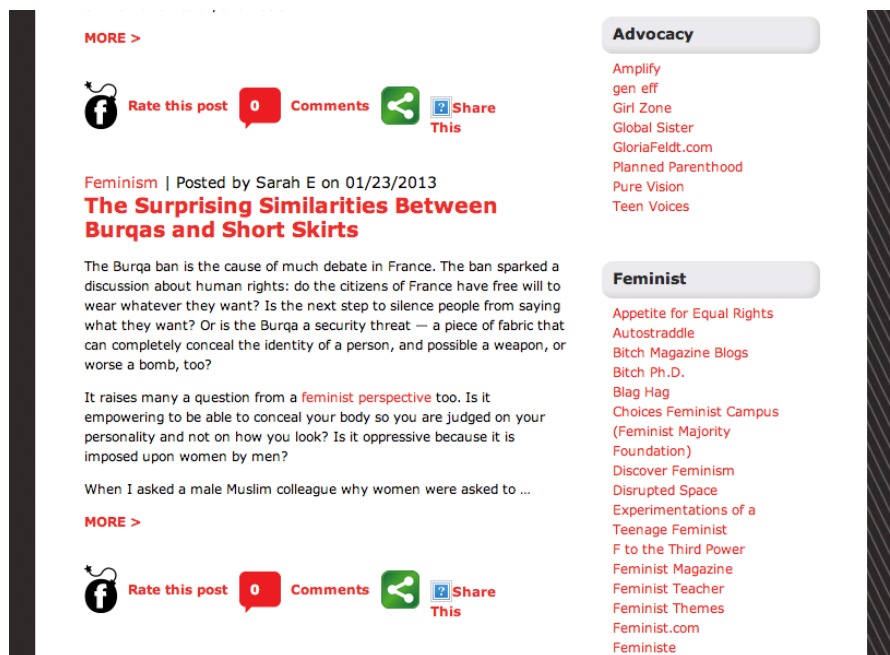


Figure 3.1 *FBomb*'s blogroll, author screen shot

I now turn to my ethnographic data and textual analysis in order to illustrate the claims that I have outlined so far in this chapter.

BEING A TEENAGE FEMINIST: IDENTITY AND COUNTERPUBLIC FORMATION

As I examined in the previous chapter, girl bloggers' identities as teenage feminists are central to their blogging practices and significantly shape the ways in which they enact feminist activism. This teenage feminist identity is also intimately linked with the ways in which young bloggers organize as a counterpublic. In other words, a teenage feminist identity was one of the primary ways that girl bloggers coalesce online. For example, blog names often incorporate the identity of a "teenage feminist" into the title, privileging this particular identity in order to attract other young feminists. Renee explains:

Just because I'm a high schooler, I'm thinking about feminism from a young person's point of view, so my primary focus right now is feminism as it relates to young people – like, getting the word out. A lot of those issues that have to deal with equal pay, for example, they're kind of adult issues, that I haven't experienced first hand yet... but right now I would say that feminism for me is advocacy for young people, telling them what it is... it's a scary word to a lot of people. Just trying to dispel those stereotypes is what I'm focusing on.

Renee privileges her identity as a teenage feminist as a way to reach out to other teens, particularly girls. In addition to maintaining her blog, she has blogged for the *FBomb*, and her blog is featured on the *FBomb*'s blogroll. While Renee reads a variety of feminist blogs and lists a couple of adult-written blogs (primarily some of the larger hub sites I mention above) as some of her favorites, she is most invested in blogs written by other teenage feminists. Consequently, Renee has primarily developed networks with other young bloggers, as I will discuss in more depth later in this chapter.

This connection between identity and community is important to consider, especially in relation to my discussions of feminist and activist identities in the previous two chapters. I have highlighted how this latter relationship is confirmed through my participants' experiences. Recount how Courtney comments that her blogging practices allowed her to understand her feminist identity in relation to a larger community, her feminism becoming "a lot more about community issues than just about myself." Warner (2005) reminds us that participation in a counterpublic is "one of the ways by which its members' identities are formed and transformed" (57). Thus, while young bloggers may be drawn to participate in a community like the *FBomb* because of their teenage identity, the *FBomb* simultaneously functions as a space where this identity will likely transform, particularly due to interactions with other feminists.

Facilitating connections between individual identity and community is a longstanding feminist practice, what has been termed "consciousness-raising" by feminists active in the women's liberation movement. In this sense, feminist blogging communities share many similarities to the consciousness-raising of the women's liberation movement and the early third wave and riot grrrl movements that produced zines for this purpose in the 1990s (Kearney, 2006; Piepmeier, 2009; Schilt, 2003). Madison even uses the term "consciousness raising" to describe the online activities she and other young feminists engage in. She says, "[Young feminists] spend the majority of our time online organizing and consciousness-raising. Especially with consciousness-raising – that's a big one. Older feminists are still in favor of getting in a room together and talking about sexism and patriarchy, but that's not how young feminists do it anymore – they do it online, through blogs and Facebook." Similar to past generations of feminists then, young bloggers recognize the importance of transforming critical

consciousness and producing political identities through community, and this remains a central way that bloggers build the solidarity needed for social action.

Participation in networked counterpublics then is a fundamental part of how girl feminist bloggers continually perform identity and vice versa. However, the networked counterpublic created by teenage feminist bloggers is not merely a meeting place for young feminists, but also functions to produce and circulate particular discourses about teenage feminists to the wider publics of the (adult-controlled) feminist blogosphere and mainstream society.

One of these discourses is the claim that teenage feminists are in the process of still learning about feminism. This discourse was reflected by many of my participants who emphasized during interviews and on the focus group discussion blog that they don't view themselves as "experts" and they still have to learn through life experiences. Websites like the *FBomb* then serve as a space to talk amongst one's peers rather than seek "correct" answers or impart "facts" to others. Renee explains: "Calling myself a teenage feminist gives myself the permission to make mistakes because I'm not claiming to be an expert. I've always had this idea, at least I did at first, like I'm a newbie, this is something I'm exploring, so I might make mistakes." Renee discusses how she once posted an article about "20 Ways to Lesson Your Risk of Sexual Assault" that focused on things girls can do to prevent sexual assault. However, upon reading another blog post by a fellow teenage blogger, Renee added an update to the bottom of the post clarifying her stance:

Literally two seconds after publishing this article I found this post over at *Teenagerie.com*. The author's take on this 'who should be responsible for preventing sexual assault' situation really touched me. Obviously, a person can take all the precautions in the world and still become a victim. No one is to blame for rape but rapists themselves, and if we spend time educating women how to

protect themselves, we should spend an equal amount of time (if not more) reaching out to – let’s face it, men – about ending violence against women.

In an interview, Renee tells me that this post has stuck with her as an example of how she’s embraced the opportunity to learn through blogging, especially from other teens. While adult-oriented blogs are written by bloggers who are often expected to be confident in their feminist position, teenage feminist networks seem to offer their participants more leeway to, as Renee suggests, “explore.”

An early incident on the *FBomb* suggests that girl bloggers have had to use this discourse to protect their discursive space in the wake of adult *FBomb* commenters. A July 14, 2009 “tweet” from Julie’s *FBomb* twitter account indicates this tension: “older feminist readers I’m a teen its for teens can’t be perfect don’t have a degree. Get some perspective plz & stop writing mean comments!” (as cited in Hartmann, 2009) (Figure 3.2). The tweet implies a tension between younger feminist bloggers and their older counterparts who may not understand and/or respect the discourses underpinning the girls’ networked counterpublic.

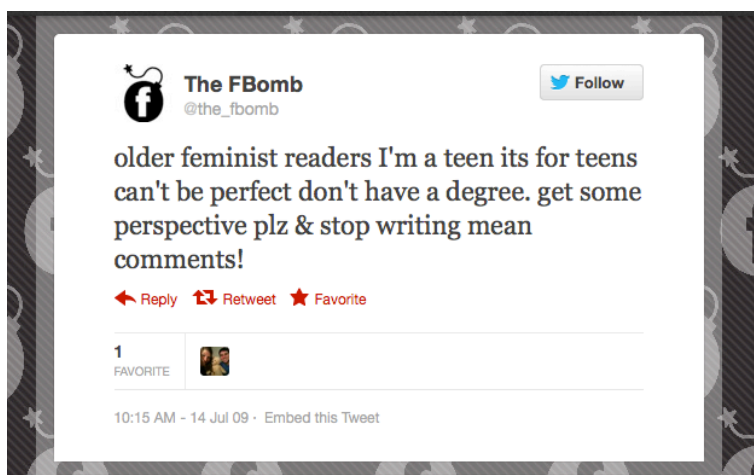


Figure 3.2, tweet from *FBomb* account, author screen shot

While Julie is significantly more experienced with speaking to the public today, she remains cautious about her positioning as a “young feminist voice” that’s often called on by mainstream media. In other words, like Renee, she attempts to avoid presenting herself as an authority on young feminist issues. However, this is significantly more difficult to do as a guest on the *Melissa Harris-Perry Show*, for example, than it is when you’re writing a blog post. Indeed, mainstream journalists will call Julie because they want an expert to comment on a particular young feminist issue. In an email, Julie tells me that this has been a challenging experience for her to navigate. She explains, “It’s difficult to feel like as an individual you’re representing an entire generation of feminists. While on the one hand I can’t qualify everything I say with a phrase like ‘this is my experience’ because in a lot of ways it undermines the ultimate message, on the other I feel compelled to because it’s ultimately the truth.” Julie’s experience sheds light on the tension between the persistent construction of some individual girl bloggers as cultural authorities and the collectivist, “newbie” friendly ethos of the counterpublic, a tension I will further analyze in the next chapter.

The findings I discuss here are similar to Jessica Taft’s (2011) analysis of girl activists as performing activist identities that she describes as “in process” (60). Rather than claim authority of certain political issues in which they’re active, Taft discovered that her study participants would instead describe themselves as activists that are “still learning” (116). According to her participants, this learning often occurred within the space of activist peer groups, which – like the feminist girl counterpublics I analyze here – emphasize the importance of conversation and dialogue. Taft recognizes the girl activists’ emphasis on an “open-ended approach to pedagogy” and listening to their peers as clearly gendered, framing these strategies within a history of women’s activism that

utilizes this non-hierarchical organizational strategy (118). While I agree with Taft, I'd also like to suggest that this hesitancy to claim an expert status and shy away from being viewed as an authority may be related to persistent gender and generational norms that discourage girls from comfortably accepting themselves as an expert. Consequently, while this practice highlights the important role of dialogue, debate, and growth within girl feminist bloggers' networked counterpublics, it also reminds us that these counterpublics are situated amidst cultural constraints that must be acknowledged.

While the teenage feminist blogging community can certainly be considered a networked counterpublic, girl bloggers also simultaneously participate in other networked counterpublics that form around particular feminist issues, such as reproductive rights and rape culture. I now turn to examine these two issues more closely in order to demonstrate how reproductive rights and rape culture have become focal points for the formation of feminist networked counterpublics of which girls are a part.

UNCOVERING YOUNG FEMINIST ISSUES: REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND THE “WAR ON WOMEN”

In chapter one I outlined how girls broadly define feminism. I'd like to continue that discussion here by analyzing the specific feminist issues girl bloggers are passionate about, in order to understand how communities are built around these issues, rather than “feminism” or “teenagedom” in general. This discussion is of course not intended to be a definitive listing of “young feminist issues”; instead, it is meant as a starting point to begin to map what feminist issues are in circulation on girls' blogs and how these issues produce particular networked counterpublics with specific activist agendas. Here, I will focus on reproductive rights and rape culture as two significant examples of girl

bloggers' activism. I chose these issues as case studies based on the frequency of these issues being mentioned as important to young feminists in interviews with bloggers, as well as the frequency with which these topics were discussed in girl feminists' blogs. Thus, it is important to reiterate that these issues are somewhat of a "snapshot" of key issues amongst U.S.-based bloggers during the time of this study and must be examined within the cultural context in which they play out.

Several of the bloggers spoke to me about reproductive rights as a topic that was particularly important to them. A longstanding feminist issue, reproductive rights have taken on a new significance in the United States over the past two years in the wake of several recent events, including: the introduction of a slate of new Republican-sponsored bills restricting abortion in several states over 2011 and 2012; the Susan G. Komen Foundation's decision to cut funding to Planned Parenthood in late January 2012; and the ongoing controversy over free contraception that is a part of President Obama's Affordable Care Act. While many issues fall into the category of reproductive rights, the bloggers I interviewed were particularly interested in sexuality education, the accessibility of Plan B, and Republican-initiated bills restricting abortion, such as Virginia's law requiring a transvaginal ultrasound before a woman can obtain an abortion. As a result of their age, several of the bloggers mentioned these particular issues as being more important for girls than adult women. For example, Madison describes how the availability of Plan B over the counter is an important issue of many girls and younger women that is rarely recognized by older feminists.

Several of my study participants discussed their participation in the feminist blogosphere as facilitating their involvement in reproductive rights activism. For example, Madison discusses how her participation on tumblr has inspired her interest in reproductive rights.¹⁰ "Tumblr is a very pro-choice feminist space, so that would probably

be my number one issue. My problem is that I care about so many feminist issues... and because I'm so young I haven't really found one that I'm super passionate about. But definitely reproductive rights is up there." This is clearly evident from Madison's blog, where information about reproductive rights has dominated her postings throughout the eight-month period in which I am focusing my analysis. In this sense, Madison's surrounding community – what I'm arguing functions as a counterpublic – is instrumental in both educating and motivating Madison. Madison is not an individual blogger who happens to blog about reproductive rights – she is part of an extensive network of bloggers producing and circulating particular discourses about the importance of reproductive rights for American women. It is these discourses, as I demonstrate below, that are crucial in the development of a counterpublic (Warner, 2005; Shaw, 2012).

Consequently, Madison's use of tumblr to actively spread awareness about reproductive rights issues, like abortion laws, is intricately tied to a larger network of bloggers that function between online and offline spaces. Madison's participation in the mobilization of Michigan women and girls in opposition to new abortion restrictions in summer 2012 serves as a useful example that showcases the way in which a networked counterpublic formed around this important issue. In early June 2012 Michigan State Representative Bruce Rendon (R-Lake City) sponsored a 60-page bill that would criminalize all abortions after twenty weeks of pregnancy, with a narrow exception when a physician determines the mother's life is at risk. The bill was heard quickly by lawmakers after its introduction and was rushed through to a vote in the Michigan State House of Representatives within a few days. The situation prompted panic amongst pro-choice activists and quick organizing amongst feminist bloggers, including Madison.

A June 2012 posting from Madison titled, "I'll be in Lansing Thursday, will you?" gives details about an upcoming protest of the bill and encourages her tumblr

followers to spread the word (“Please Signal Boost This”) and come out to the demonstration. To accompany her post, Madison includes a video from another protest a few days prior, depicting hundreds of pink-clad women and men infiltrating the state Capitol shouting, “This is our house!” in protest of the bill. The video provides a powerful visual and aural representation of a counterpublic that creates an affective response in Madison’s followers. “Lipstickfeminist” reblogged the video, commenting “THIS IS OUR HOUSE. These are... Michigan. What an incredible sound.” The ability for this short video to be re-circulated amongst tumbler users allows people who may not have been able to physically attend the demonstration to experience the “feel” of the room. In her doctoral dissertation examining an Australian feminist blogging network, Frances Shaw (2012) argues that these affective connections are a crucial part of creating and maintaining feminist blogging communities and they therefore must be understood as politically important. Thus, the video that I describe above does not merely document an event, but produces and circulates affect amongst fellow feminist bloggers that binds people together as a counterpublic.

Similarly, Piepmeier (2009) describes zine communities as creating a “currency of intimacy” whereby zinesters foster connections through the exchange and/or gifting of zines (75). By sharing personal feelings, secrets, and (sometimes painful) experiences, girl zine makers generate affective attachments with one another, creating “support group” communities that Kristen Schilt (2003) recognizes as a form of resistance (80). Thus, we can understand the affective connections which sustain within girl feminist bloggers’ networked counterpublics as a politically significant part of girls’ media making practices.

A few days later Lisa Brown, a Democratic Representative in the Michigan legislature, was banned from the Capitol floor for using the word “vagina” when

criticizing the abortion legislation. Madison documents the reactions to Brown's banning on tumblr, and encourages her readers to attend the "Vaginas Take Back the Capitol" event planned in protest of Brown's banning. After attending the event, which attracted over 5000 people, Madison posted pictures on her blog, depicting a range of women, men, and girls participating in the protest. She writes: "It was the most amazing experience I have ever had.... It brought me to tears knowing that all of those people showed up for choice. I am in serious awe of the women of Michigan."

Later that day, in a post titled, "I Met Women Who Talked About Protesting in the 60s, 70s, and 80s," Madison continues recounting her experience: "I met women who talked about remembering when Roe was announced. I met women who remembered when it was illegal. I met women who fought for the ERA. I met 15-year-old girls with braces. I met 10-year-old girls who made their own signs. All those women. All together for the same purpose. It's overwhelming." Madison's posting clearly emphasizes the importance of solidarity between generations of women and girls as a necessity to successfully challenge the threat to reproductive rights in Michigan. She most likely would not have encountered these girls and women outside of the context of protesting reproductive rights legislation in Lansing, and she may never cross paths with some of them online or in person again. Nonetheless, Madison is clearly inspired by the women she met that day at the Capitol and these connections remain an important part of how a counterpublic operates.

I want to clarify that I am not implying that girl feminist bloggers use online media simply to organize or publicize "in person" community events. This of course, does happen, however my analysis reveals a more complex circulation of connections indicative of a counterpublic. For example, Madison not only attended the "Vaginas Take Back the Capitol" event, but she returned to her tumblr after the protest, posting not only

the “facts” of the demonstration (in this case, for example, that Eve Ensler attended), but also her feelings about being in attendance (“in awe of Michigan women”), as well as photos and videos she took. As I discuss above, these posts (particularly the photos and videos) create affective attachments that can be “liked,” “reblogged” and/or commented on (called “notes” on the tumblr platform) by her many followers, who in doing so re-circulate Madison’s experiences amongst their tumblr followers. Madison received 499 notes on one of her “vagina protest” posts, and these notes became a part of the discourses circulating the networked counterpublic built upon the threat to reproductive rights in Michigan.

Finally, these networked counterpublics also help to create and circulate particular discourses that enable participants to communicate with one another and make sense of certain issues. For example, making visible and combating the “War on Women” became a central discourse for the counterpublic I’ve been discussing, and almost all of the bloggers I interviewed listed the “War on Women” as a major issue of concern.¹¹ Consequently, it is not surprising that the phrase frequently appeared in their blog posts as a way to speak about contemporary sexism. To wit: a June 2012 post by Amandine titled, “What War on Women?” contained an infograph detailing the number of American women killed by their male partners in relation to Americans killed in terror attacks and U.S. troops killed in Afghanistan and Iraq (Figure 3.3). Using an infograph rather than merely descriptive text, Amandine’s post makes visible the war on women as a serious problem that requires her readers’ attention.

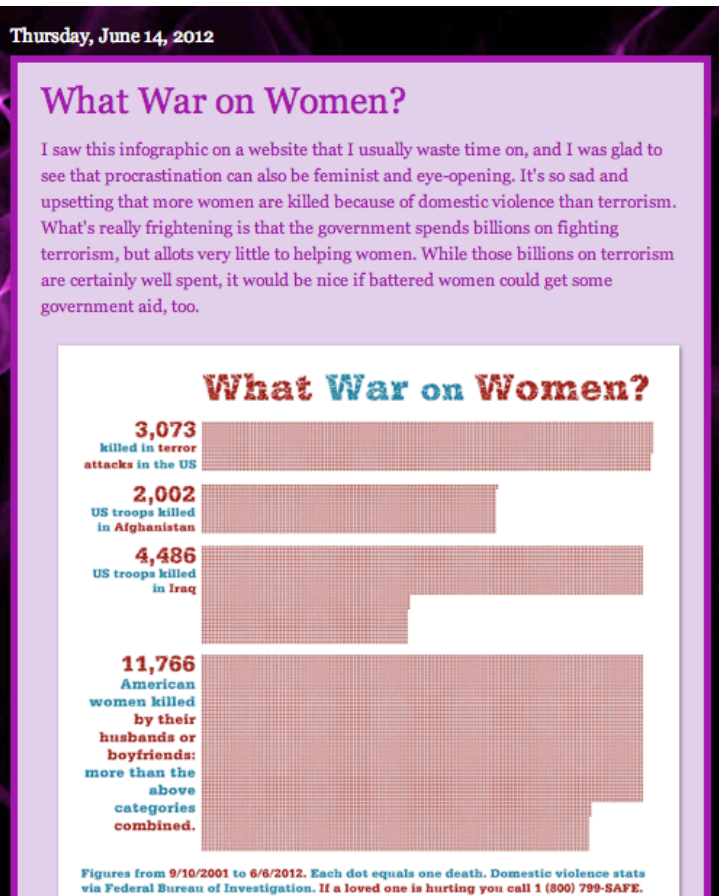


Figure 3.3, Amandine's blog post, author screen shot

However, not only do discourses like the “war on women” create discursive space to address reproductive rights and highlight misogyny, but these discourses are affect-laden, again fostering connections between girls and women that mobilize (at least in this case) anger, urgency, vulnerability, fear, and determination (Piepmeier, 2009). Thus, much like Madison's posts that I discuss above, the “war on women” serves a political function that creates solidarity amongst a group of girls and women that may never meet in person.

RAPE CULTURE: SLUTWALK AND “SLUT SHAMING”

Rape culture is another key issue that the bloggers discussed with me at length. While adult women are certainly not excluded from experiences with rape culture, Courtney believes this issue is particularly pertinent to teenage girls and college students because of their active social lives. “As a college student I go out a lot and cat-calling, touching women at parties, these are things that I experience,” Courtney says. When the bloggers discuss rape culture, they include various issues under this term: “slut-shaming,” cat-calling, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and representations of these behaviors in media, are all part of the rape culture girl feminist bloggers are concerned about. In particular, Julie notes that “slut-shaming” is an issue that many girls feel strongly about, but with which older feminists seem less concerned. Julie explains, “The reactions around Slutwalk are a good example of this. Granted a lot of older feminists were really supportive of our mobilization around an issue we believe in, but there were definitely some who felt slut-shaming is a trivial issue compared to issues like equal pay.” I will return to Julie’s comment later in this section.

The 2011 Slutwalk mass demonstrations are a recent response to the prevalence of rape culture, and serve as a visible example of the ways in which networked counterpublics are mobilized in the digital age. Largely organized online by girls and young women, participants marched through cities around the world wearing “slutty” (and “non-slutty”) clothes to express their disapproval with rape culture logic that suggests women “ask for” rape if they wear certain clothing, such as a short skirt or a low-cut blouse. While Slutwalk was first organized by a group of young women in Toronto in response to a police officer telling a group of college students that they could avoid sexual assault by not dressing like “sluts,” the marches quickly spread to other cities across the world, including New York City, New Delhi, London, Dallas, and Cape

Town, gaining widespread global media attention. For the most part, Slutwalks attracted a diversity of participants and cannot be regarded as solely a young feminist phenomenon. Nonetheless, in many places girls and college-aged women organized and promoted the marches through social media and blogs and did appear to dominate many of the rallies. For example, the organizer of the Chicago Slutwalk was Jamie Keiles, an 18-year-old freshman at the University of Chicago who had become interested in feminism after she began blogging.

Several of the bloggers I spoke to attended Slutwalks near to their homes and blogged about their experience. For example, Renee's experience at a Slutwalk on the west coast is worthwhile to consider in full:

This was my first real "protest." I probably saw more skin that day than I've seen in my entire life, but the fact that people could be so bold in order to make a point (i.e. it doesn't matter what you're wearing — or not wearing — rape is never okay) was truly inspiring ... For me, the most surreal and passionate and amazing part of the protest was when everybody chanted together. Hundreds of voices tangled to create a gigantic, powerful echo; we rattled the entire city with sayings like "Wherever we go, however we dress, no means no, and yes means yes!" and "When women's rights are under attack, what we do? Stand up! Fight back!"

If you can imagine the strangest collection of people ever — men, women, children, the elderly — of every orientation, color, body shape, and style of dress — all united by a common cause, that's what SlutWalk felt like. Being a feminist can feel lonely and alienating when it seems like the world is against you, but last Sunday I was embraced by an entire community of people who were willing to risk anything to fight for women's rights.

Similar to Madison's experience at the "Vaginas Take Back the Capitol" demonstration, Renee's blog post highlights an intense affective attachment to her experience of Slutwalk (words such as "surreal," "passionate," and "amazing"), and emphasizes the

importance of collectivity in order to challenge rape culture. The images and video that she posts extend this sentiment. Renee posts a flashback of photographs she took at the demonstration with girls, women, and men holding signs with sayings like “Consent is Sexy,” “My Dress is Not a Yes” and the cheeky “God Loves Sluts!” Farther down in the entry Renee also posts a sixteen-minute video of a rape survivor addressing the Slutwalk crowd where she details the lengthy process of convicting her attacker. “Serena” comments on Renee’s post, writing, “I have tears in my eyes right now. It’s sad and wonderful to see Slutwalk. Wonderful to know that people won’t take that s*** anymore and sad that we have to have a Slutwalk. Thank you for sharing this video!”

While scholars such as Turkle (2011) may understand Renee’s post as evidence that she had to participate in this community “in real life” in order to truly feel a part of a collective, I am arguing that we need to understand Renee’s experience with Slutwalk as extending before and after her actual attendance at the event. The networks she has cultivated through blogging not only informed her desire to attend Slutwalk, but also provided an avenue to share her feelings about it afterwards, again circulating and stimulating particular discourses and affects produced by this networked counterpublic. People like “Serena” become part of Renee’s experience of Slutwalk, as she shares an affective connection with her through the video she posts. Renee’s commitment to end rape culture can also be seen beyond her Slutwalk commentary. Several weeks later she posts a guest entry from a fellow teenage feminist who writes about the prevalence of date rape and victim blaming in American culture. The conversation about rape culture thus continues beyond Renee’s initial entry, and is linked to the guest blogger’s own blog, and any other blogs who may choose to circulate the posting via social media.

It is not my purpose to weigh in on the debates about Slutwalks here (for example, if the word “slut” can ever really be recuperated by women), as I am most interested in

how Slutwalk became a visible symbol of a feminist networked counterpublic that can become obscured if we do not analyze online spaces carefully enough. In other words, I discuss Slutwalk at length here because it is emblematic of how I am arguing feminist networked counterpublics operate today: as interconnected networks held together by particular, pertinent issues that are often responding to public conversations and debates. Girl bloggers such as Renee strengthen these networks through not only showing up to participate in the Slutwalk march, but also through producing and circulating discourse about Slutwalk, such as the language of “slut shaming.”

Similar to the “war on women” discourse I discussed in the previous section, the discourse of “slut shaming” was mobilized and circulated by bloggers active in this networked counterpublic. The phrase became popularized alongside the Slutwalk marches and functions similarly to the “war on women,” producing affective connections while additionally working to reclaim the word “slut” as a source of power and agency for girls and women. However, the phrase has caused controversy amongst feminists, highlighting the way in which the phrase carries generational tensions as Julie mentioned. For example, in an editorial published in *The Guardian* adult feminists Gail Dines and Wendy J. Murphy (2011) assert, “Women need to find ways to create their own authentic sexuality, outside of male-defined terms like slut... While the organizers of the Slutwalk might think that proudly calling themselves ‘sluts’ is a way to empower women, they are in fact making life harder for girls who are trying to navigate their way through the tricky terrain of adolescence. Women need to take to the streets – but not for the right to be called ‘slut.’” Not only does this comment problematically imply that girls are not participating in the Slutwalk movement, it highlights how those outside of this networked counterpublic may lack the connections that allow “slut shaming” to make sense to a particular group of girls and women. I will return to the issue of Slutwalk later in this

chapter to demonstrate how bloggers used the issue to support one another and open up space for conversation about sexual assault.

In concluding this section I want to highlight that while reproductive rights and rape culture are central issues for young feminists, they are certainly not the only feminist issues girls care about. I have outlined two issues here that have received a lot of attention from young bloggers over the past couple of years, in part due to both the age of the bloggers as well as our contemporary cultural context. However, there are many more issues that concern the bloggers I interviewed, including body image/beauty norms and media representations of girls and women. While the bloggers I interviewed recognize that certain topics such as rape culture do get more attention from young feminist bloggers, they will often attempt to address less-discussed issues, such as the intersection of feminism with religion, on their own blog by inviting a guest blogger to write a post on a topic they might be particularly knowledgeable about. I now turn my analysis to a discussion of these practices that facilitate connections amongst girl feminist bloggers.

FACILITATING CONNECTIONS

Thus far I have outlined how particular issues serve as focal points for the development of the networked counterpublics in which girl feminists participate. I have paid particular attention to the ways in which these networked counterpublics are crucial in the creation of discourses that girls produce and re-circulate through their blogging networks. These discourses are significant in producing what I am suggesting is a counterpublic, but which other scholars have described as community (Shaw, 2012). Here, I continue this discussion by focusing on the specific practices that girls utilize in order to maintain and build their blogging networks. Many of these efforts are directed to

other young feminists or “potential-feminists,” demonstrating the importance that these particular connections have for girl bloggers.

The girl bloggers that participated in this study spend a lot of time facilitating connections through their blogs. This work takes various forms, however, all of the bloggers described this as an “unconscious” practice, implying that they view this work as just a part of having a feminist blog. This “common sense” understanding demonstrates how blogging constitutes a social activity by nature of the interactions that, as one blogger put it, “just happen.” In some cases, bloggers never even recognized the work they were doing as “community-building” until I suggested it might be.¹² For example, to celebrate the first birthday of her blog, Amandine hosted an essay contest where participants were asked to answer the question “How has feminism changed your life?” While Amandine tells me that she received many entries – including several international entries – she didn’t immediately describe the contest as facilitating community, even though the contest allowed contestants to share their personal experiences with a wider audience, giving their own blogs exposure. The contest also generated a conversation about the role of feminism in girls’ and women’s lives and made visible the vast networks that Amandine had cultivated after only one year of blogging.¹³

In addition to Amandine’s essay contest I am discussing a number of practices under this larger framework of what I’m calling “building networks.” These include: sharing other girls’ stories through “re-blogging” or “reposting,” promoting other girls’ blogs through feature stories or on the blogroll, inviting contributions from other girl bloggers, sharing personal experiences, leaving comments on other girls’ blogs and allowing comments on one’s own blog. For example, when another girl starts a feminist blog Renee will often promote it on her own site, sometimes including a short interview

with the new blogger. To wit: in a May 19, 2011 post Renee introduces a new feminist blog, *Blossoming Badass*, to her readers and interviews the blog's author about being a teenage feminist. She is constantly adding these new blogs to her blogroll so that her readers can easily navigate to other feminist blogs they may not be familiar with. As I previously discussed, the blogroll works to maintain connections between blogs and is a crucial part of the ways that networked counterpublics are built and intersect with one another.

Similar to Amandine's essay contest, Renee frequently poses a question or issue and invites responses from her readers. In an August 6, 2011 post called "5 Perspective on the Recent Birth Control Ruling" Renee writes, "It feels like we're a part of history here, doesn't it? This ruling is a huge, exciting deal, and it's been fun to see the feminist community alive with celebration these past few days... Since the 'birth control conversation' is often restricted to the twenties-and-older sphere, I wanted to get some younger perspectives on this momentous ruling. Naturally, I turned to my feminist blogger friends!" The post goes on to include responses from five teenage bloggers about the no co-pay birth control ruling as part of the Affordable Care Act.

This is an interesting example because it not only makes visible how dialogue between bloggers is central to facilitate and maintain teen feminist bloggers as a networked counterpublic, it also privileges the voices of teenage feminists who are often problematically excluded from conversations about birth control because of their age. Renee also actively replies to other bloggers' call for responses as well. When Carrie poses the question "How do you feel about NY's same-sex marriage ruling?" on her blog, Renee is quick to send in her answer detailing her excitement about the legalization of gay marriage in the state. This reciprocal relationship developed between Renee and

Carrie is one of the kinds of connections that sustains, in this case, teenage feminist bloggers as a networked counterpublic.

Another significant way that community is facilitated by teen bloggers is through the comments section. Unlike many popular websites' comments section, which often can be dominated by negative and derogatory "feedback," the comment section in many teen feminists' blogs serve as a space for productive conversation, education, and sometimes even the sharing of personal stories about sensitive topics like sexual assault, eating disorders or the death of a family member (Banet-Weiser, 2011). For example, in an August 2011 article titled "Thank You, Slutwalk" Kelsie M. details her rape the year before, writing, "You will never understand that feeling of being completely alone. That feeling that even your own body has betrayed you, and is no longer your own. That feeling of hating yourself more than you've ever hated any other human being. You will never understand... and if you do, I am so sorry." The post is powerful and difficult to read, laying bare the emotions of denial, hatred, loneliness, anger, and eventually, relief.

The twenty-one comments that follow this post reveal how girl bloggers' counterpublics are strengthened through this type of emotional sharing, again revealing an affective dimension to the connections they create. In addition to showing their support for the writer ("I believe you"), commenters shared their own stories of sexual violence. For example, "Connie" writes,

Thank you! I went through something similar two years ago (raped by a friend of a friend at a party) and it has taken me until very recently to confront the scars it has left me with – I felt exactly that same as you did, disgusted and repulsed by what had happened and so isolated in the knowledge that no one would ever believe me. I missed the London Slutwalk because of reasons outside my control, but I can't tell you how comforting it has been to read your post, now I don't feel quite as alone. I admire your bravery very much.

Similarly, “Alyson” responds, “I understand what you are saying completely. I was raped six years ago by a boy who was about to join the air force, who I had been consensually intimate with prior to the rape, who my own ‘best friend’ didn’t believe raped me. I am also participating in the Slutwalk in my city in a few weeks.” The community space of the *FBomb* provides discursive space for this conversation and is simultaneously strengthened by it, as members become increasingly emotionally invested in the space, something that Susan Driver (2007) also found in her study of queer girls’ online communities. Likewise, Schilt (2003) argues that “emotional validation” is crucial to the formation and maintenance of girl zines communities that often serve as “support groups” to deal with topics like sexual abuse, self-mutilation, puberty, and sexual harassment (80). This example also reveals the ways in which a counterpublic is formed around the important issue of rape culture, connecting people in this case from places that include London, Berlin, Philadelphia, and Cleveland. Even if these connections are fleeting, the production of what Driver (2007) calls “community as healing and hope” allows “girls to help each other feel better and move on” (182).

Because the majority of teenage feminist blogs are single-authored (unlike the *FBomb*), the strategies I outline here function as a type of dialogue between blogs, demonstrating the connective nature of blogs as a medium. These practices also challenge dominant discourses that characterize girls as relationally aggressive and in competition with one another (often discussed through the language of “mean girls”), rather than working together as friends and allies (Ringrose, 2006; Gonick, 2004). Jessica Ringrose (2006) argues that the “mean girl” is a postfeminist discourse that “construct[s] a universal, pathological feminine culture of meanness with massive reach” which often

equates girl power with girl meanness (414). In these accounts, feminism is often blamed for the supposed crisis of the mean girl and is “held accountable for the fostering of girls’ aggression” (Ringrose, 2006, 415). The girl bloggers I spoke to are aware of this problematic discourse, and we can read the practices I discuss above as resisting the “mean girl.” Renee explains:

Community is extremely important because there’s this idea that when you are a feminist you are tough and you are ready to duke it out with anybody that crosses your path, and we need to build this notion of camaraderie rather than this image of if you’re a feminist you are basically ready to fight anybody. Because that’s what the media thinks it is, so I think we need to support each other. I think women in general are taught to be competitors, to be enemies, we’re taught to want to be better than all the other girls. [But] women in general, we need to unite!

Consequently, we see a different story emerge in girls’ feminist blogs, one that shows how girl bloggers are not competitors for the most popular blog or “frenemies” looking to take each other down, but are invested in each other’s voices and thrive off of the connections they make. As Renee tells me, “I started to get emails from other girls who were also finding feminism for the first time and that feedback was really validating and empowering – I would say that that’s what I like most about blogging.”

FORMING FRIENDSHIPS

Girls in my study report that they perceive several positive benefits from their participation in online feminist communities, and I am arguing that one of these benefits is the formation of positive female friendships. For example, when I ask Renee about the friendships she’s made online, she can’t hide her enthusiasm:

The friendships that I've made have been one of the best things about starting a blog overall. Because when I think about my personal life, I've just never had a single friend that has been passionate about anything... The girls... that I meet online, it's this instant connection because you're both so passionate about something. I don't know what it is but I feel like a lot of us are very similar - these are some of the most nicest people I've ever met, some of the most well-spoken, we just seem so similar that it's so easy to start a friendship. In real life, talking to someone the first time can be awkward, but online, from the first email, you feel like you're friends already. It becomes this amazingly comfortable friendship that if you ever met in real life you'd be best friends.

Renee clearly regards the friends that she's met through feminist blogging as a significant part of her experience blogging. And while she uses language like "real life," which implies a separation between online and offline life, further discussion reveals that this binary does not structure Renee's understanding of friendship at all. In fact, the friends that Renee has met blogging are very much part of her daily life away from the keyboard.

During our last phone interview Renee describes how she's been in close frequent contact with nine other young feminist bloggers in order to plan a new feminist site that they'd like to launch as a collective. She describes how the participants have been using voting and consensus models to determine the site's name, mission, and plans for peer editing. Indeed, the project she describes sounds very much like the collectives that have long history within feminism such as the London-based feminist printshop collectives active in the 1970s and 1980s discussed by Jess Bains (2012). She's clearly excited about this new project and tells me that she believes it will showcase the ways in which she's grown as a blogger and will be a great way to talk about the new challenges she's anticipating as she begins college.

Because I was expecting that email and online social networking sites like Facebook and Skype would be the primary mode of communication between this

collective of bloggers that are dispersed internationally, I was surprised to hear from Renee that several of the girls had begun to exchange handwritten letters and small gifts through snail mail. When I ask Renee how this ritual developed she explains how one of the girls was bored over the summer at her parent's home and sent Renee a surprise via the mail on a whim. They continued the exchange and now regularly correspond this way (in addition to email, of course). This type of exchange between girls has long been a part of girls' friendship cultures, which includes practices such as pen pals, chain letters, and the exchange of self-produced goods such as friendship bracelets and zines (Kearney, 2006; Piepmeier, 2009). Consequently, this example reveals a link between girls' feminist blogging and girls' culture, something I'll explore in more detail in the following chapter.

Other study participants have also discussed female friendships as being a very positive part of their experience online. For example, Madison tells me, "I've met one of my best friends through tumblr's 'ask' feature. I wrote her, she wrote me back, and we went from there. Now we're Facebook friends and we talk on the phone. I've never met her in person, but we're close because we bonded over tumblr." Similarly, Amandine says, "I think blogging has made me more feminist. I never would have made such amazing feminist friends if it weren't for my blog, and they've helped me stay very much into women's rights advocacy."

Amandine's comment is particularly interesting because it suggests the political potential that girls' friendships can have. According to Amandine, it is her feminist friends that have encouraged her to continue her activism and have made her become "more feminist." This idea is significant because it points to the importance of friends – and community – for sustaining feminism as a movement. Blogging becomes a key practice through which young feminists are fostering these friendships. Amandine

continues, “Blogging definitely helps link individual feminists to the larger feminist community. I said it before, I never would have made so many feminist friends, especially those my age, if it wasn’t for blogging. I actually recently received an email from a girl saying that she likes my blog, and it made me so happy! Positive feedback is always appreciated.”

The idea that friendship and community is necessary to sustain feminism as a movement is important to recognize in light of frequent critiques that marginalized communities are merely “preaching to the converted.” Tim Miller and David Roman (1995) describe how queer theatre is often dismissed using this logic, which assumes that community practices like queer theatre, or in my case, girl feminists’ networked counterpublics, hold little political weight or initiative for broad social change. More recently, this critique of “preaching to the converted” has been levied at online communities, which have been assumed to attract small groups of likeminded individuals that “affirm one another’s perspective and lead people away from political action” (Baym, 2010, 96). However, Miller and Roman argue that this critique ultimately ignores the political value in connecting with those who may share a marginalized status or political stance. They write,

Regardless of how [preaching to the converted] is employed – whether it be to insist that queer artists are propagandists and queer audiences infantile, or to insist that queer artists are didactic and queer audiences bored with it all – lesbian and gay theatre that supposedly preaches to the converted is never understood as a valuable, or even viable activity. Instead the uncontested phrase shuts down discussions around the important cultural work that queer artists perform for their queer audiences. The result is yet another occasion of queer disempowerment, one which undermines the idea of building a community culture around an ongoing series of events and gatherings (173).

I am most interested in Miller and Roman's insistence on the significance of producing and maintaining a community culture amongst marginalized groups and the ways in which these communities sustain community member's investment. Thus, their assertion that the critique of "preaching to the converted" "dismisses the emotional and political benefits of queer people's gathering together in a shared public space" is particularly relevant for theorizing the political significance of girl feminist bloggers' networked counterpublics (177). Similarly, Stephen Duncombe (1997) describes how zinesters' webs of communication provide "the support and the feeling of connection that are so important for dissent and creativity" (55). Taking this scholarship into consideration, we can understand how girl bloggers' networked counterpublics are both continually produced through these instances of friendships/interpersonal relationships and are sustained by the emotional connections that foster political motivation.

I am suggesting that this political motivation is indicative of a "relational citizenship" that the girl feminist bloggers are practicing. Yvonne Hebert, Jennifer Wenshya Lee, Shirley Xiaohong Sun and Chiara Berti (2003) argue that citizenship is a relational concept, writing, "More than a legal notion, relational citizenship is based on a concept of the social or relational self and acknowledges that particularities of relationships play a part in constituting the meaning of individuals' lives and identities" (85). We can see this process occurring when Amandine says that blogging has made her "more feminist" and when Renee describes how inspiring the passion of her fellow girl feminist bloggers is to her own politics. Consequently, the friendships and relationships girl feminist bloggers form through their blogging become a political resource that is both personally meaningful and essential for understanding how blogging functions as a practice of citizenship for these girls.

In addition to keeping bloggers motivated and in touch with feminist issues, friendships with other girl feminist bloggers function as a much-needed support system for girls. This was mentioned by all of my study participants as a key reason why they understand the feminist blogosphere as shaped by the notion of community. For example, Abby says that, “I have found that simply the existence of the feminist blogosphere is supportive... simply know[ing] that there are girls who think and feel like you, who you can relate to.”

This issue of support is especially important in relation to online harassment and “trolling” that many feminist bloggers regularly experience. Madison explains:

Since I use tumblr for blogging, I think it makes it easier to support other girl bloggers. The ask feature draws out some really nasty people. I have gotten some terrible comments, but at the same time it allows for people to talk and interact with one another in a positive way... Everytime I get a nasty or disturbing ask, and I publish it or write about it, I always get an outpouring of support. The support always outweighs the negative. I think there is this feeling that we need to watch out for one another.

It is not difficult to imagine how hurtful and disillusioning it would be to receive anonymous comments personally attacking you for your feminist beliefs. However, rather than keep nasty comments private, Madison publicizes these insults in order to draw on the support of a larger community of girl bloggers.

In a focus group conversation, other bloggers also discuss this issue. Kat says, “All the feminist blogs [on tumblr] help each other out by reblogging each others posts and by supporting each other when we get nasty Anons.¹⁴ I help by reblogging from other feminist blogs and adding positive comments.” Courtney responds: “I definitely feel you on the Anons, I am pretty sure that I’ve turned off Anon for now but I’ve gotten and seen

some terrible things written. It doesn't take a lot to see the support that comes around when something like that happens. So many people will leave nice notes, or if someone wrote a post, it's so easy to see the positive reblogs." This exchange points to one of the reasons that several bloggers I spoke to prefer tumblr, as they can visually see community through "reblogs" (Figure 3.4). Thus, rather than wonder who has seen your blog posting, bloggers see who has reblogged their post and who then reblogs the post from the reblogger. In some ways it is this visual representation of the networked counterpublic that encourages girls to keep blogging despite their critics.

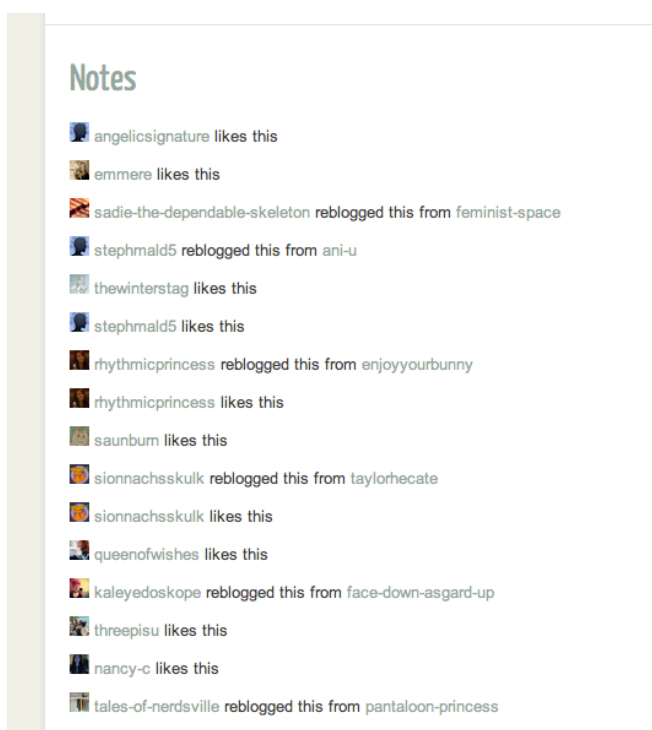


Figure 3.4 Madison's 'notes' on a recent post showing reblogs, author screen shot

While a perfect world would be without sexism on the Internet, online harassment may work to foster stronger feminist communities. For example, in a January 20, 2012 posting on the *FBomb* called “Countering Hatred on the Internet,” Gina S. recommends connecting with feminist communities online as a way to deal with what she calls “Internet haters.” She suggests: “Surround yourself with likeminded individuals! Using feminist-friendly sites and participating in discussions with fellow feminists is a great way to ensure you feel part of a community who hold similar beliefs and values as you do yourself. Not only is this a way to meet new people, it’s reassuring to use these sites.” Gina S.’s post emphasizes the supportive qualities of feminist online communities and presents the troubling phenomenon of online harassment to *FBomb* readers as an important issue that can be overcome not by individual feminists, but feminist *networked counterpublics*.

Despite the importance that friendship plays in girls’ blogging practices, literature examining girls’ online practices has largely ignored the ways in which girls are forming friendships online with other girls. When friendship is discussed, it is usually within the context of maintaining already existing friendships with peers, rather than forming friendships with girls outside of one’s daily life. For example, Lynn Schofield Clark (2005) argues that girls use new media technologies to maintain and enhance their peer groups outside of adult surveillance, exercising agency and control over their relationships. In a different vein, Sarah Baker’s (2011) research demonstrates the ways in which girls use the Internet to explore popular culture and “porn” within peer groups, negotiating sex, sexiness, and sexuality as a shared practice between friends. While both of these chapters reveal something about how friendships shape girls’ online practices, they provide little insight into how online communities foster girls’ friendships and the political potential that these friendships hold.

In her recent book *Alone Together*, Sherrie Turkle (2011) argues, “Virtual places offer connection with uncertain claims to commitment. We don’t count on cyberfriends to come by if we are ill, to celebrate our children’s successes, or to help mourn the death of our parents. People know this, and yet the emotional charge on cyberspace is high” (153). Turkle’s assessment may be true in some instances, but her claims do not match the experiences of friendship that I describe in this chapter. Indeed, when Renee’s father passed away unexpectedly in 2011, she posted about her experiences several times online, and tells me in an interview that these posts remain most important to her. Renee says, “I was just kind of talking about what goes on after you lose somebody... I just told it how it is, how exactly I was feeling. That was my first major loss and for someone who was going through the same thing to read that, I’d hope they could get some solace from that.” In a touching tribute to her father posted on the day of his funeral, Renee received several messages of support from readers, including invites to get in touch if she wanted to talk. These notes may not be substitute for a hug and a batch of homemade muffins, however, they reveal affective attachments that are not adequately represented by Turkle’s characterization of “cyberfriends.”

Indeed, girls do not understand the friendships they form through blogging as “internet friends” that are different from their “real friends.” This lack of distinction can be seen through Madison’s discussion of her friend Sarah, whom she met online. Madison explains, “She was one of the first people to follow me and she was a teenager too, so we bonded over that. Sarah is definitely one of my best friends.” Madison does not qualify her friendship with Sarah as her “best Internet friend” or the “best friend she’s met online,” but describes her merely as a best friend, regardless of the fact that they’ve never met in person. Thus, while some of the research I outline at the start of this chapter suggests that “online friendships” do not require the same time commitments and notions

of reciprocity as those friendships formed through more traditional face-to-face interactions, my research demonstrates this is not necessarily always the case. I describe how reciprocity is an important part of girl feminist bloggers' interactions, and note how bloggers support one another in the case of trolling and harassment. Furthermore, bloggers spoke of the commitment they feel towards the friends they know are following their blogs, often feeling guilty if they get busy and can't follow their regular posting schedule. Of course, not every blogger will necessarily build the friendships I describe here – and that's okay. I am suggesting, however, that these friendships serve an important function within girl feminists' networked counterpublics, providing the close connections that motivate bloggers to continue their activism.

REVISITING “DIVERSITY”: DIGITAL DIVIDES, DIGITAL WHITENESS, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INCLUSIVE COUNTERPUBLICS

Thus far I have been discussing the variety of connections that girl bloggers form as part of their participation in the feminist blogosphere. I now turn my attention to focus more specifically on who is participating in these networked counterpublics. Which girls are a part of these networks? Who is excluded? And how do girls think about inclusivity when it comes to communities that appear to form “naturally”? I will take up these questions in this section, focusing specifically on race as an identity that highlights some of the limitations of networked counterpublics to connect a diversity of voices.

I have previously discussed how girl bloggers are aware of the importance of diversity in the feminist communities, and that some even draw on the language of intersectionality to express their understandings of how power operates to create multiple oppressions in the lives of women. However, this desire to facilitate diverse communities

is held in tension with the fact that there are few visible girls of color participating in teenage feminist blogging communities. All eight of the bloggers that participated in the online focus group identify as white, although two claim ethnic Jewish identities. While I made a conscious effort to recruit girls of color to participate in this study, I was unfortunately not able to find anyone of such identity that was able to commit to the project.¹⁵

I want to emphasize that I claim there are few *visible* girls of color who are feminist bloggers because it is nearly impossible to discern the actual number of minority girls participating in various feminist blogging counterpublics. Indeed, part of the reason for this is because we do not know what many bloggers look like - the problematic way in which we often determine race - unless they choose to make themselves physically visible through posting a photo of themselves or specifically writing about their appearance and/or body. Julie discusses this as an issue that she struggles with as an editor of a teenage blogging site. She tells me,

My blog is based on submissions that are almost entirely anonymous in that I have no idea what the race/sexual orientation/age/class/etc. of my submitters are unless it's part of what they've written. But I recently got an email from a reader asking why there weren't more women of color featured on my blog. I found that email to be really interesting because, as I just stated, I have no idea how many women of color have written for my blog and it was interesting to me that that person would assume that just because I'm white and I run the blog that everybody that writes for it is white. It's almost like on the blogosphere, *you're white unless proven otherwise*.

So, I don't want to make any assumptions about who is involved with the teen feminist blogosphere solely based on the most prominent faces out there. That being said, I think our generation of feminism kind of has the responsibility to work on diversifying this movement and it's something we definitely need to be aware of (italics not in original).

I quote Julie at length because I find her comments especially pertinent to dominant discourses about race and the Internet.

The discourse of the “digital divide” has framed much of the public conversation and academic analysis of inequality online. The digital divide posits that there is a large disparity between socioeconomic groups’ access to and knowledge of new information and communication technologies. As Janell Hobson (2008) notes, digital divide discourse is also racialized and gendered, positioning people of color, women, and communities from the Global South as failing at technological literacy. In doing so, the digital divide often erases the knowledge that these groups contribute to technological advances. Hobson thus contends that hegemonic discourses that inform the digital divide problematically position people of color “outside of technology,” reproducing associations of whiteness with progress, technology, and civilizations and blackness within a discourse of nature, primitivism, and pre-modernity. Other scholars such as danah boyd (2011) and S. Craig Watkins (2009) have challenged notions of the digital divide (specifically related to the Internet) by demonstrating how mobile devices, platform preferences, taste and aesthetic cultures, and the diffusion of cheaper technology have debunked the notion of a simple divide between middle and upper class technological haves and lower and working class have-nots.

However, these scholars recognize that despite the fact that a diversity of people may now have access to the Internet and other communication technologies, online spaces continue to be structured by the power dynamics present in social life (Nakamura, 2002, 2012; Nakamura and Chow-White, 2011; boyd, 2011). Research by scholars such as Lisa Nakamura (2002, 2012) and danah boyd (2011) have demonstrated that social inequalities are often reproduced in new media spaces, and that identities such as race

and gender can often be “read” in these spaces in particular ways. Indeed, in her seminal article “Head-Hunting on the Internet: Identity Tourism, Avatars, and Racial Passing in Textual and Graphic Chat Spaces” Nakamura (2002) asserts, “The celebration of the Internet as a democratic, ‘raceless’ place needs to be interrogated, both to put pressure on the assumption that race is something that ought to be left behind, in the best of all possible cyberworlds, and to examine the prevalence of racial representation in this supposedly unraced form of social and cultural interaction” (32). While Nakamura (2002) made this argument over a decade ago, the issue of how race works online continues to be of central importance, particularly for feminists.

The bloggers I interviewed were aware that racial diversity is a problem within the teenage feminist blogosphere. Amandine says, “I never actually really found the teen feminist blogosphere terribly diverse. In my experience, of the teen bloggers, it’s mostly white middle class females. Off the top of my head I can only think of one teen feminist blog run by a guy, and I can’t think of any run by non-whites. The non-teen feminist blogosphere is much more diverse.” Renee agrees, commenting in this same focus group discussion,

I think Amandine really hit the nail on the head. The adult feminist community seems to be much more diverse than the teen feminist community. When I stop and think about it, most of the teen bloggers I know are white, middle-class females. That’s something we should really be exploring – why people of different ethnicities aren’t joining in the conversation. (I’ve never personally met a feminist who is Asian or Hispanic. WHY?)... I wonder if there’s something we’re not doing to make the movement more inclusive, because all of these issues – equal pay, reproductive rights, body image, gender stereotypes – span all races and ethnicities.

Amandine and Renee's comments are interesting because while they clearly understand the importance in fostering diverse feminist communities, they seem to lack the language to unravel the complex ways that identities like race and class operate to exclude certain voices from "joining in the conversation." This is illustrated more clearly when I ask Amandine why she thinks that more girls of color are not participating in the feminist blogosphere. She tells me,

I think that black culture doesn't emphasize education so much, and to have a blog and write on a regular basis you need to be relatively educated, so I guess that may be one factor. (I'm sorry if that sounded not so pc). If this is true, then it makes sense that the blogosphere gets diverse as people get older, because those non-whites who have managed to get educated get inspired to start blogs... Also, white people are much more economically secure, I attended a NOW webinar a while ago and they said that unmarried African-American women's median wealth is \$100, unmarried Latinas' wealth is \$125, and unmarried white women's wealth is \$41,500. So non-whites have better things to worry about than feminist theory. This all feeds into Maslow's hierarchy of needs.¹⁶

Amandine makes several problematic statements here. Most obvious, she draws on troubling and incorrect stereotypes of "black culture" and uses this to assume that many black people are poor and uneducated, preventing many from starting blogs due to limited technological and literacy skills. In this sense, she problematically conflates race with class, connecting black people, low educational attainment, and a low class status. In doing so, she seems to imply that it is actually one's class status that prevents one from blogging, although her idea of class is clearly racialized. While she grapples with intersectionality when she mentions the statistics on women's incomes she was provided by NOW, she fails to link her own feminist activism to the issues affecting women and girls of color. Thus, instead of using these statistics as incentive to question larger power structures that often position women and girls of color in lower class positions, she seems

to understand this economic discrepancy as connected to cultural values of education and success.

Additionally, Amandine reproduces the “black-white” binary to talk about race more generally. While this is common in the United States, it obscures the actual racial makeup of the country and fails to take into account the experiences of girls and women who may not identify with the narrow categories of either black or white. It is also interesting to note that while my initial question that sparked this conversation was about diversity – not specifically race - the conversation quickly became centered on race. This points to the bloggers’ recognition of race as an issue of ongoing importance. However, it also risks obscuring the experiences of other girls who may be prevented from blogging due to a range of inequalities. For example, these may include: white girls who may be poor or working class, girls who live in rural areas lacking reliable high speed Internet signals, and girls who may have a physical or learning disability that make blogging difficult. While it is not possible here to interrogate each of these particular issues in the depth they deserve, it is nonetheless important to recognize how a multitude of structural factors can impede a girls’ ability to participate in the feminist blogosphere.

Of course, part of what Amandine is saying makes sense. For example, if a woman has to work multiple jobs in order to put food on the table she most likely does not have the leisure time or resources to blog. Similarly, a girl from a poor family may have to work a part time job or look after younger siblings after school, taking up leisure time that wealthier girls may use to blog. Nonetheless, Amandine’s response seems to absolve her from responsibility to change the situation, which is troubling. Her comments also reaffirm notions of technological whiteness as critiqued by Hobson, which prevents a more comprehensive analysis that would allow us to better understand how power inequalities are enacted online in ways beyond the digital divide.

It is not my intention to imply that Amandine is “racist” or “failing” at the feminist goal of fostering diverse blogging networks and recognizing intersectional oppressions. However, I am suggesting that she may lack the discursive resources to talk about issues of race, class, and other intersecting oppressions in ways that challenge the status quo. It is not surprising that Amandine adopts dominant discourses that position people of color as responsible for their own failure to attain economic prosperity – this is the neoliberal story that we often hear in public discourse. It is also important for me to stress that Amandine’s neoliberal perspective on racial diversity was not expressed by all bloggers. The phone conversation I had with Renee about diversity also raised some interesting questions about race and the teenage feminist blogosphere.

When I ask Renee to suggest reasons why there are not more girls of color blogging on feminist sites, she draws on her own experience growing up in a very racially diverse, working-class neighborhood in a small west coast city. She begins by describing how her two best friends, one of whom is first generation Filipino and the other who is first generation Korean have not been interested in getting involved in feminist activism in the way that she has. She explains this difference not in terms of race, but in terms of ethnic identity and the communities that these identities foster. Renee says, “They are so much more connected to their cultures than I am as a white person. I have always been so jealous of people that have any connections to their heritage, to where their families came from.” When I ask her to clarify what she means by this, Renee suggests that her friends’ participation in their ethnic communities provide a sense of community and belonging that she has not experienced as a “white person.” Renee’s turn to feminism then, implies that feminism has offered her a way to connect her identity to a larger community in the same way that her friends can do this with the Filipino and Korean communities in their city. While the idea that white people have no culture problematically reproduces notions

of the “exotic Other,” Renee’s explanation highlights the importance of a feeling of belonging produced through her blogging.

While Renee’s explanation is a somewhat apolitical understanding of community and identity, it nonetheless points to the issue of conflicting identities that Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) discusses in her analysis of girls’ participation in hip hop and punk cultures in the 1980s. Kearney argues that punk girls, who were predominantly white, had more leeway in experimenting with gender identity and performances because their “femininity was already affirmed as a result of their dominant racial identity and its associated privileged class status” (57). In contrast, hip hop girls were constrained in the ways that they could perform femininity because of their deprivileged racial, and often class, status (Kearney, 2006). Additionally, Tricia Rose (1994) reminds us that many black girls and women who participated in hip hop chose not to identify as feminist because of the history of racism within mainstream feminisms and a lack of a “concrete link to black women or the black community” (Rose, 1994, 177). These analyses affirm that girls of color do not merely lack resistance (their resistance is often made invisible because it occurs outside of white culture), but social inequalities like racism can prevent girls of color from wanting to participate in feminist activism.

Considering these important points by Kearney and Rose, I am suggesting that something similar is happening with regard to girls’ participation in the feminist blogosphere. As Scharff (2012) convincingly argues, the feminist identity challenges conventional notions of femininity, as well as destabilizes the heteronormative order. White girls may then more easily be able to adopt a feminist identity with less of a social penalty than girls of color, as their whiteness aligns with privileged femininity. Similarly, Gayle Wald (1998) argues that whiteness allows white, American female musicians the feminist agency to perform girlhood in ways that women musicians of color cannot

access without reifying harmful stereotypes. In other words, adopting a feminist identity appears to still be less risky for white girls, although class status, ethnicity, ability, and sexuality may complicate this claim. If girls' adoption of a feminist identity serves in part as a form of resistance to normative femininity, as I suggest in the first chapter, girls of color may be less invested in the need for a feminist identity, as they already possess non-normative identities on which to draw. This appears to be case for the black hip hop girls that both Kearney and Rose discuss.

Of course, the history of racism in feminist movements may also discourage girls of color from participating in feminist blogging. While intersectionality and difference have been important parts of the feminist lexicon for close to thirty years, lingering stereotypes about feminists as white, middle class women (note, not girls!) remain. Scharff (2012) found that many of her participants, a racially and sexually diverse group of young women in their twenties and early thirties living in England and Germany, disassociated with feminism in part because of the raced and classed connotations they perceived feminism as carrying. Renee also acknowledges this during our conversation when she suggests that girls who are not white or middle class from wanting to participate in feminism because of these associations.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) theories of taste cultures and social stratification are useful for further understanding which girls may become feminist bloggers. Bourdieu describes cultural capital as knowledge, attitudes, and aesthetic tastes that are inherited from one's family of origin and denote a particular class status. In other words, taste "functions as a sort of social orientation" meaning that things like media choice, for example, are not completely random, but guided by one's relationship to their class status (466). While often related to economic capital, cultural capital is not necessarily determinant on one's financial standing, demonstrating the complexity of class as a

multidimensional system of privilege. In addition to cultural and economic capital, Bourdieu recognizes social capital as the benefits that one receives from both being known and knowing particular people. Thus, friends, acquaintances, relations, and associates can all bestow status and grant opportunities to those with these connections. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to sustain an in-depth discussion of social capital, the ways in which social connections generate particular opportunities, knowledge via cultural capital, and other benefits suggest that both what you know and who you know may determine who may be more likely to participate in the feminist blogosphere.

For the purpose of this study, sociologist Jacqueline Kennelly's (2011) research on youth activism in Canada is relevant in this regard. Drawing on Bourdieu's conception of social capital and habitus, she coins the concept of "relational agency" in order to make sense of how issues of race and class function in the anti-globalization activist communities she studied (117). Kennelly defines relational agency as "the contingent and situated intersection between an individual's social position within a field of interactions, and the means by which the relationships within that field permit that individual to take actions that might otherwise be inconceivable – or, in other words, permit them to achieve a habitus shift" (117). According to Kennelly, one's personal relationships can give one the "knowledge, capacity, and resources" to engage in activism. Kennelly's analysis considers agency then as not only an individual attribute, but connected to a larger network of relationships. While this shift has exciting implications for thinking about activism, Kennelly acknowledges that certain people may not be "invited in" to participate because of their lack of particular social relationships.

She writes, "Since friendships often emerge unconsciously along class, gender, and race lines – because the people with whom we feel 'at ease' often share these

characteristics with us – they can also serve to perpetuate class, gender- and race-based exclusions also identified by participants throughout the ethnography” (270). Consequently, existing social relationships may allow some girls to take up feminist activism more easily than others who come from communities where feminism is not a part of the social and cultural context. While Kennelly’s research did not examine how relational agency may function in online spaces, I am suggesting this may not be problematic since girls’ online practices are very much related to their lived experiences offline, as I’ve been demonstrating throughout this dissertation. Consequently, Kennelly’s insights suggest the importance of examining social relationships to better understand why some girls may be more comfortable googling “feminism” and then participating in the movement than others.

Sarah Thornton’s (1996) concept of subcultural capital is also worthy of consideration, as it recognizes how “hipness” circulates as a form of capital within youth cultures. We can understand subcultural capital as an accrued knowledge of the norms of a subculture, or in this case, the networked counterpublic. Thornton emphasizes how media are “a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge” necessary for subcultural capital, a distinguishing factor from Bourdieu’s cultural capital and a point that’s particularly salient for my study (14). While being a teenage feminist blogger may not be “cool” within high school environments (as I discussed in the previous chapter), being a feminist blogger does require the development of a certain knowledge that functions as subcultural capital with feminist blogging counterpublics.

For example, bloggers must not only understand and utilize language like “slut shaming,” which requires a certain amount of intellectual theorization, but must also often be versed in popular media culture and cultural happenings, which often informs blog posts and sustains conversations. While this knowledge is most likely connected to

Bourdieu's social and cultural capital (such as being educated about feminism by one's parents), it is something that bloggers can accrue through their interaction as consumers and producers of media, and then from a continued participation in the blogosphere.

We can see the development of subcultural capital in Amandine's experience that I described in chapter one. By discovering and reading Jewish feminist blogs Amandine became familiar with the language and norms of the community and was able to identify with members due to shared identities and beliefs. This subcultural capital fosters social capital, or a certain relational agency that Kennelly describes, giving Amandine the confidence to start her own blog and a network of connected bloggers that were eager to read it. Amandine's commitment to blogging meant that she was continually building social and subcultural capital by posting on her blog regularly as well as commenting on the blogs of others. In turn, this practice provides publicity for her own blog. Amandine's visibility in the networked counterpublic of the teenage blogosphere allows her to garner subcultural capital in ways that exclude those girls who are online irregularly and therefore lack the knowledge of cultural events and popular media culture to contribute to discussions.

We may also consider how Amandine's offline positioning may assist her in accruing this capital. Amandine come from a middle-class single parent household, has no self-identified feminist friends (outside of the friends she's met online), and goes to a very conservative, religious private school. However, Amandine lives in a large urban center on the east coast, meaning that she has access to cultural events, feminist politics, and a variety of media (including feminist media) that may generate subcultural capital; that which a blogger in rural Indiana may not be able to access. I raise this example to demonstrate that we cannot make simplistic generalizations about the young feminist blogosphere based solely on class, race, or location, but must recognize the complex

ways in which these identities and the social, cultural, and subcultural capitals they generate may position some girls more likely to become feminist bloggers. Thus, contrary to what neoliberal logic may suggest, a lack of agency or interest amongst individual girls does not tell the whole story as to why some girls are not feminist bloggers.

Thus, while it is impossible to definitively conclude why the networked counterpublics formed by girl feminist bloggers do not reflect the diversity of the American public, my discussion emphasizes that social and cultural contexts and capital make a feminist identity more accessible and socially desirable to some girls. Of course, this does not mean that there are no girls of color participating in the young feminist blogging networks. Indeed, as Julie suggests, they may not be as visible as their white counterparts. I will further examine issues of visibility, as well as social, cultural, and subcultural capital in the next chapter in relation to prominent teenage feminist bloggers like Julie Zeilinger, Jamie Keiles, and Tavi Gevinson.

CONCLUSIONS: NETWORKED COUNTERPUBLICS AS DISRUPTING NEOLIBERAL CITIZENSHIP

In this chapter I have suggested that girl bloggers are best understood as participating in networked counterpublics, forming networks around particular discursive feminist identities and issues, coming together, dissolving, and reconvening in a fluid manner. I demonstrate this through three case studies that examined how girl bloggers have formed networked counterpublics in relation to a teenage feminist identity, reproductive rights, and rape culture. While girls' networked counterpublics include "strangers" and see participants come and go, I contend that affective relationships and friendships are an important part of the functioning of these counterpublics and often

serve to sustain girls' activism. These findings challenge much of the scholarly literature that continues to compare "online communities" with those "offline," failing to take into account the fluidity across online and offline spaces that these networked counterpublics exhibit.

I am arguing then that girl feminist bloggers are challenging postfeminist and neoliberal discourses through collective organizing via networked counterpublics. The language of networked counterpublics not only suggests a collective strategy, but one that also contains transformative and emancipatory potential (Warner, 2005; Fraser, 1992). In this sense, new opportunities are generated through networked counterpublics to engage in citizenship practices that attempt to intervene in changing public discourse. Slutwalk is an example of how this works, producing and circulating discourses about "slut shaming" that aim to change cultural common sense. Therefore, understanding girl bloggers as participating in networked counterpublics provides us with a model to think about citizenship as communal and relational, rather than the individual pursuit celebrated by neoliberalism and postfeminism.

Endnotes

¹ While the FBomb certainly isn't the only feminist blog for girls today, it was the first website of its kind to be widely discussed in both the blogosphere and mainstream press when it launched in 2009. Indeed, several of my respondents mentioned that the FBomb inspired them to start their own blogs.

² I'd like to reassert that I'm defining a girl-friendly citizenship as a practice of accessing a public sphere by mobilizing one's critical voice in community with other girls, resulting in the ability to understand oneself as active in the present, yet with an awareness of one's positioning in relation to both the past and future

³ I will be returning to the can-do girl in the following chapter.

⁴ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an in-depth discussion of all of the key scholarship addressing online communities over the past twenty years. Instead, I aim to focus on recent work here that is directly relevant to my study. See Yuan (2012) for an excellent overview of some of the early literature on online communities.

⁵ Nonetheless, Burgess and Green (2009) acknowledge how commercial interests are intertwined in platforms such as YouTube and recognize them to often be in tension with communities of users. This issue raises further questions about the “ownership” of online communities, which is important to recognize although not the main focus of my discussion here.

⁶ Steiner’s use of the word “cyberfeminist” is problematic, considering the dated nature of the word. As I describe in the introduction of this dissertation, “cyberfeminism” dates back to the early 1990s when women began to use the Internet as an organizational and networking tool for feminist and social justice initiatives (Shade, 2002). However, as I also mention, the term implied a certain utopian stance that understood “cyberspace” as distinct from “real life,” able to offer women users unparalleled power due to the supposedly disembodied nature of the Internet (Youngs, 1999). With the growth in the number of women using the Internet for feminist and political purposes since the early 1990s (as well as many other purposes), the language of “cyberfeminism” has fallen out of fashion. Indeed, most Internet scholars now recognize the integration of online practices into the daily lives of people, something that is obscured through the discourse of “cyberfeminism.”

⁷ It should be noted that Yochai Benkler (2007) utilizes the related term “networked public sphere” in his book, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* however, his macro-level analysis centers on shifting communication policy to account for the Internet as a “networked public sphere.” My own use of term departs from Benkler’s, as I aim to understand the meanings of bloggers’ networked connections rather than attempting to make claims about how the Internet as a network functions in relation to commercial mass media, the focus on Benkler’s book.

⁸ The term “networked” also can be referred back to Garrison’s (2000, 2010) description of third wave feminism, as well as Duncombe’s (1997) discussion of zine cultures. This connection is not a coincidence, as I position girls’ feminist blogging in relation to both third wave feminism and zine culture throughout this dissertation.

⁹ I discovered that one of the challenges in conducting personal interviews is the language one uses to communicate with interviewees. In this case I used the term “community” with my participants, although I knew that I wanted to frame the collectivities that girl bloggers are forming online in slightly different terms (eventually choosing “networked counterpublic”). However, due to the theoretical nature of “networked counterpublic” I could not use this term in interviews, as most subjects would not be familiar with it. This

issue means that quoting participants often means slipping back into the language of community, something that I recognize may be somewhat awkward.

¹⁰ Tumblr is a microblogging platform and social networking website which was launched in 2007 as is particularly popular with teens and young adults. While users can post text, the popularity of tumblr has centered on the ease of which users can post and share (“reblog”) images. Consequently, images and relatively small amount of text distinguish tumblr from blogging platforms such as Blogger.

¹¹ While the “War on Women” as a phrase has been used sporadically since 1992 when Susan Faludi published her book *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against American Women*, it gained prominence most recently after the 2010 U.S. midterm elections. Today, the phrase primarily refers to the Republican initiatives in federal and state legislatures aimed to curb reproductive rights, although other related issues have been discussed using this discourse, including the prosecution of violence against women (including rape), access to birth control and abortions services, the defunding of women’s health organizations such as Planned Parenthood, and the treatment of women’s discrimination in the workplace.

¹² As I previously suggested, this is likely due to the participatory culture fostered by online media; whereby the ongoing creation and circulation of content occurs between communities of Internet users and is an accepted and normalized part of the architecture of the Internet (Jenkins, 2006).

¹³ In fall 2012 Amandine announced that she’d be holding a second essay competition where participants answer the question, “why do you need feminism?” Essays are due in spring 2013 and winning submissions will be published on her blog.

¹⁴ The Internet slang term “Anon” refers to an anonymous commenter.

¹⁵ As I outline in the introduction to this dissertation, I contacted bloggers based upon their inclusion in the Fbomb’s blogroll, and then using the email addresses they provided on their blog. I then used a snowball sampling method, asking these bloggers for referrals to other teenage bloggers that may be interested in participating in the study, as well as asking them to post my call for participants on their blog. In many cases I was not able to immediately identify the race of the blogger, unless they posted a photo of themselves on their blog (about half of the bloggers had done this). Once I discovered all of my participants were white I searched through the blogs listed on the FBomb blogroll, but was unable to find any blogs that were written by teenage girls of color. This does not mean that none exist, however, at the time of this writing there were none listed on the FBomb blogroll. One African American girl feminist blogger did contact me after seeing my call for participants listed on one of the other bloggers’ sites, however, while

expressing initial interest she did not return any of my follow-up emails and I noticed that she had taken down her blog shortly after contacting me.

¹⁶ I confirmed that these statistics are correct, according to a study release in spring 2010 by Insight Center for Community Economic Development. The report can be accessed at: <http://www.insightccd.org/uploads/CRWG/LiftingAsWeClimb-WomenWealth-Report-InsightCenter-Spring2010.pdf>.

Chapter Four: “Pint Sized Internet Phenom?” Feminist Girl Bloggers and the Politics of Public Space and Voice

“Feminist communities like the *FBomb*, as well as individually curated blogs, allow young women to become comfortable with not only developing our opinions and ideas, but to publicly publish them – to refuse to buy into a culture that encourages our silence and subservience.”

-Julie Zeilinger, March 15, 2013, *FBomb*

“When you speak out against something – even just a guy friend making some sexist joke – they will probably feel defensive or threatened and girls aren’t taught that it’s okay to speak out. You’re not supposed to be threatening to a guy like that...”

-Tavi Gevinson, Spring 2012, PBS’ *Makers* series

In the summer of 2008 the blogosphere erupted with news of a mysterious twelve-year-old fashion blogger from suburban Chicago who had harnessed the attention of countless prominent adult fashion bloggers, as well as cultural-zeitgeist forecaster, *New York Magazine* (The Cut, 2008). On the magazine’s website, debate raged whether or not the witty, culturally-savvy, and effortlessly-hip blogger named Tavi was actually a middle school student or the brainchild of a much older fashion insider. It wasn’t until a *New York Times* article published a short article quoting Tavi a month later that many in the fashion blogosphere resigned to the fact that the hottest new blogger on the block did not yet have a driver’s license (Spiridakis, 2008).

Since then Tavi has cemented her status as a media mogul, with a growing list of accomplishments that would make most cool kids green with envy: Tavi has penned

articles for fashion bible *Harper's Bazaar*, served as a muse for ultra-hip fashion label Rodarte, sat in the front row at the most exclusive couture catwalk shows, spoken at prominent events such as ideaCity10 and TEDxTeen, and scored a modeling gig alongside Cyndi Lauper for Uniqlo. In September 2011, she launched *Rookie* (<http://rookiemag.com>), an online feminist-oriented pop culture magazine for teenage girls, receiving media attention from the *New York Times*, *Ms. Magazine*, and the BBC, eager to cover the blogger's latest media project. Since then, Tavi has expanded the *Rookie* brand by taking to the road, embarking on a cross-country "Rookie Roadtrip" to meet her readers and to promote the launch of *Rookie Yearbook One*, a printed book of the best posts from *Rookie's* first year. Based upon this public attention, I understand Tavi as exemplifying an idealized form of contemporary celebrity, perpetuated by and circulated throughout new media technologies, yet producing significant public space for a girlhood feminist activism that resists normative postfeminist girlhood subjectivities (Keller, forthcoming 2014).

In this chapter I explore how girl feminist bloggers like Tavi produce a space within mainstream culture to perform feminism publically. This strategy represents a shift away from the "bedroom culture" that characterizes traditional girls' culture, raising significant questions about what it means for girls to *be public* and create *public culture* within our contemporary neoliberal and postfeminist context (McRobbie and Garber, 1991). I use Tavi Gevinson as a fascinating case study that illuminates many of the tensions generated when girls enter public space as agential feminist activists and cultural producers, including public/private, visible/invisible, vocal/silent, and commercial/alternative cultural binaries. Ultimately, I argue that girl feminist bloggers consciously negotiate protectionist warnings that suggest girls should remain private and guarded in (online) public life and "girl power" celebrations of girls' public visibility,

generating their own spaces through blogging to perform a *public feminist girlhood*. I suggest that this is a powerful act as it makes feminism an accessible discourse to a range of girls who can access this media due to its relatively wide circulation and coverage in popular commercial teen media, such as *Teen Vogue*. Several questions then guide this inquiry: How are girls' bodies that are "out in public" presented within mediated public discourses? In what ways are girl feminist bloggers fashioning a new type of girlhood activism through their engagement with mainstream media? And finally, how might girl feminist bloggers' public subjectivities demonstrate a practice of citizenship?

I will begin by outlining scholarship addressing how girls have been positioned in relation to private and public space, drawing on scholarship by Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1991), Mary Celeste Kearney (2007a), and Anita Harris (2004). In this discussion I elaborate on "bedroom culture," a concept used to theorize girls' culture. I also pay particular attention to critiques of bedroom culture and recent interventions into this literature. For example, Harris (2004) argues how the balance between public and private spaces continues to shift in relation to a neoliberal and postfeminist cultural context where "political and civic duties are brought into private spaces as though this is where they should be enacted, and the realm of the intimate is exposed for public scrutiny" (126).

I then discuss two hegemonic contemporary discourses that shape the ways in which girls' public engagements are often framed, focusing particularly on how digital media technologies intersect with both of these discourses: (1) a protectionist discourse that warns girls of making their bodies *too public*. I will discuss this specifically in relation to warnings about the threats related to new media technologies, such as sexting, cyberstalking, and other breaches of privacy; and (2) a postfeminist "girl power" discourse prominent since the late 1990s that encourages girls to "live large" through

public visibility and display (Hopkins, 2002; Harris, 2004). As Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012b) has recently argued, new media spaces have become central sites for girls' performances of postfeminist visibility where the ideals of independence, capacity, and empowerment can be performed and circulated. These contradictory discourses suggest a precarious public positioning of girls within a contemporary new media culture, one in which girls are rewarded for being seen as active, yet not heard as political or activist voices.

I then turn to discuss three girl feminist bloggers, Tavi Gevinson, Julie Zeilinger, and Jamie Keiles, as particularly indicative of girl feminist bloggers' ability to perform a public feminist girlhood. I outline how these bloggers have utilized entrepreneurial strategies to publicize their media production and to vocalize their feminist politics. I argue that Tavi, Julie, and Jamie have successfully created political spaces within public (and sometimes even commercial) media culture, challenging can-do girlhood through a specifically activist agenda. This distinguishes these bloggers from many girls visible in popular media culture, often in roles within the entertainment industry, who do not perform as political activists publicly. Nonetheless, I call attention to the cultural and social capital needed to partake in such public activism, contending that many girls are excluded from this type of activism due to a marginalized position with regards to classed, raced, sexual, religious, ethnic, and/or other identities.

Next, I then turn to my case study of Tavi Gevinson in order to explore these issues in more depth; drawing on my discursive and ideological textual analysis of her media coverage since her emergence as a fashion blogger five years ago at the age of twelve until the launch of *Rookie Yearbook One* in September 2012. In particular, I locate and analyze three dominant discourses that were used by adult journalists, bloggers, and fashion insiders in an attempt to contain Tavi's threat to patriarchal and adult-controlled

popular culture. I argue that unlike many visible girl celebrities, Tavi was deemed threatening because of her disruption of both postfeminist can-do and protectionist discourses related to public girlhood; via her feminist politics as well as the agency she has exercised over her media production and career. I contend that her adoption and performance of a feminist subjectivity became significant for Tavi's negotiation of public space and represents a key intervention in popular culture. Consequently, I suggest that feminist politics may help girls to make sense of, navigate, and ultimately challenge the discourses often used to contain them.

Finally, I conclude this chapter by arguing that Tavi, Julie, and Jamie have fashioned a new type of girlhood feminist activism that disrupts both can-do and protectionist discourses of public girlhood via their blogging practices, thereby challenging public/private, visible/invisible, vocal/silent, and commercial/alternative cultural binaries. In doing so, girl feminist bloggers open up a public space for girls to not only access feminism, but practice citizenship as feminist, political, and activist actors in their own right.

THEORIZING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE: GIRLS, GIRLS' CULTURE AND THE POLITICS OF SPACE

The gendered divide between public and private space created by patriarchal ideology has been a central way in which feminists have understood structural inequality. While women and girls have been traditionally associated with the private sphere of the home, feminist scholars and activists during the women's liberation movement have challenged this idea through their assertion that "the personal is political." More recently, girls' studies scholars have also demonstrated how girls have often moved in and out of

public space during various points throughout the last century, as well as recognizing how other identities such as race and class structure public and private binaries.

For example, Mary Celeste Kearney (2005) details how white middle-class American teenage girls gained significant public attention during the 1940s, as many girls had their own disposable income as a result of their participation in the war effort and were eager to spend their money in public spaces such as soda shops and record stores. Consequently, the development of a girls' culture (which began in the late 1930s) increased during this time, positioning girls as a valuable consumer market for new fashions, beauty products, magazines, and records. As Kearney (2005) argues, this girls' culture motivated girls – especially those from the middle and upper-middle classes – “to be publicly present in ways that broadened their worlds beyond school and work” (574).

Girls' occupancy of public spaces at this time represented an independent and non-domestic female subjectivity that, while often celebrated as indicative of a modern and progressive America, was also threatening to the established social order. Kearney maintains, “Race and class dynamics are pertinent here, for if the white, upper-middle-class teenage girls depicted in magazines and newsreels were in fact becoming less domestic, then the traditional social order of the United States was at risk of collapse” (575). Kearney documents how the public girlhood of the 1940s was quickly recuperated in the post-war era, when girls and women were forced out of paid employment in the public sphere and encouraged to embrace domestic responsibilities, marriage, and motherhood. Nonetheless, girls often continued to assert their independence away from the private sphere of the home through the use of the telephone, a “technology of sociability” that allowed girls to insert themselves into the public sphere while physically remaining in their homes (Kearney, 2005, 583). As a result, the telephone became a significant technology that disrupted girls' positioning within private and public spaces,

and became an important part of girl culture throughout the 1960s and beyond (Kearney, 2005).¹

Despite girls' engagements with fashion, music, and other cultural products, the study of youth cultures in the 1970s began as a study of boys and their cultural practices, as I discuss in chapter two (McRobbie and Garber, 1991). Angered by male cultural studies scholars' assumption that girls do not participate in youth subcultures because they were not visible on public streets as boys were (justifying girls' exclusion from their research), Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1991) conducted their own study of girls' cultural practices, coining the concept of "bedroom culture." McRobbie and Garber argued that scholars must acknowledge how "girls negotiate a different leisure space and different personal spaces from those inhabited by boys" (24). They write, "It might be suggested that girls' culture of the time operated within the vicinity of the home, or the friends' home... Teenage girls did participate in the new public sphere afforded by the growth of the leisure industries, but they could also consume [pin-up pictures, records, and magazines] at home, upstairs in their bedrooms" (16).

McRobbie and Garber recognized girls' cultural practices within their bedrooms as agential and resistant, despite somewhat privatized within the domestic sphere and focused on consumption of commercial products. Indeed, it is the private aspect of girls' cultural consumption that the authors suggest is significant, allowing girls a space to develop close-knit, all-female friendship groups away from the surveillance and scrutiny of parents, teachers, and boys. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that McRobbie and Garber acknowledged that despite the fact that girls' bodies were located in a private space, their interaction with popular culture, such as their attendance at concerts, complicated a simple public/private divide in ways similar to Kearney's analysis of girls' telephone use in the mid-twentieth century.

However, there have been several useful critiques of McRobbie and Garber's original conception of bedroom culture that are important to consider in relation to our contemporary social and cultural context. Kearney (2007a), for example, argues that as McRobbie and Garber define it, bedroom culture does not account for the productive practices that girls engage in both in the past and today within the space of their bedrooms, such as making films, playing guitar, or creating a personal website or zine. Additionally, these can be seen as practices that link girls to a wider public through their distribution of such media online, or via other means, such as the giving away of zines at local music shows. The exclusion of girls' cultural production from theories of bedroom culture has thus resulted in the problematic reproduction of a consumerist and private framing of girls' domestic practices by many other scholars who have studied adolescent room culture (Kearney, 2007).

In a related vein, Sarah Baker (2011) contends that bedroom culture problematically positions girls' online practices as primarily personal or private, failing to account for how girls' Internet practices can be both subject to adult and peer surveillance and as well as productive of girls' explorations of sexuality and sexiness that are absent from bedroom culture. As I will explain later in relation to my analysis, my own concerns with McRobbie and Garber's theory is its inability to understand girl feminist bloggers' public performances of feminism via online media as a citizenship practice, a concern that draws on both Kearney's and Baker's arguments.

Finally, Anita Harris' (2004) work has been significant in further conceptualizing the shifting boundaries of public and private spaces for girls in the new millennium. She argues that due to the increasing surveillance of girls in public spaces, girls are engaging in what she calls "border work" (158). She explains,

Many young women are electing to work through new networks and new media, forming marginal, creative, and virtual spaces to express themselves and to engage with one another away from scrutiny, while at the same time reframing strategies, meanings, and effects of social change. This is border work because it moves between public and private, building collective secret knowledge and then using this carefully to create manifest activism (158).

To Harris then, new media spaces are “transforming young women’s spheres into productive places of activity instead of passive consumption, and in providing some room for overregulated young women to be in the world within leaving their homes” (162). She continues, “The Internet allows young women to actively manipulate the borders between public and private, inside and outside, to attempt to manage expression without exploitation, and resistance without appropriation” (162). While Harris (2004) does relate her discussion of girls’ online practices to zine culture, she nonetheless theorizes girls’ disruption of the public/private binary as a phenomenon unique to new media culture, something that I disagree with based upon my knowledge of both Kearney’s and McRobbie and Garber’s scholarship.²

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully detail the rich scholarship documenting girls’ negotiations of public and private space, the above literature points to the multiple ways in which girls have participated in public life, as well as negotiated its boundaries. As Kearney (2007a) argues, girls are reconfiguring the private space of the bedroom to create “new publics that can better serve their needs, interests, and goals” (138). Nonetheless, recent scholarship by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2011, 2012b) complicates this argument by demonstrating how girls’ creation of online publics can be understood as indicative of performances of hegemonic neoliberal and postfeminist subjectivities,

research which I will return to in the following section of this chapter. However, here I specifically want to emphasize how media and communication technologies have been significant in facilitating girls' access to and creation of public space, whether through consuming popular music, talking on the phone, creating a zine, or producing a website. Keeping this discussion in mind I now turn to discuss two contemporary dominant discourses that shape the ways in which public girlhood is understood.

BETWEEN POSTFEMINIST AND PROTECTIONIST: CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES OF PUBLIC GIRLHOODS

In her book *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-first Century*, Anita Harris (2004) argues that neoliberalism has produced a new idealized subject position for young women, which she calls the “can-do girl” (16). I briefly introduced this concept in chapter three, but will discuss it here in more detail. According to Harris (2004), the can-do girl is “self-inventing, ambitious, and confident,” successful at school (and later in the workplace), and consumes the right products, including beauty, fashion, and lifestyle goods that allow her to maintain a highly disciplined body that conforms to hegemonic femininity. While Harris does not use the word “postfeminist” in her discussion, the can-do girl is unequivocally postfeminist through her mobilization of individualism, choice, and empowerment; self-surveillance and discipline; and femininity as bodily property (Gill, 2007).³

Additionally, we can see that while the can-do girl has become empowered by feminist gains and is expected to take advantage of them (e.g. have a successful career), she is not encouraged to be a political activist or to engage in collective movements for social change. Jessica Taft (2011) explains that the “empowerment” encouraged of the

can-do girl is “focused on incorporating girls into the social order as it stands, rather than empowering them to make any meaningful changes to it” (23-24). Unlike traditional discourses of girlhood that emphasized passivity, empowered girls are active, yet their activity is informed by an individualized worldview and a focus on personal, rather than collective, change. Taft argues,

By focusing on psychology, self-reliance, healthy choices, and individual achievements, however, this approach to girls’ empowerment encourages girls to think of the lives in these terms, often at the expense of a more sociological or political analysis. As girls learn to assess their lives through the language of self-esteem, healthy decision-making, and individual opportunities, they are more likely to see their problems as personal troubles, rather than as issues of public concern. If their problems are not seen as publicly relevant, they are also much less likely to engage in social action to remedy them (30).

Consequently, girls’ politics become privatized, an issue that Harris recognizes as part of the reshaping of public space associated with neoliberalism.

Indeed, the can-do girl exercises citizenship through individual responsibility, consumption, and the apolitical entrepreneurial activities, such as launching her own fashion line; as well as through adult-managed leadership programs that emphasize “establishing economic literacy, networking, and discovering one’s own power to realize ambitions” (Harris, 2004, 78). As McRobbie (2009) aptly suggests, the can-do girl is able to come forward and prosper within a neoliberal economy on the understanding that she allow feminism to fade away.

I want to focus specifically on what the can-do girl discourse suggests about girls’ positioning within public spaces, the focus of this chapter. Harris argues that the can-do girl is encouraged to be “highly visible in public” via not only the display and positioning of her body within the public sphere, but also through the constant display of her inner

self, such as public declarations of responsibility, personal transformation, and self-scrutiny. Thus, while opportunities for girls' political engagements become privatized, Harris (2004) maintains that they are conversely encouraged to perform their intimate lives publicly.

The ability for girls to “live large” in public then signals a successful negotiation of contemporary femininity that Susan Hopkins (2002) relates to an increasing interest in celebrity culture. Both Harris (2004) and Banet-Weiser (2011, 2012b) have also explored this connection between can-do girlhood and celebrity. Harris argues,

It is in a world of celebrities, pop stars, supermodels, actresses, and entertainers that young women are encouraged to become somebody. Indeed, it is often these kinds of figures who are supposed to illustrate how young women have made it; they are emblematic of the arrival of the can-do girl in the public world... the regular young person is expected to work on herself as a celebrity project and gain some kind of public profile in the process. With determination and effort, visibility and therefore success can be accomplished. Living outside the public gaze is for those who do not try hard enough (127).

The can-do girl can therefore be seen as a product of contemporary celebrity culture, an issue that I will return to in my discussion of Tavi, Julie, and Jamie.

Since the publication of Harris' book, the proliferation and accessibility of web 2.0 platforms have increased exponentially, opening up new spaces for girls' to engage with the public sphere. Banet-Weiser (2011, 2012b) connects the opportunities for girls' visibility created through digital media with many of the postfeminist ideals I have described above in relation to the can-do girl. She argues,

Importantly, the ideals and accomplishments of the postfeminist subject – independence, capacity, empowerment – are entangled with similar ideals about

the contemporary media-savvy interactive subject who is at ease in navigating the ostensibly flexible, open architectures of online spaces. This interactive subject, like the postfeminist subject, realizes self-empowerment through her capacity and productivity” (56).

To Banet-Weiser (2012b) then, girls’ visibility within the public sphere via digital media production is often determined by their ability to “self-brand,” producing oneself as a product that can be circulated and even commodified through practices such as becoming a cam girl.⁴

Consequently, Banet-Weiser (2012b) contends that rather than fostering more opportunities for girls to perform a diversity of identities publicly, new media spaces have become branded sites that often restrict girls’ expression of identity to narrow performances of can-do girlhood (and other postfeminist hegemonic femininities) via disciplinary practices such as feedback.⁵ Amy Shields Dobson (2008) has made a similar argument in relation to her research on cam girls. She maintains that despite reframing bedroom culture into a public, productive, and commodified cultural space, “cam girls’ use of the Internet does not signify a change in the traditional nature of girl culture as private, personal, close, and insular, rather it makes these previously invisible aspects of girls’ cultures visible, in line with the wider [neoliberal and postfeminist] social context of ‘confession and display’” (131).

Alongside the proliferation of the can-do girl discourse we see the mobilization of another discourse related to girls’ positioning in public space. I am referring to this as a protectionist discourse that suggests girls are now *too public*, vulnerable to multiple risks assumed to be primarily the result of girls’ increased use of new media technologies and desire to be visible. While “cyberbullying” has gained media attention recently, the dangers surrounding girls’ public presence online (and via their mobile phones) is most

often framed as a problem related to girls' sexuality and potential sexualization by adult men (Shade, 2007, 2011).

Amy Hasinoff (2012) analyzes how educational experts, policymakers, and journalists have portrayed contemporary girls as sexually "disinhibited" by new media technology, resulting in girls engaging in risky and non-normative sexual behavior (e.g. taking topless photos and uploading them online). Hasinoff cites Parry Aftab, an online safety expert who testified before a congressional committee on the dangers of MySpace, who claimed that teenagers are "disconnected from the immediate consequences of their actions online, [so] many 'good' kids tend to find themselves doing things online they would never dream of doing in real life" (5). She also quotes Aftab as saying that teens post photos and texts online in which they appear to be "drunken sluts," a comment that is shocking yet revealing of the gendered nature of this discourse (5). Hasinoff rightfully argues that Aftab's comments problematically assert that girls should not be expressing their desires online, comments that I argue also imply that girls are indeed too public in their self-expression and must be reigned in by concerned adults.

Indeed, as Leslie Regan Shade (2011) argues, these characterizations of girls' use of new media technologies as out of control and potentially dangerous have resulted in a protectionist discourse that prescribes adult intervention in the form of monitoring, tracking, and controlling girls' use of the Internet and mobile phones. Shade describes several examples of spy software, GPS technology, and smart phone apps designed to monitor and contain girls' new media use, which she argues deny girls' agency and technological-savvy.⁶ Perhaps ironically, this protectionist discourse suggests that while girls must be taught to diligently guard their privacy when using new media technologies, these same girls have few privacy rights in relation to their parents' surveillance of their online lives.

Protectionist discourses such as the one I describe here are certainly not new, as several scholars have noted the lengthy history of moral panics surrounding girls' uses of new technologies over the past century (Marvin, 1990; Kearney, 2005; Cassell and Cramer, 2008; Shade, 2011; Hasinoff, 2012). For example, Justine Cassell and Meg Cramer (2008) analyze how both the telegraph and telephone were feared to foster inappropriate relationships between the sexes, contending, "new technology, it was believed, removed girls from the safety of the home and invited sexual immorality" (11). It is significant to recognize, as Cassell and Cramer (2008) and other scholars do, that these moral panics are connected to the politics of space, often proliferating during times of girls' and women's increased public presence and access to the public sphere.

I want to consider this most recent protectionist discourse as related to the girls' "loss of voice" rhetoric that gained widespread attention in the mid-1990s, which I described in chapter one. Also employing a protectionist framework, the loss of voice discourse perceived adolescent girls as suffering from low self-esteem, depression, an inability to voice their opinions and thoughts, and vulnerable to social and cultural pressures to conform to traditional femininity. Prominent psychologists such as Mary Pipher (1995) advocated that parents, educators, and other concerned adults must intervene to "empower" girls in order to "save" them from their seemingly dire situation.

It is fascinating to note the contradiction between these two discourses; as one warns against girls' highly visible and overly-confident public displays of sexuality, the other portrays girls as insecure, voiceless, and absent from public life. However, I am arguing that despite their seemingly contradictory messages, both discourses reveal a similar anxiety about girls' positioning in public life; namely, that girls should be guided toward "managed participation" by adults in order to ensure a public presence that avoids

being too public or inappropriately public by upsetting normative performances of female adolescent sexuality (Harris, 2004).

In this section I have outlined what I see as two primary discourses that relate to the performance of public girlhood. While postfeminist discourses promote a model of can-do girlhood that celebrates visibility, independence, and one's ability to "live large" through digital media, we simultaneously hear that girls have gone too far; are now too public via their uses of new media technologies and must be monitored and protected by parents and other adults. Consequently, girls are situated in a precarious position where they are encouraged to publicly perform a visible can-do girlhood, yet avoid becoming too public through inappropriate displays (e.g. flashing one's breasts) or participating in the wrong public spaces (chat rooms), something that I'll explore further when I discuss Tavi. The tension between these postfeminist and protectionist discourses will be illustrated throughout this chapter, as I argue that girl feminist bloggers are able to navigate these tension through their mobilization of feminist politics.

CREATING POLITICAL SPACES IN PUBLIC MEDIA: GIRL FEMINIST BLOGGERS' PERFORMANCE OF "VOCAL POLITICS"

I have already suggested in chapter two that making feminism visible is understood by many girl feminist bloggers as an important activist strategy, and here I will build upon this discussion by demonstrating how girl feminist bloggers utilize both self-produced and commercial media to establish themselves as vocal, productive citizens. I maintain that while girl feminist bloggers have been able to successfully create spaces for girls to publicly perform feminism, we must consider their strategies in relation to the privileging of visibility, display, and individual entrepreneurship promoted by postfeminist and neoliberal discourses.

In addition to Tavi (whom I'll discuss in detail later in this chapter), both Julie Zeilinger, editor of the *FBomb* and Jamie Keiles, who created the *Seventeen Magazine Project*, have made a concerted effort to insert their voices into public conversations, often serving as commentators and experts in mainstream adult-dominated media, such as radio shows, television segments, newspaper articles, and magazine features. Their engagement with the mainstream media, while often incorporating a critique of such media into their platform, is a significant part of their activist strategy that positions them as very active public figures and, as I'll argue, demonstrates a citizenship practice that defines girl feminist bloggers.

Julie Zeilinger has an impressive list of media credentials. In the four years since launching the *FBomb*, Julie has been featured in such media outlets as *The Daily Beast*, *Salon*, and *More Magazine*, where she was listed as one of the “New Feminists You Need To Know.” In 2010, she was named one of the *Times of London*'s “40 Bloggers Who Really Count” and has participated in numerous panels, including the “Women in the World” summit in New York City in March 2012. In April 2012 Julie released her first book, *A Little F'd Up: Why Feminism Is Not a Dirty Word* with Seal Press, which received significant coverage in the *Huffington Post*, *Forbes Magazine*, the *Melissa Harris-Perry Show* (MSNBC), and *Glamour Magazine*. She continues to operate the *FBomb*, despite starting her undergraduate degree at Barnard College in fall 2011, and also maintains her own promotional website, where she is described as “one of the leaders of the fourth wave feminist movement” (Zeilinger, 2012b).

Similarly, Jamie Keiles gained significant mainstream media attention after her blogging project, *The Seventeen Magazine Project*, became a viral success online in June 2010.⁷ Jamie decided to use *Seventeen Magazine* as a guide for daily living for the month before her high school graduation, and blogged daily about her experience. National

Public Radio's "All Things Considered", Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's "Q," *Bust Magazine*, and her local Fox News affiliate, amongst other media outlets, covered Jamie's story, and her blog quickly garnered hundreds of comments based on the publicity. As a result of this overwhelming public interest in the *Seventeen Magazine Project*, she then launched an initiative called "Hey Mainstream Media," a photo submission project encouraging people to use handmade signs to critique narrow media representations of femininity and masculinity. In September 2010, *Woman's Day Magazine* named Jamie as one of the eight most influential bloggers under age 21. Jamie, currently an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, is now a regular contributor to Tavi's *Rookie Magazine* and *Chicago Weekly*. She is signed to Folio Literary Management and working on a book about media and culture for older teenage girls.

Throughout this dissertation I have been demonstrating how girl feminist bloggers have used blogging to create their own spaces to perform feminist identities and activism. As we can discern from the examples of Julie, Jamie, and Tavi that I briefly sketch above, a significant part of this practice involves what I'm calling the performance of "vocal politics" within public space. I employ this concept to refer to the way in which girl feminist bloggers speak publicly about being a feminist and the need to take action to make gender equality a reality. The ability for bloggers to perform these vocal politics publicly is often through their use of mainstream commercial, and often traditional, media to publicize their own blogs and feminist politics.

For example, in 2009 Julie actively courted media attention for the newly launched *FBomb* by sending out a press release to both traditional media outlets, as well as other blogs. She tells me,

I think often times when bloggers start out they either underestimate the power of the already established blogosphere or feel that the only way to establish themselves is to do so independently – that they can only be successful if they make it on their own. I think both are pretty limited ways of thinking. When I started the *FBomb*, I sent out a press release to let other people know - in the blogosphere and in terms of other media – about what I was doing, I figured that some people might be interested and write about the *FBomb*, thus generating interest and audience, which is exactly what ended up happening.

Julie's comments and actions are fascinating to consider in that they demonstrate her conscious attempt to produce an audience for the *FBomb*. The strategy of using a press release to generate publicity for one's feminist blog no doubt assumes the logic of neoliberal entrepreneurship, whereby individuals are expected to brand themselves through visibility and media circulation (Banet-Weiser, 2012b). Releasing a press release is also a classed practice, requiring the resources of both time and money; as well as the cultural and social capital needed to understand the workings of the media industry. Consequently, while this tactic worked for Julie, many other girls would not be able to employ such a strategy to publicize their own blogs.

For example, while Amandine performs a vocal politics through her blog and actively participates in events such as the NOW Conference in summer 2012, she is unable to cultivate the visibility that Julie is able to due to her religious identity and attendance at a conservative religious school. Consequently, Amandine never posts picture of herself online and does not use her last name in correspondences related to her blog, making the celebrity achieved by Julie impossible for Amandine at this point in her life. Julie also likely attains easier access to mainstream media than some girls; due not only to her class position, but her race and normative body type which correspond to the hegemonic ideals privileged in popular culture. Consequently, we must keep these

limitations in mind, as they no doubt shape *which* girl feminist bloggers attain mainstream visibility.

While releasing a press release to generate an audience for one's blog seems indicative of a performance of can-do girlhood, I am arguing that bloggers like Julie complicate this assumption by utilizing their public personas as a platform to perform a vocal feminist politics to a wide audience. In doing so, girl feminist bloggers make feminism an accessible discourse to girls (as well as boys, men, and women) who may not encounter feminism in their daily lives. To wit: Julie's decision to write and publish a book is another example of her desire to engage with a larger audience through traditional commercial media; a decision that also sees Julie participate in the publishing industry more broadly by hiring a publicist, generating "buzz" through the *FBomb* (which contained a link to the book's Amazon.com page), and engaging in promotional work such as interviews with major commercial media outlets (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 Julie promoting her book on "Live on Lakeside" on NBC Cleveland, August 2012, author screen shot from Julie's website

For example, Julie's book publicity facilitated her coverage in many publications including *Teen Vogue*, the popular teenage counterpart to *Vogue Magazine*, and a magazine that rarely addresses feminist politics. The May 2012 article (which appeared on the magazine's website) was titled, "Teen Author Julie Zeilinger on Her Feminist Blog and New Book," and was formatted as a question and answer with Julie, who responded to questions about topics such as: her own interest in and definition of feminism; girls' supposed fear of the term; specific feminist issues in Julie's book; the relationship between fashion and feminism; and the women's health care debate (Tishgart, 2012). Unlike most other teen magazines that utilize a postfeminist discourse of "empowerment" rather than "feminism," the *Teen Vogue* article directly engages with feminism (likely due to Julie's use of the term) and links to the *FBomb* website, providing readers the opportunity to explore feminism beyond the scope of the article. Julie's ability to produce political space within the pages of a fashion magazine that reaches thousands of teenage girls is significant, as she is making feminism an accessible discourse to many *Teen Vogue* readers who may not otherwise encounter feminist politics in their daily lives.

While Jamie did not initially court media attention for her blog in the same way that Julie did, she later used her public profile and the connections that she made as a feminist blogger as a platform for her feminist politics. For example, after the media attention she received from the *Seventeen Magazine Project* in June 2010, Jamie continued being active in the feminist blogosphere both through her tumblr site and her blog *Teenagerie*, where she maintained a significant following. She used her experience with producing media and speaking to mainstream media, as well as her name recognition, to organize and publicize the June 2011 Chicago Slutwalk; where she was

able to create more public space for her vocal feminist politics (Figure 4.2). Since then, Jamie has begun to write for Tavi's *Rookie Magazine* and also continues to work on her book. While Jamie's use of her public persona differs from Julie's, both bloggers demonstrate an interest in maintaining a public visibility from which to speak as political citizens.



Figure 4.2 Jamie (far left) with Tavi (middle) at Slutwalk Chicago, June 2011, author screen shot from *Refinery29.com*

I am arguing that it is this interest in cultivating a public *political* identity that differs from postfeminist girlhood subjectivities, which Harris (2004) describes as not only being apolitical, but specifically disconnected from feminist politics. Both Julie and Jamie publicly perform a feminist identity and advocate for other girls to do the same.

Furthermore, both bloggers demonstrate girls' right to be present in online public space, maintaining their blogs independent of their parents or other adults. This differs from other feminist websites such as SPARK (www.sparksummit.com), which includes blog posts by feminist girls, yet is organized and managed by adult women. Both Julie and Jamie's success then also reveals the fallacy of protectionist discourses that suggest adult supervision and management is necessary to prevent girls from harming themselves through their online public presence.

These examples must be considered in relation to theorizations of girls' culture and space that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, as they complicate notions of girls' bedroom culture as both consumptive and private. Moreover, they also suggest a necessary rethinking of conceptualizing girls' online practices as "virtual bedroom culture," as suggested by Jacqueline Reid-Walsh and Claudia Mitchell (2004). While Reid-Walsh and Mitchell do acknowledge both the public and private dimensions of girls' self-created websites, they fail to recognize how girls' websites function as spaces for girls such as Julie and Jamie to perform a vocal politics in the public sphere.

Julie's comments that I quote above suggest that girls such as herself are involved in practices of cultural production that they don't want to remain private; indeed, they want their voices to be heard amongst a larger public sphere in order to produce social change. Jamie feels the same; in a December 2011 interview with *The Harvard Independent* she says, "I am pretty confident that the future of social justice will come when there is a shift in who is producing media" (Hou, 2011). In this sense, girl feminist bloggers create blogs as a strategy to "broadcast" themselves beyond the confines of their bedroom and immediate peer group with the hopes of making feminism accessible to more girls and enacting social change, a strategy that Kearney (2006) also links to riot grrrl.

I want to emphasize that I am not arguing that girl feminist bloggers are the first or only girl activists historically who have been invested in cultivating a public visibility through combining an engagement with commercial media with their own media production. Instead, it is more accurate to understand girl feminist bloggers as part of a continuum of this type of activism. For example, Kirsten Pike (2011) examined how teenage girls regularly wrote columns in *Seventeen Magazine* during the height of the women's liberation movement, using the popular commercial magazine for girls as a space to advocate for gender equality and feminist politics. Pike acknowledges that girl writers often problematically reproduced an individualistic approach to feminism, perhaps unsurprising considering the emphasis on individualism and self-improvement found throughout *Seventeen*. Nonetheless, she recognizes the girl writers as performing their own form of "do-it-yourself citizenship," where girls are engaging in "civic action and dialogue by circulating their own ideas, stories, and opinions [about feminism and gender equality] to a broader network of readers" (68).

More recently, riot grrrls have cultivated a public visibility for their feminist politics, most notably through their music, with bands such as Bikini Kill, Sleater Kinney, and Huggy Bear gaining significant mainstream popularity and commercial success. As rock bands, these groups were sonically loud, producing political spaces in whatever public spaces they played; as well as within the music industry. Additionally, riot grrrl coverage in the early 1990s glossy magazine *Sassy* was also crucial for popularizing the movement. Erin Smith, a riot grrrl zinester and guitarist of the influential riot grrrl band Bratmobile, worked as an intern at *Sassy* introducing girl readers to zines, DIY culture, and riot grrrl. In *How Sassy Changed My Life: A Love Letter to the Greatest Teen Magazine of All Time*, Kara Jesella and Marisa Meltzer (2007) argue that while plenty of girls across the country were introduced to feminist

politics via the magazine, *Sassy's* coverage of riot grrrl was not uncontroversial. Jesella and Meltzer (2007) argue that the underground nature of riot grrrl and its connections to anti-establishment youth culture like punk meant that some riot grrrls viewed the *Sassy* coverage as co-opting and commercializing the movement.

This controversy points to an assumed divide between mainstream commercial popular culture and “subcultural” or alternative culture. Catherine Driscoll (2002) argues that this binary fails to account for the ways in which girls’ culture (in which she include both riot grrrls and the Spice Girls) exists between these tensions. She argues, “Feminism itself belongs to the popular culture field, a point feminist discussion of popular culture often seems to ignore even in fields where the influence of feminism is most palpable” (280). Indeed, this has been especially true for third wave feminism, which emphasizes the importance of popular culture as a site for feminist politics (Heywood and Drake, 1997). Thus, I am suggesting that rather than view Tavi, Julie, and Jamie’s cultivation of celebrity within the realm of popular commercial culture solely as a postfeminist strategy informed by the mantra of “living large,” I’m arguing that their actions may be better understood as indicative of both a longstanding girls’ culture and the influence of third wave feminism; which has always emphasized the integration of feminism within popular culture (Keller, 2011).

GIRLHOOD VISIBILITY ACROSS MEDIA

By cultivating celebrity and producing political spaces outside of their blogs, Julie, Jamie, and as I will discuss shortly, Tavi, perform a public feminist girlhood that differs from many of the highly visible girls we usually see in public culture. While we frequently see girls within mainstream media, they are often only granted access to public space based upon their perceived commercial value to companies such as the Disney

Corporation – a company that has been highly invested in the production of girl celebrities (Blue forthcoming 2013; Sweeney 2008). For example, Kathleen Sweeney (2008) describes former Disney girl celebrities such as Christina Aguilera, Britney Spears, and later, Raven Symone and Hilary Duff, as an “unexpected cash cow” for Disney (69). As Morgan Blue (2013) documents, Disney’s success with girl celebrities has encouraged the corporation to continue producing highly visible girl celebrities, such as Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez, and Demi Lovato via multiple media platforms, including; television shows, music, movies, fashion lines, and other branded products ranging from paint colors to prepackaged salads.⁸

As Harris (2004) notes, the commercial value of girlhood is usually contingent on a performance of a can-do girlhood that is apolitical and informed by hegemonic femininity; yet active and entrepreneurial. Indeed, a significant aspect of Disney’s girl celebrities, including Symone, Cyrus, and Gomez, are their performances as active, “public citizens” (Blue, 2013). For example, Blue describes how Cyrus and Gomez have been active in Friends for Change, a Disney corporate citizenship initiative advocating for kids’ participation in environmental and wildlife protection. While these issues are no doubt worthy of public attention, Blue argues that the vague and apolitical framing of the Disney initiative is safely uncontroversial for its girl celebrity advocates and continues to hail Disney fans as consumers that can produce change through purchasing particular Disney products attached to the initiative.

Similarly, Blue maintains that while Symone has participated in more girl-focused civic engagement with a “feminist bent,” she nonetheless presents herself as uncontroversial, safely securing her positioning as publicly active, yet not activist. Blue contends,

Representing massive corporations such as Dove and Merck, Symone has worked directly with girls, encouraging them to accept and appreciate their bodies, but with commercial sponsors, she may also be encouraging girls to connect body acceptance with consumerism while perpetuating neoliberal discourses that individualize the systemic and institutional inequalities that organize U.S. society. In addition, her efforts to model appropriate ways of performing femininity through dress, make-up, and behavior may divest her activism of its feminist potential (45).

Thus, like Cyrus and Gomez, Symone performs a can-do girlhood that is publicly visible and active, but not invested in politics or advocating for progressive social change.

It is worth asking why the celebration of girls' visibility has not resulted in more instances of girls that are politically vocal within public space, like Julie, Jamie, or, as I'll soon describe, Tavi. Indeed, this inquiry makes visible the difference between girls' visibility as a defining feature of postfeminist can-do girlhood, and girls' agency, what I'm arguing is central to the model of girls' citizenship advocated throughout this dissertation. While a sense of agency grants girls the ability to be vocal as political citizens, Harris (2004) argues that visibility does not guarantee one's access to voice. She contends, "At the same time that can-do girls are being celebrated for sassiness and public visibility, what they are able to say is perhaps more limited than ever. In other words, more opportunities for display and expression have resulted in the increased management of young people's participation in the public sphere and in fewer opportunities for their privacy" (133). Harris' argument again points to the tension between can-do visibility and a protectionist discourse that prescribes management of girls' public selves. In order to more fully interrogate this contradiction I now turn to my case study of Tavi Gevinson, whose extensive media coverage and productive career as a

fashion and feminist blogger, as well as the editor in chief of *Rookie Magazine*, demonstrates how girls' use of public space remains contentious.

TAVI GEVINSON AS A PUBLIC GIRL FEMINIST: A GIRL OUT OF PLACE?

Tavi Gevinson is not representative of most of the girl feminist bloggers that I discuss in this dissertation, in that few have received the kind of celebrity and name recognition as Tavi. However, Tavi's exceptional situation serves as a useful case study that I argue makes legible the contradictory discourses that I have been discussing as shaping the ways in which teenage girls – including “non-celebrity” girl feminist bloggers - are both celebrated and restricted within public space. For example, throughout the nearly five years that Tavi has been in the global public spotlight, she's been described with an array of suggestive words and phrases, including: “pint-sized” (*Teen Vogue* blog, 2009; Graham, 2012), “the size of a pixie” (Schaer, 2009), “muse-of-the-moment” (*Teen Vogue* blog, 2009), “novelty” (Sauers, 2009), “pocket-sized child” (Spiridakis, 2010), “teen bloette” (Schaer, 2009), “wunderkind” (Measure, 2010; Walker, 2011), “feminist” (Rock, 2011), “uber-precocious” (Rock, 2011), “just a kid” (Rubin, 2011), “Internet sweetheart/ occasional lightning rod” (Lambert, 2011), and “petite tastemaker” (Schulman, 2012), to name only a few.

The following discussion is based upon my discursive and ideological textual analysis of approximately sixty purposefully chosen media stories about Tavi, spanning from her debut as a fashion blogger in the spring of 2008 until September 2012, when she released *Rookie Yearbook One*. I will discuss my findings in this section using the following thematic discourses: (1) Tavi as an extraordinary girl, (2) Tavi as minimized, small, and ultimately insignificant, and (3) Tavi as a fangirl. I suggest that together these discourses function to position Tavi as what I'm calling “a girl out of place,” occupying

public space in a way that challenges postfeminist norms of girlhood through her role as a media and cultural producer and her refusal to perform an apolitical “girl power” subjectivity. Tavi’s adoption and performance of a public feminist identity then, has allowed her to create her own public space where she invites other girls to be political, activist, and feminist.

Before moving on to my analysis, it is useful to map out the public space that I’m discussing here in relation to Tavi. Having begun her career as a fashion blogger, Tavi’s entry into the public sphere was through the fashion industry, which comprises a wide range of global participants, including designers, producers (garment workers), distributors (corporations, independent retailers), marketers, consumers, and media (both traditional and “new”). I draw on Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu’s (2011) characterization of the industry as the “cultural economy of fashion,” which recognizes the ways in which culture and the global economy are becoming increasingly intertwined, where “we have seen culture expand from a form of social expression or way of life into an important mode of economic production” (3). In particular, neoliberal discourses promoting individual enterprise, entrepreneurship, and the self-regulating, self-disciplined creative worker have dominated the cultural economy of fashion over the past twenty years (McRobbie, 1998; Nguyen Tu, 2011).

It is also crucial to understand fashion as a particularly gendered phenomenon. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a thorough analysis of this history, McRobbie (1998) describes how fashion’s association with consumerism, mass culture, youth culture, and women has positioned it as a feminized industry. Nguyen Tu (2011) also highlights the gendered nature of fashion, arguing, “occupations such as fashion design are gendered not just because women do them, but because they require a model of self-discipline and insecurity that is a fundamentally gendered model” (4). Based on

the feminization of fashion we may expect Tavi to move seamlessly into this public sphere; however, my analysis suggests otherwise.

A Blogging “Wunderkind”: Tavi as Extraordinary Girl

A fall 2011 *New Zealand Herald* article titled, “Teen fashion blogger turns media mogul,” typifies much of the framing of Tavi by mainstream media. Journalist Harriet Walker writes,

Web wunderkind Tavi Gevinson shot to fame in 2008 at just 12 years old, when her blog *Style Rookie* became a must-click for the fashion crowd. Since then, she has gone from strength to strength, and from front row to backstage, ad campaigns and magazine covers. And this week saw the launch of her own online magazine, of which she is editor-in-chief and which sees her presiding over a staff of almost 40 people, most of whom are older than her.

Walker’s framing of Tavi, including word choice, is worthy of analysis. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, “wunderkind” is defined as “a child prodigy; also: one who succeeds in a competitive or highly difficult field or profession at an early age” (“Wunderkind”, 2012). The word wunderkind then, crystallizes a dominant discourse employed by journalists to talk about Tavi, a discourse that I’m referring to as *Tavi as extraordinary girl*. This discourse portrays Tavi as somewhat of a prodigy, writing insightful and creative fashion criticism that revealed a knowledge of the industry that few possess. However, Tavi also proved talented beyond her role as fashion critic, demonstrating a keen understanding of online media at a young age, using it to expand her brand into numerous media projects, and gaining mainstream visibility that many adults never achieve.

However, central to this discourse of extra-ordinariness is the idea that Tavi represents a deviation from “normal” or “average” girlhood. Tavi, accordingly, is presented as special and more creative, smarter, dedicated, and harder working *than other girls her age*.⁹ This idea that Tavi is inherently different from most girls is emphasized continually throughout media coverage of her. For example, in a July 8, 2010 *Blackbook* blog post, an anonymous staff blogger details Tavi’s visit to the magazine’s New York office in order to style a shoot for the publication. The blogger writes, “Her voice belongs, of course, to that of a teenage girl, and she carries herself that way. But hype be damned, she is not like other teenage girls” (Haramis, 2010). Thus, while Tavi is celebrated in many of these articles, she is consistently positioned in opposition to her girl peers. While Tavi and her work is praised for being “mature, intuitive, and inspired,” the implication is that most teenage girls are immature, conforming, and have little cultural insight (Haramis, 2010). Moreover, in doing so journalists reinforce hegemonic and dominant notions of girls as culturally unproductive, emphasizing Tavi as an exceptional case, rather than indicative of the creative skills many girls exercise in their daily lives.

In her book, *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism & Social Change Across the Americas* Jessica Taft (2011) describes how during the course of her research she often encountered adults who suggested that her girl activist study participants must be “truly ‘exceptional’ young women who are very different from their peers” (42). Taft argues, “By proclaiming youth activism and youth activists to be extraordinary, adults perpetuate an association of youthfulness with political inaction or inability. Normal youth, in this narrative, are apathetic and politically disengaged. It is only the talented and committed few who are seen as capable of becoming politically active” (44). I am suggesting that by positioning Tavi as one of these “exceptional” young women, journalists who describe

her as a wunderkind often reproduce the invisibility of the many other girls who are engaged in productive, creative, and political projects.

While often seemingly complimentary, the exceptional girl discourse can quickly morph into mocking and condescending jabs, as evident in several articles about Tavi. For example, in one of the first stories about her, *New York Times* writer Elizabeth Spiridakis (2008) writes, “Meet the next generation of style bloggers. They might not be able to drive yet, but their fashion sense is so incredible it’s actually intimidating.” But Spiridakis’ tone hardens in the next paragraph when she quips, “As an almost-30-year-old style blogger myself, I have to ask: Whom will I envy next? Kindergartners?” Spiridakis’ snarky shift implies that while regarding the fashion advice of tween bloggers as serious cultural work might be trendy right now, it is actually ridiculous, an equivalent to celebrating the style of a young child. Yet, Spiridakis confesses that she’s intimidated by the young fashion bloggers, hinting that Tavi and her peers are potentially threatening to Spiridakis’ own status as an adult style blogger. While Spiridakis celebrates Tavi’s “creative, supportive, [and] confident” demeanor, she simultaneously attempts to contain the threat her girliness presents to the public space of the adult-dominated fashion industry. Thus, Spiridakis simultaneously celebrates and contains Tavi’s status as prominent fashion blogger, a complex move that dominates much of the media coverage Tavi has received.

A “Pint Sized Internet Phenom”: Minimizing Tavi

While Tavi is consistently positioned as an extraordinary girl in media accounts, many of these stories simultaneously attempt to contain Tavi through what I’m describing as a minimizing or diminutive discourse. While these discourses may seem contradictory,

I argue that they actually complement one another by recognizing Tavi's accomplishments as indicative of "can-do" girlhood, yet ultimately attempting to silence her by employing a protectionist discourse that maintains girlhood as located in the private sphere (Harris, 2004).

Thus, while the discourse that positions Tavi as extraordinary paints Tavi as an almost larger-than-life figure in constant circulation, this minimizing discourse is almost always paired with language that, in a fascinating contradictory move, emphasizes Tavi's smallness. For example, words and phrases such as "the little sensation," "pint-size," "tiny," "pocket-size child," "13 year-old fashion urchin," and "size of a pixie" are commonly used by adult journalists and bloggers to describe her. While this language is supposedly used to describe Tavi's small stature – not uncommon for a preteen or young teenage girl or boy - I am suggesting that the consistent use of such terms must be understood as a specifically ageist and gendered framing of Tavi, rather than as offering objective descriptors merely relaying an observable fact. In other words, the constant framing of Tavi through these terms serves to link Tavi's physicality with a state of disempowerment, a position of dependence, and a lack of agency – qualities that are often problematically associated with children in dominant social discourses (Sanchez-Eppler, 2005).

In her book *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture*, Illana Nash (2006) describes how the 1938 movie adaptation of the Nancy Drew novel series transformed the character of Nancy from an intelligent, mature, confident, and agential character to one displaying ignorance, frivolity, and hyperfemininity. Nash argues that this shift is not coincidental and reveals a cultural anxiety with the portrayal of a transgressive girlhood on the big screen during an era of social decay and an accompanying crisis of masculinity. Indeed, Nash contends that this potential threat was

averted through the “hollowed-out, diminished Nancy” who appealed to the male gaze, replacing the savvy, independent literary Nancy in movie theaters (97). Nash’s attention to Nancy’s minimized or “diminished” status, both physically (she appears tiny in comparison to her father, despite being sixteen) and intellectually, reveals a lengthy history of discursively minimizing the public presence of teenage girls; a practice that must be considered in relation to my analysis of Tavi’s media coverage.

I’m also arguing that this discourse is connected to the contemporary protectionist discourse used to frame girls who publicly exert themselves in ways that are too public, which I discussed earlier in this chapter. For example, in an August 2008 article in *USA Today* entitled, “Young fashion bloggers are worrisome trend to parents,” Amanda Kwan uses a protectionist discourse to elaborate on the proliferation of young fashion bloggers; suggesting that parents must closely monitor their children’s online activities by providing a sidebar with tips on “How to Keep a Young Blogger Safe.” Kwan begins the article by describing a then twelve- year-old Tavi posting images of herself to her fashion blog. Kwan continues, “To some wary adults, [Tavi is] in a world where she doesn’t belong. Unlike a typical social network page, a blog can be seen by anyone. And at least one young fashion blogger says she’s been recognized by strangers on the street – a worrisome turn for adults worried about privacy and predators.” By suggesting that Tavi (and other teenage girl bloggers) is “in a world where she doesn’t belong,” Kwan’s article problematically implies that the public space of the Internet, which “can be seen by anyone,” is not for girls, reproducing traditional binaries that affirm public space as both masculine and adult.

This idea is emphasized again later in the article, when Kwan notes how Tavi became upset upon discovering online comments that questioned her true age, comments that Kwan characterizes as ranging from “suspicious to nasty” in nature. Kwan quotes

Tavi's father, Steve Gevinson, describing how a disturbed Tavi had trouble sleeping and woke up crying for several nights after finding the comments. While many people – men and women, adults and children – would likely be upset to find such comments about them online, Kwan emphasizes Tavi's age and gender as indicative of her reaction. Citing Addie Schwarz, the CEO of a company about to launch a "kid-safe" social network, Kwan writes, "Such negative responses [to online comments] are the reason why children shouldn't be blogging, Swartz says. 'Whoever may comment and whatever feedback you may get – girls are very impressionable, especially girls in this age that we're... talking about.'" While it is not surprising that Swartz has a stake in presenting blogging as dangerous and personally damaging to girls, her economic motive goes unquestioned by Kwan. Instead, Kwan's article minimizes the agency of young bloggers like Tavi, prescribes parental surveillance as necessary to ensure Tavi's safety (something that, interestingly, Tavi's father seems to resist) and even suggests that Tavi has no legitimate right to occupy public space.

Kwan's article is not the only one that questions the legitimacy of Tavi's public presence using a minimizing discourse. Scott Schuman, a prominent fashion photographer and blogger at *The Sartorialist*, is another such writer who has employed ageist and sexist discourse to minimize Tavi's cultural power. In a September 2011 interview with *The Talks*, Schuman responds to a question about the influence of young fashion bloggers by saying,

Well I don't think her [Tavi's] audience is that big. I think her success is a little bit of a conspiracy by established print media that wanted to show that this blog thing is not that important, that it's done by a bunch of twelve year olds. But a lot of us are serious grown-ups. I think it's great that Tavi can create a blog and write for other people that are like-minded – probably other kids around her age – but I don't know how that is going to help a 26-year old, if she has never had a

boyfriend or any of that kind of stuff. She's just a kid, so she can talk about art and stuff only in an abstract way [Emphasis added.] (*The Talks* blog, 2011).

While Schuman later apologized for his offensive response, his original comments demonstrate how positioning Tavi as “just a kid” is employed to minimize her accomplishments, and I would argue, the threat she poses to Schuman's own career and masculine, adult cultural authority. By suggesting that only people that are Tavi's age read her blog, Schuman attempts to protect the dominant binary that celebrates cultural authorities as male, adult, white, serious, and tasteful, while those outside of this identity are viewed as childlike, frivolous, unable to understand art and culture, and often, female.

This binary is also clearly gendered. Indeed, while many of these words used to describe Tavi literally minimize her, they also work concurrently to feminize her. For example, words used to describe Tavi, like “pixie” and “bloette,” are distinctively feminine and highlight Tavi's femininity as a defining feature of her public presence, effectively linking femininity to smallness. Similarly, Schuman's dismissal of Tavi's cultural critique because “she has never had a boyfriend” implies it is men and boys that are the influential force in women's and girls' cultural production and without them, females cannot possibly be legitimate cultural actors. Consequently, Schuman's comment also heterosexualizes Tavi, while still entertaining suggestions of lesbianism due to her perceived lack of romantic relationships with men.

The *minimizing Tavi* discourse also relies on gendered tropes to position Tavi's blogging as private and inconsequential, reifying a normative understanding of girls' cultural practices as located in the private sphere, while the public sphere remains a masculine and adult realm. For example, Spiridakis (2008) likens tweens' fashion blogging to bedroom culture, writing, “Mainly, though, these sites are part of a

developing sense of fashion and self, today's equivalent of doing your hair 20 ways before bedtime. Only you use a digital mirror." This analogy is particularly fascinating to me, as Spiridakis seems to mobilize the trope of the girl's bedroom in an attempt to contain girls' blogging within the privacy of their bedrooms. While McRobbie and Garber (1991) and later Kearney (2007a) have demonstrated that bedroom culture has public and political potential, Spiridakis' prose does not acknowledge this and instead implies that girls' blogging has no real public implications, just as doing one's hair "20 ways before bedtime" is a narcissistic and irrelevant act. This framing of Tavi by a young adult female writer is interesting because it reveals how common it is for girls' cultural practices to be viewed as private, personal, irrelevant and beauty-oriented, rather than public and political, an assumption that I am attempting to refute in this dissertation.

In addition to physical descriptors that highlight Tavi's small size and feminize her, other words are used to discredit and minimize Tavi by dismissing her celebrity as merely a trend. To wit: Kwan's (2008) article in which I previously discussed, cites Tavi's father as commenting that his daughter will perhaps "grow out of" her interest in blogging, suggesting that Tavi's passion for blogging may only be a passing hobby. Because trends are understood as short-lived, inconsequential, and often as indicative of a mass culture, this positioning also can be seen as a key part of this broader minimizing discourse. For example, in a December 2009 article on *New York's* "The Cut" prominent American fashion writer Lesley M.M. Blume called Tavi a "novelty" three times, implying that Tavi is merely attracting fleeting amusement that the fashion world will soon tire of. Blume goes on to publicly doubt that Tavi writes her own work at all, commenting, "She's either a tween savant or she's got a Tavi team" (as quoted in Odell, 2009). Blume's dismissal of Tavi's talent and agency highlights the way that this discourse attempts to contain Tavi's threat to the established fashion hierarchies,

suggesting that a girl could not possibly successfully participate in the fashion industry outside the role of consumer.

Blume's questioning of Tavi's authorship is not uncommon and has long been used to discredit the cultural contributions of women and members of other marginalized groups. For example, powerful female musicians who challenge feminine stereotypes such as Courtney Love and M.I.A. have been accused of having men write their best work (Haddad, 2011). In this case, it is Tavi's status as girl that becomes the basis for her dismissal by both adult women and men already established in the fashion industry. Thus, instead of using Tavi as an example of the creative and cultural agency that many girls exercise in their everyday lives, adults such as Blume choose to suggest that Tavi is merely a short-lived fluke, reproducing dominant understanding of girls as passive, flighty, consumers dependent on adults rather than serious cultural producers with their own agency.

“Wide-eyed and Obsessed”: Tavi as Fangirl

The increasing popularity of blogging as a cultural practice has fostered another dominant discourse that has been used to construct Tavi: that of bloggers as fannish, obsessive, and thus, inauthentic, unreliable, and uncritical cultural commentators. While fashion journalism has a lengthy history in popular culture, fashion blogging is a relatively new phenomenon, becoming popular only within the past decade. Thus, many industry insiders who have worked in fashion since long before the emergence of the fashion blogosphere argue that bloggers lack the rigor, expertise, and established dedication of older fashion journalists and editors.

For example, in a story about Tavi at Paris fashion week, *The Independent's* Susie Measure (2010) cites Robert Johnson, associate editor at the men's lifestyle magazine *GQ*, as saying, "Bloggers are so attractive to the big design houses because they are so wide-eyed and obsessed, but they don't have the critical faculties to know what's good and what's not. As soon as they've been invited to the shows, they can no longer criticize because then they won't be invited back." Likewise, in a March 2012 article in the *Toronto Star* David Graham writes, "Bloggers are the new critics. Often dazzled by celebrity culture, at best they offer snappy if uninformed commentary ... And as social media (including tweeting) insinuates itself in the front row, considered opinion is more often a simplistic rush to judgment." At the end of the article Graham lists three young women, including Tavi, as a key leaders of this growing and supposedly uncritical fashion blogosphere.¹⁰

Johnson's use of the words "wide-eyed" and "obsessed" to describe fashion bloggers and Graham's characterization of bloggers being "dazzled by celebrity culture" negatively position fashion bloggers as fans rather than experts or critics, and draws on longstanding problematic assumptions of fans as shallow, mindless consumers, and celebrity-obsessed (Jenson, 1992). This characterization has been particularly true of girl fans, whom as Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs (1986) note, have been portrayed by (often male) adults as merely conforming to the masses and/or unable to control their own frenzied response to their celebrity crush. Furthermore, Johnson's assertion that fashion bloggers "don't have the critical faculties to know what's good and what's not" is unfounded and incorrectly assumes that print fashion editors and journalists are always impartial, critical, unenthused and have no connections with designers and fashion companies.¹¹

I am suggesting that Johnson's and Graham's critiques are informed by and make visible larger cultural binaries, including those of critic/fan, producer/consumer, high culture/low culture, traditional/new media, and professional/amateur. These binaries work together in maintaining current cultural hierarchies, which often privilege the voices of adult, wealthy, white males (and sometimes females) as purveyors of desirable cultural tastes, as evident by the comments made by Scott Schuman discussed in the previous section. Because many fashion bloggers are girls and young women, the above comments can be read also as specifically gendered, drawing on longstanding notions of girls and women as fans and consumers of mass/low cultural products, rather than media producers or sophisticated audiences (Kearney, 2006). Thus, this discourse positions blogging as a fannish, uncritical, and ultimately a low-culture feminine practice, effectively containing Tavi's cultural authority and maintaining the positioning of adult men like Schuman and adult women like Blume as cultural experts.

I want to draw specific attention to the ways in which the positioning of an expert or professional in relation to an amateur is situated within dominant discourses about class and gender. In their study of the discursive construction of amateur filmmaking, David Buckingham, Maria Pini and Rebekah Willett (2009) argue that despite popular rhetoric claiming that the distinction between amateur and professional is being blurred by the proliferation of easy-to-use media technologies, this binary continues to exist, yet is complicated by various "grades" of amateur media-makers. For example, they distinguish an amateur, an every-day user who does not intend to distribute their work, from a "serious amateur," the latter being characterized as someone wanting to improve their practice, investing in more expensive equipment, as well as the time needed to do so. Thus, Buckingham, Pini, and Willett note that the serious amateur is a classed category marked by middle and upper-middle class taste sensibilities and often gendered

male, yet lacking in the knowledge of an expert. While Tavi may be seen as a serious amateur, and as an upper-middle class white girl has the cultural and social capital to occupy such a position, her age and gender complicate this positioning often reserved for aspirational middle-class men and boys. Consequently, Tavi is discursively constructed not as a professional or even a serious amateur, but as an amateur, a lucky fan whose media products should be consumed by friends and family – not by the wider public.

“PEOPLE GOT REALLY MAD ABOUT A GIANT PINK BOW!” TAVI AS A GIRL OUT OF PLACE?

I am arguing that the three discourses I have outlined above are often employed together by those writing about Tavi to suggest that she is occupying public space in a way that is inappropriate for a girl. I want to emphasize two aspects of this sentiment; first, that Tavi’s body is positioned in public, and second, that she is mobilizing her public body in an inappropriate way. Consequently, it is important to recognize that it is not necessarily solely the fact that Tavi is a public figure; indeed, the “can-do” girl is encouraged to occupy certain public spaces, but that the public spaces Tavi chooses to inhabit upsets some of the logic of the “can-do” girl as a consumer and adult-managed phenomenon, as I will explain in this section.

In late January 2010, the fashion blogosphere exploded with news of Tavi’s accessory of choice for the exclusive Christian Dior Fall 2010 Paris Fashion Week show: a giant pink bow designed by Stephen Jones and positioned on top of her head (Figure 4.3). While Tavi’s bow was unlikely the only eye-catching accessory at the Dior show, her hairpiece made headlines because Tavi was sitting in the front row, a coveted position assigned to only the most prominent fashion insiders. In a January 31, 2010 article titled, “Fluff flies as fashion writers pick a catfight with bloggers,” British newspaper *The*

Independent, reported that the “online spat” over Tavi’s headpiece was instigated by Tavi’s much sought-after front row seat at the exclusive Dior event (Measure, 2010). According to tweets from influential senior British fashion writer Paula Reed such as, “At Dior. Not best pleased to be watching couture through 13 year old Tavi’s hat” and “Dior through Tavi’s pesky hat,” Tavi’s hair bow – which was clearly *not* a hat – seemingly blocked the view of the catwalk for those behind the front row blogger, and these regular fashion insiders were not happy about it (Measure, 2010). The editors’ quick use of social media to broadcast the incident to others in the fashion industry soon resulted in an extensive online debate between fashion editors, bloggers, and fans that went beyond the ethics of sporting a large headpiece if you are a front row guest, and instead focused on the politics of age and the authenticity of bloggers as cultural commentators.



Figure 4.3 The view behind Tavi’s bow, January 2010,
author screen shot from *Jezebel*

Many prominent fashion heavyweights were eager to take sides with their industry peers regarding Tavi's bow. To wit: *The Independent* reported that Sarah McCullough, creative concepts manager of Selfridges' and avid blog reader, quipped, "It's mind-blowing that bloggers like Tavi are at the couture shows and being showered with all kinds of gifts. It has soured things a little bit for me" (Measure, 2010). Likewise, Lisa Tant, an editor with Canadian fashion magazine *Flare* tweeted, "Sobbing to think that a 13-year-old gets a front-row seat to cover couture. No justice in this world" (Goldenberg-Fife, 2010). Even some fellow fashion bloggers grasped the opportunity to question Tavi's front-row celebrity status. Kristin Knox, fashion blogger at *The Clothes Whisperer* lashed into Tavi in a January 25, 2010 post, writing,

But after seeing Susie Bubble's twitpic of this blue headed pint-sized fashion cyber terror, Stephen Jones bow larger than her brazenly blocking the views of--ahem-certain (I will not use the word, I will not use the word), screw it--REAL journalists--at the Christian Dior Couture show. Oh the irony of a grown-up correspondent's view of the runway being blocked by someone little older than a child and no taller than Frodo (sorry Grazia). Who needs a booster seat when you've got Stephen Jones befitting you bespoke headgear? Couture my ass, Christian would be rolling in his grave. I mean, with all this school this girl is missing to become Chicago's best traveled eighth-grader, can she even spell the word?

It is worthy to note how many of these comments, such as those by McCullough and Tant, depart from the topic of Tavi's bow and instead focus of Tavi's *legitimacy* as a cultural authority. Indeed, numerous other writers for publications, such as *Toronto Life Magazine* and *Blackbook Magazine*, as well as popular blogs, such as *Jezebel*, weighed in on the controversy, revealing the real issue at stake: *What right does a 13-year-old girl blogger have to be sitting in the front row of the Dior haute couture show?*

While writers often draw on Tavi's physically small stature to describe the blogger, there was little mention of her small size within the context of the Dior controversy. This is significant because, at least seemingly, her small size could actually be a relevant issue here. As Tavi herself noted in a blog post about the Dior show, "I had no intentions of blocking the views of people behind me but it didn't block any views – I'm SHORT [caps in original], so watching the show behind me would be like watching it through a regular-sized adult, but better, because adult heads do not have holes in them... But also, I am really curious as to when news websites will write about something interesting, ie. Not what someone wore to a fashion show" (Measure, 2010). According to Tavi, her bow gave her no more height than a "regular-sized adult," and thus, her shortness allowed her to experiment with fashion in ways that other adults might be prevented from doing.

Instead of describing Tavi in terms of size here, fashion industry insiders like Reed and Tant, discussed Tavi in reference to her age, with both editors specifically describing her as being a "13 year old." While their descriptions hint at Tavi's supposedly extraordinary status, they also carry a subtle implication that the front row of a prominent fashion show is no place for a 13 year old. By highlighting Tavi's age rather than her creative accomplishments, the editors appear to be attempting to use Tavi's age to discredit her. I'm also arguing that these editors may mention her age as a means of disparaging her decision to wear a large pink bow as a choice made by an amateur fashion week fan, rather than a serious cultural commentator.

These comments align with and further perpetuate the hegemonic and dominant discourses of girlhood which I have outlined throughout this chapter, positioning girls as lacking in sophisticated cultural knowledge and thus unable to participate as culturally productive citizens (Kearney, 2006). While editors – and even fellow blogger Knox –

imply that Tavi, as a blogger, has no right to occupy a position formerly reserved for a professional journalist, I am suggesting that it is Tavi's status as *blogger combined with her girlhood* that is problematic to these adult insiders. Indeed, snagging a seat in the front row of a Dior show is coveted because of the high culture connotation of couture fashion, which includes a sophistication beyond the mass commercial appeal associated with girls, and an expert taste that is cultivated through years of experience in the industry (McRobbie, 1998). Thus, dominant discourses of girlhood suggest that Tavi has no right to be in the front row of a Dior show, and it is this logic we see being reproduced by annoyed adult fashion editors. Despite being a prolific blogger, demonstrating both her cultural knowledge and writing talent, Tavi is unable to occupy fully the position of fashion expert because of her status as a girl blogger.

However, rather than attempt to portray herself as older in order to “pass” as an adult, Tavi seems to embrace her girl subjectivity and even emphasize it. For example, the girlishness of the accessory I've been discussing – a pink bow – is important to consider. By choosing this particular accessory Tavi is explicitly drawing attention towards her status as girl, differing herself from the other attendees. I read this move as a strategic choice by Tavi to embrace and make visible her girlhood, perhaps anticipating the backlash that her front row status may generate. Thus, instead of trying to minimize her girlhood in order to appear older and conform to dominant notions about who should receive runway-side seats, Tavi challenges this logic by overtly claiming a right to be in the front row as a girl by sporting the ultimate feminine girlhood accessory: a large pink bow.

Tavi's claim to girlhood, however, is complicated by her dyed gray-blue hair, which became signature to her look for close to two years. A recent *New York Times* profile noted that Tavi was often mistaken for an “outré granny” during this period, due

to her hair color, small size, glasses, and eclectic fashion choices (Schulman, 2012). Like girlhood, old age occupies a marginalized positioning within both the fashion industry as well as the public sphere more broadly. Tavi's choice to adopt signifiers of old age may then be read as an attempt to reclaim a space for old age within public space in much the same way that she does for girlhood. However, her ability to mobilize both simultaneously also suggests a complicating of age that creatively plays on the hype that Tavi is "wise beyond her years" (Campbell, 2010; Weinger, 2013). This specific trope has been used by journalists and fellow bloggers to describe Tavi throughout the entirety of her career, and is a part of the extraordinary girl discourse I outlined earlier that suggests Tavi possesses a wiseness not common to girls. Thus, by dying her hair gray, yet retaining signifiers of girlhood, Tavi encourages us to consider how girls can perform both a wiseness associated with old age and youthful girlishness.

Finally, we may also read Tavi's gray hair as a conscientious challenge to postfeminist beauty norms that privilege signifiers of hegemonic femininity, such as long, sleek, and (often) blonde hair. By purposefully choosing to dye her hair gray (a hair color that many women try to hide due to its association with old age) Tavi refuses to conform to the idealized feminine body norms associated with can-do girlhood. Furthermore, the fact that she is presenting this non-normative girlhood within a cultural space known for its promotion of hegemonic feminine bodies, suggests that Tavi's gray hair may be an act of resistance that is both provocative and progressive.

Tavi herself is keen to the ways in which these discourses have shaped her experiences. In a video she made in early 2012 for the PBS *Makers* series which documents the stories of accomplished females, Tavi recounts the Dior controversy, claiming,

Once people got mad because I was physically taking up space because I wore a giant bow on my head and whoever was sitting behind me said something about it, even though I was really short at the time. And so that became a whole, “she has no right to be there” thing because I’m not a fashion expert or whatever. People got really mad about a giant pink bow! (PBS, *Makers*, 2012)

Here, Tavi acknowledges the politics of space that saturates this story, implying that her status as a girl did not allow her to be “expert,” no matter how well she wrote or how creatively she was styled. My discussion throughout this section can then be viewed within the larger debate about the gendered politics of space, which is also framed by race, class, age, and other identity inequalities, and raises questions that include: Who is entitled to occupy public space and in what contexts? Whose bodies are allowed to be seen in public? Feminist scholars have long been concerned with the politics of space, arguing that women have historically been encouraged to take up less public space, while men are taught to actively embrace it (Bordo, 1993; Young, 1990). This ideal has influenced the ways that women’s and girls’ bodies are understood within the public sphere, and shapes the discourse that suggests Tavi is taking up public space to which she has no right.

As I described earlier in this chapter, fashion has a lengthy history of being a feminized space and girls and young women play a key role in sustaining the industry through the consumption of fashion products. However, girls also participate in the industry in non-consumer roles, most notably as models. The different meanings implied by Tavi’s body occupying a seat in the front row of a couture show and the body of a girl similar in age strutting down the catwalk is made clear in an exchange between Tavi and the Editor-in-Chief of *Vogue Magazine*, Anna Wintour. In an August 2012 interview in *Bust Magazine*, Tavi recounts how Wintour once asked her when she goes to school, implying that the appropriate public space for Tavi to be occupying is the high school –

not the front row at Fashion Week. Tavi explains, “I just felt like, ‘When do your models go to school?’ I’m the same age as the models and I’m missing school to travel and write and voice an opinion” (quoted in Alani, 2012).

This exchange makes visible how it is not only Tavi’s presence in the fashion industry that’s offensive to Wintour and the other editors I’ve cited throughout this chapter, but her role as a writer with a public voice. In contrast to the teenage models who passively display clothes on the catwalk and are paid to be *visible but not vocal*, Tavi is an active cultural producer whose agency is not mobilized through her feminine body, a quality of postfeminist empowerment (Gill, 2007). Instead, Tavi’s agency is enacted through “voic[ing] an opinion” via her writing skills, creativity, and cultural knowledge. Thus, while Tavi’s body occupies a public space where other young female bodies are present and often celebrated, her positioning as a cultural producer and active body complicates her positioning as a girl within the public space of fashion.

TAVI’S FEMINIST POLITICS

In the above sections I have been primarily discussing the ways in which other people have constructed Tavi through mainstream media, and have identified several dominant discourses that have consistently framed her public image. However, Tavi is a particularly interesting case study because, as I’ve hinted above, she has creatively challenged and resisted many of the discourses used to frame her, demonstrating an agency that is a significant part of her celebrity image. In this section I will discuss the ways that Tavi has done this through her promotion of feminist politics, embrace of girlhood, and continual commitment to media production. I will discuss these three

aspects in tandem, as they work together in many of Tavi's projects. Ultimately I argue that Tavi has been able to use her access to public space to perform and promote a public feminist girlhood; a subjectivity that has also helped to her make sense of the critiques levied against her, as we saw in her comments to PBS *Makers* that I previously discussed.

While Tavi's work as a fashion blogger originally established her celebrity status, she has since become more invested in other subjects, most notably, feminism. She characterizes this change due to shifting interests towards music, movies, and media representations more broadly; although Tavi claims that her work has always been informed by a feminist perspective (Amed, 2012). Throughout this next section I will argue that feminism provided Tavi with the critical tools to critique the fashion industry and shift her identity from fashion blogger to girl feminist, as represented by her role as a public speaker and editor-in-chief of *Rookie*.

In July 2010, Tavi spoke at ideaCity10 in Toronto, the Canadian equivalent of the Ted Conference. Billed as an annual conference where "fifty of the planet's brightest minds converge in Toronto each June to speak to a highly engaged audience," the event is dominated by adult speakers, many of whom are male (Gevinson, 2010a). Tavi's twenty-minute talk then was a significant departure from the standard IdeaCity presentation, and represents a key shift in Tavi's public persona. Perhaps surprising to her adult audience, Tavi began her talk by admitting, "I didn't really know what to talk about... I didn't want to talk about fashion because I write about it all the time. And what I was I obsessed with when I had to come up with this and I'm still obsessed with, and I think it's just going to last, is *Sassy Magazine*." Tavi went on to discuss why the early-1990s, feminist-inspired glossy magazine should be a model for thinking about contemporary girlhood and progressive media for girls. She tells the audience, "The most subversive thing a magazine could do today... would be to be honest and encourage teen girls to be vocal."

She lists fashion, community, pop culture, celebrity, relationships, politics – including “activism activism activism!” - and feminism as significant components of her ideal teenage magazine.

Tavi’s discussion of feminism is passionate, and she advocates for girls to take on the feminist label in order to eradicate what she perceives as the harmful stereotypes that problematically influence people’s understanding of feminism. Despite the fact that she’s clearly nervous, she is convincing when she concludes her talk by telling the audience, “The fact of the matter is that teen girls have always been told to keep quiet and it would be such a different world if half of the population hadn’t always been told to not be vocal. But it’s not the ‘Age of Women’ unless it can be the age of girls too, so teen girls need to be a part of [feminism] as well.”

At the time, the audience was probably unaware that they were actually witnessing the presentation of the blueprints for what would, in just over a year, become *Rookie*, Tavi’s web destination for teenage girls. In fact, after her presentation, the male MC who appeared about fifty years Tavi’s senior, asked her “if she could talk about fashion a bit” because the audience apparently wanted to hear about who her favorite designers are. Tavi conceded, yet refused to name-drop which designers she’s met, making the MC visibly uncomfortable. This somewhat awkward ending to Tavi’s presentation suggests that Tavi’s decision to step outside of her publicly constructed persona into a more political and perhaps controversial position made some in her adult audience uncomfortable. After all, she was supposed to talk about *fashion*, not *feminism*!

If the IdeaCity10 talk first made Tavi’s feminist politics publicly visible, the next two years would see Tavi become increasingly involved in feminist politics. Later in summer 2010, Tavi posted what she called “An open letter to *Seventeen Magazine*, also, WHY ARE YOU UGLY WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU [caps in original]” on

StyleRookie. In it she criticizes the popular teen magazine for implying that becoming “fat and ugly” is the worst thing that can happen to a teenage girl, writing, “Teenage girls are worth more than looks, and we don’t need another media outlet telling us otherwise..... PS. I’m just taking a guess here, but could it be at all possible that your valuing looks over intelligence or happiness is somehow related to your advertising content?” (Gevinson, 2010b). She also began posting about feminism and feminist issues like girls’ media representation, rape culture, and female role models on her blog. For example, she writes about media for teen girls,

We need a voice that can shift through the bullshit and weed it out. There needs to be more feminism. There needs to be less emphasis on boys. *Seventeen* doesn’t emphasize companionship, it emphasizes boys, and that is exclusive to straight people. I think it is important to encourage girls to be loud. There can’t be all these negative messages. A big thing [to be addressed] is the beauty standard and slut shaming. There are so many double standards here (as quoted in Cadenas, 2010).

Tavi has recently spoken out in support of restricting runway work to models over sixteen-years-old and marched in Chicago’s Slutwalk to raise awareness about rape culture and victim blaming. Her March 2012 TedxTeen talk focused on the importance of strong female characters in media, and she enthusiastically advocated for her audience to understand feminism as a “process” and a “conversation” rather than an intimidating “rulebook.” Her presentation revealed the continual role that feminism plays in her work, as well as her ongoing commitment to promoting feminism as a viable and positive politics for teenage girls.

Central to Tavi’s positioning of herself as a feminist is her consistent adoption of a girlhood subjectivity, often making reference to herself as a girl and advocating for not

just feminist media, but a feminist girls' media culture. This is significant to recognize, because it is this subjectivity that distinguishes her from the adult feminist voices that are usually dominant when feminism is talked or written about publicly. In interviews, for example, Tavi often makes clear that she's speaking from the position of a girl, and in doing so, is able to explore and critique ideas about girls based on her own subject position. In her 2012 interview for PBS' *Makers* series, Tavi is explicit about calling out the ageist and sexist assumptions that understand girls as ignorant of political and social issues. "I think it's alarming or surprising for people to realize that teenage girls are much more aware of certain things than they thought..." she says thoughtfully.

Her own sense of gendered power relations is revealed throughout the interview, as Tavi considers the limited subjectivities available to girls based upon sexist ideas about girlhood. She argues, "If you're a girl you have to show some kind of insecurity, to like, show that you're an okay person and that you're not too sure of yourself or whatever. Because that would make you threatening to other people and people don't want to be threatened by a girl, because that would be insulting." While she doesn't specifically mention her own experience in the fashion industry, her comments can easily be read as reflecting the ways in which adult fashion insiders were threatened by her confident performance of girlhood, and by extension, their often insulting, sexist, and ageist comments made about her.

Thus, I view Tavi's ability to vocally embrace girlhood and feminism simultaneously as a challenge to her adult critics who attempted to silence her through hurtful remarks and unfair critiques. In doing so, Tavi is reframing girlhood as a positive, powerful, and feminist subjectivity and challenging the dominant discourses that suggest girlhood is a time of silence and powerlessness. We may then understand Tavi as

practicing a feminist girl citizenship through both her vocal politics and embracing of girlhood; asserting her right to public space and voice.

Tavi's discussion of girlhood is refreshing because, unlike many adult feminists who can't understand why girls have not adopted a feminist position, Tavi does not criticize her girl peers, instead understanding their behavior as indicative of larger patterns of gendered socialization and societal power imbalances. When asked about feminism and girls in the PBS Makers segment, Tavi responds,

I do think there's a stigma attached to the word feminism, if you say I'm a feminist, because most people do probably think that women should be paid equally and people would probably not call themselves a sexist, but it's just that word that they can't get behind because ... if you're a feminist you're angry for no reason or man-hating or whatever, and taking up space. And no one wants to be that person. Especially if you're a girl – you're taught not to feel like an inconvenience to anyone else. When you speak out against something, even just a guy friend making some sexist joke, they will probably feel defensive and threatened. And girls aren't taught that it's okay to speak out. You're not supposed to be that person, you're not supposed to be threatening or whatever to a guy like that.

Tavi's discussion highlights girls' hesitancy to adopt the feminist label as a somewhat rational and reasonable choice, given their social context. In doing so, she suggests that it is not individual girls' low self-esteem or apolitical nature that prevents them from being vocal citizens, but the patriarchal culture in which they live. Thus, her stance represents a significant departure from the girls' loss of voice discourse that focuses on individualizing girls' perceived problems, as I've previously discussed in chapter one.

Tavi has incorporated her feminist girlhood subjectivity into both her blog and more recently, *Rookie*, which she launched in September 2011 as the result of her "obsession" with *Sassy*, feminism, and girlhood. But unlike *StyleRookie*, which Tavi ran

as a personal blog, *Rookie* employs a staff of several people, has new content three times a day every weekday, and even occasionally has celebrities write feature columns. While closer in structure to the online versions of the mainstream glossies, the feminist nature of *Rookie* distinguishes it from most other publications for girls. For example, while it is not uncommon for editors of teenage magazines to embrace words like “empowerment” in place of feminism, Tavi breaks from this tradition by admitting that “On *Rookie*, everything is through a feminist lens, we’re a feminist site” (Keller, 2011; PBS, 2012). Tavi tells PBS that the decision to start *Rookie* was because she felt like “there just wasn’t anything today that was honest to an audience of teenage girls or respected their intelligence.” And apparently, others agree. *Rookie* became a quick success, registering over one million page views in the first five days after its launch and making headlines in both the blogosphere and in mainstream media, including positive reviews in *The New York Times*, *Ms. Magazine*, and the BBC, amongst others (Amed, 2012).

While it is not my intention to provide a comprehensive analysis of *Rookie* here, I want to draw attention to the way that *Rookie* functions as a public space that Tavi has created for girls to talk about feminist issues, including, sexual harassment (“First Encounters with the Male Gaze”), rape culture (“How We Dress Does Not Mean Yes”), eating disorders (“The Year of My Eating Disorder”), sexuality and queer culture (“Choose Your Own Adventure”), female friendships (“Getting Over Girl Hate”), and activism (“Why Can’t I Be You: Shelby Knox, feminist activist”). *Rookie* also consistently celebrates women and girl musicians, comedians, actors, and writers and often provides how-to lessons for readers on succeeding in these often-sexist industries (“last Night (Being) a DJ Saved My Life”), promoting readers to be active producers of culture rather than just consumers.

Based on Tavi's interest in and performance of girlhood it is important to highlight the significant extent to which *Rookie* is built around the celebration and interrogation of girlhood and the cultivation of a feminist *girlhood* subjectivity specifically. While girlhood is celebrated in obvious ways (such as featuring "Girl Gangs" as the monthly theme for November 2011), it is also visible in the way *Rookie* pays tribute to longstanding girl culture traditions (the "dear diary" section), girl style ("How to look like Juliet: A how-to for an angelic hairstyle that would make a Capulet proud," "How to Bejewel Your Tights"), and girl icons ("In Defense of the Spice Girls," "Friday Playlist: Hanging out with Alice (in Wonderland)"). Most importantly though, *Rookie* celebrates girls' same sex friendships through a regular column called "Girl Crush," where girls send in a tribute to their best friend which is featured on the site, along with photos of the friends and an interview. The column appropriates the idea of the heterosexual "crush" and instead mobilizes it as a way for girls to celebrate their friendships and focus on other girls, rather than boys. This practice can be understood as continuing an important tradition of cultural feminism that has also become a significant aspect of third wave feminisms.

Unlike mainstream teen magazines, *Rookie* does not promote a singular model of girlhood as the "correct" way to be a girl. For example, while magazines like *Seventeen* promote normative feminine beauty standards and the seemingly perfect celebrities that embody them, *Rookie* writers often veer away from these standards, celebrating the tomboy style of *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s Scout Finch ("Secret Style Icon: Scout Finch"), the awkwardness of becoming a teenager ("The Importance of Being Awkward"), and the inner geek we all harbor ("Literally the Best Thing Ever: Star Trek: The Next Generation"). *Rookie*'s presentation of girlhood as diverse, fun, and active, its valuing of (commonly degraded) girl culture, and its celebration of girl friendships and camaraderie

can be viewed as promoting and circulating Tavi's version of a feminist girlhood subjectivity.

Tavi is, of course, not the first person to utilize the position of girlhood to adopt a feminist subjectivity. As previously discussed, the riot grrrl movement also relied on a girl subjectivity as a dominant position with which to critique issues such as violence, beauty and body image, media representations, sexual double standards, and the right to cultural space and means of production. Commercial "girl power" rhetoric, while problematic in many respects, could also be understood as privileging girl subjectivities, although significantly more limited ones than riot grrrl (Currie, Kelly, Pomerantz, 2009; Zaslow, 2009; Hains, 2012). As Harris (2004) notes, girl power informs the "can-do" girl subjectivity, which offers girls a distinct mode of performing a "girlled" citizenship that relies on a body consistent with hegemonic femininity, the consumption of mainstream "girl" products, and a public presence that upholds neoliberal values, such as entrepreneurship, self-invention, and personal responsibility. However, it is Tavi's emphasis on girlhood as a *political* subjectivity, her public embracing of activism (we can recall how "activism, activism, activism!" was a central point in her ideaCity10 talk), and her rejection of hegemonic femininity that distinguishes her performance of girlhood from the commercial girl power subjectivity that forms can-do girlhood.

FEMINIST AGENCY AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

While actively embracing a girl feminist subjectivity has certainly distinguished Tavi from other girl and young women celebrities, it is perhaps her role as cultural producer, rather than just a consumer, that makes adults like Scott Schulman so uncomfortable and hostile towards her. In a 2009 blog post, *Jezebel* writer Jenna Sauers raises this possibility when she rightly observes that prominent fashion writer Lesley

M.M. Blume's negative comments about Tavi reveal that Blume "would no doubt prefer that Tavi were reading her young adult novels, rather than competing with her for freelance gigs" (Sauers, 2009). Thus, while adults like Blume have characterized her as a short-lived trend, Tavi has continued to make engaging media, most recently in her role as editor-in-chief and founder of *Rookie*, becoming competition for many adults attempting to sell their own ideas to the desirable teenage girl market.

Tavi's role as a cultural producer must be viewed within a larger participatory media culture, which Henry Jenkins (2006) has characterized as one in which "fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" (290). Indeed, Tavi's ability to gain mainstream attention is due in part to the proliferation of a participatory culture that encourages the sharing of content, and supported by easy-to-use technologies; such as free web 2.0 platforms that require no knowledge of coding and smart phones equipped with cameras. It is not my intention to comprehensively address the diverse scholarship on participatory culture here.¹² However, it is significant to consider how participatory culture has shifted power relations between media industries and their consumers, providing opportunities for the mainstreaming of cultural products that would once have remained underground or subcultural. While this has been occurring over the past two decades, this case study suggests that the potential for (girl's) feminist politics within participatory culture remains a rich area for scholarly exploration.

CONCLUSIONS: GIRLS' CITIZENSHIP AS A PUBLIC PRACTICE

Elizabeth Klaus and Margreth Lunenborg (2012) define cultural citizenship as "a set of strategies and practices to invoke processes of empowerment in order to

subversively listen and speak up in the public sphere” (204). I have drawn on their definition in my own conception of citizenship, as their emphasis on the ability to speak up in the public sphere is particularly significant for girls, who continue to occupy a precarious position in public space.

This idea has guided my inquiry into how girl feminist bloggers have used public space to advocate for feminist politics. In this chapter I have demonstrated how girl feminist bloggers such as Julie Zeilinger, Jamie Keiles, and Tavi Gevinson have utilized entrepreneurial strategies to vocalize their feminist politics and promote their feminist blogs. In doing so, they challenge both postfeminist can-do and protectionist discourses of girlhood – a prospect that can be threatening to adults, as I demonstrated in my case study of Tavi. Furthermore, by publicizing their blogs through mainstream commercial media, Julie, Jamie, and Tavi have made feminism accessible to a wide range of girls who may not have encountered feminist politics within their daily lives. It is this performance of a vocal political public girlhood that characterizes the citizenship I have been mapping throughout this dissertation.

While I do acknowledge the convergence of some of the bloggers’ strategies with postfeminist ideals, I am uncomfortable with Banet-Weiser’s (2012b) characterization of girls’ online practices as *solely* about self-branding, attaining celebrity visibility, and performances of postfeminist hegemonic femininity. Indeed, this claim ignores the politics that girls such as Julie, Jamie, and Tavi advocate through the public space they generate via new media. This does not mean that we should ignore the structural inequalities that shape *which* girl feminist bloggers have access to mainstream visibility; indeed, Julie, Jamie, and Tavi all are white, middle-class, and possess normative body types privileged within popular culture. This issue suggests a significant limitation of a feminist activist strategy that relies solely on attaining mainstream visibility and celebrity

status, a point worthy of further research by feminist media scholars. Nonetheless, the public visibility of alternative girlhoods generated through participatory culture, such as the feminist girlhood subjectivities performed by the bloggers I've discussed in this chapter, remind us of the necessary inclusion of girls' public voices and vocal politics for challenging postfeminist popular culture.

Endnotes

¹ However, Kearney (2005) also emphasizes that despite the ability for girls to move between private and public sphere via their telephone use, teenage girls' phone use was also subject to various containment strategies that often recuperated the girls' agency. See Kearney (2005) for detailed discussion.

² The idea of zines as functioning as a "safe" in-between space for girls has also been discussed in-depth by both Schilt (2003) and Piepmeier (2009).

³ Harris' omission of the word "postfeminism" is likely due to the time period when she wrote this book, as postfeminism was not yet clearly articulated by feminist scholars.

⁴ Amy Shields Dobson (2008) describes cam girl sites as a type of personal, amateur website where a webcam allows site visitors to see live moving images and/or video feed of the site owner. In the late 1990s a cam girl subculture developed, primarily consisting of teenage girls and young women, according to Dobson. Some of these "cam girls" required visitors to pay before accessing the site, or posted wish lists on their sites whereby visitors could purchase gifts for the cam girl. Dobson (2008) notes that there are several different types of cam girls and contrary to popular assumptions, not all cam girls site contain sexual material. Please see Dobson (2008), Senft (2008), and Banet-Weiser (2012b) for feminist analyses of the cam girl phenomenon.

⁵ Banet-Weiser (2011) describes feedback as a fundamental part of social media, whereby visitors (both anonymous and known) to a site or profile leave a comment. However, Banet-Weiser notes that often times feedback functions as a "neoliberal disciplinary strategy" that can operate as a strategy of "surveillance, judgment and evaluation," such as rating girls looks on their YouTube videos (288). She argues that girls often gain "value" (positive comments, compliments, praise) for performing normative standards of femininity. See Banet-Weiser (2011, 2012b) for discussion.

⁶ Interestingly, many of these technologies have gendered names, such as “Girl Ambition,” a parent-monitored social networking environment, and “Anne’s Diary,” a subscription only website for girls 6-12 years old. Consequently, there is little confusion that these programs are meant for parents with daughters, not sons.

⁷ Please see Keller (2012b) for an in-depth discussion and analysis of the *Seventeen Magazine Project*.

⁸ While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to comprehensively discuss the history of girl celebrities, it is important to note that the entertainment industry has been one public space where girls have been visible public figures. Girl stars such as Shirley Temple (1930s), Patty Duke (1950s and 1960s), and Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen (1990s) are all prominent examples of girls who have occupied public space as entertainers. See Blue (forthcoming, 2013) for a comprehensive discussion.

⁹ While the term wunderkind is not explicitly gendered, a search of the term reveals that most recently “wunderkind” has been employed to describe teenage boys who possess particularly impressive technological abilities, such as Li Ka-shing, the late Aaron Schwartz, and the hacker “Cosmo” (Olson, 2012; Associated Press, 2012; Honan, 2012). By using this word to describe Tavi, journalists may be unconsciously highlighting her savvy use of technology, which continues to be a masculinized practice. In this sense then, Tavi is further distinguished from her girl peers who are assumed to be consumers of online media, rather than producers (Kearney, 2006).

¹⁰ Along with Tavi, Graham (2012) includes Kelly Framel and Jessica Quirk as influential young fashion bloggers. However, Framel and Quirk began as twenty-something adults, rather than as preteens and both were participants in the fashion industry in New York City as designers before beginning their blogs.

¹¹ This is in fact, untrue. Fashion editors at print magazines often receive gifts, complimentary samples, and event invitations from designers and fashion companies. It is common practice at most magazines to keep these gifts and accept event invitations. For example, when I was an intern at a New York-based fashion magazine, I received a free pair of Seven jeans (retail value of about \$250) for attending a free breakfast from a beauty company releasing a new teeth-whitening product.

¹² Please see Jenkins (2006), Burgess and Green (2009), Van Dijck (2013), and Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) for comprehensive discussions of participatory culture and social media platforms.

Chapter Five: “I’ve Really Got a Thing for Betty Friedan:” Girl Feminist Bloggers and the Production of Feminist Histories Online

I always felt more of a connection to the Second Wave, my mom always says that I was born 50 years too late! Doing research led me to read feminist classics like *The Feminine Mystique* and *The Dialectic of Sex*, among many others that really affected me. That’s when I realized I was a feminist... I think what really struck me at first, and really continues to hook my interest, is the fact that so many of the Second Wave goals haven’t really been met....

-Amandine, focus group discussion

I open this chapter with a quote from Amandine that caught my attention when I first read it on our focus group blog. Amandine contradicts much of what we hear about girls and feminism – that girls don’t want to be feminists, and if they do they certainly don’t want to be associated with the supposed bra-burning of the second wave. But perhaps more importantly, Amandine refuses to understand herself as distinct from her feminist predecessors that fought for many of the same things she continues to pursue today.

In this sense, Amandine also challenges hegemonic constructions of youth as ignorant of history, in a constant state of waiting passively for the future (Lesko, 2001). Nancy Lesko (2001) argues that the linear, unidirectional, and cumulative conceptions of growth and change that characterize dominant discourses about adolescence presume “the present always overtakes the past” (196). Consequently, youth are often positioned as either overly invested in the present with little thought to past or future, or in a constant “state of becoming” where teens’ agency is understood as located in the future. Neither of

these discourses recognize youth's investment in and connection to the past, something I will explore here in relation to girls' feminist blogging practices.

In this chapter I analyze how girls' feminist blogs fit into feminism as an ongoing, fluid political movement. This requires paying attention not only to how the bloggers understand their own positioning as historical subjects within the contemporary context, but how they relate their activism to the history of feminism. This relationship between the history of feminism and contemporary girl feminist bloggers is particularly significant for several reasons upon which I will elaborate throughout this chapter. First, dominant feminist discourses based upon the wave metaphor often characterize younger "third wave" feminists as being ahistorical, disconnected from how their feminism aligns with past feminism(s). I will argue that these arguments are further buttressed by postfeminist rhetoric that problematically "generationalizes" feminism (Scharff, 2012). Consequently, we must pay attention to how girl feminist bloggers are challenging this argument in complex ways.

Additionally, as Mary Celeste Kearney (forthcoming 2013) argues, scholars of youth media have neglected to "consider the historical contexts of media, focusing instead on contemporary culture with a myopically presentist and ahistorical lens" (8). She notes that this has been especially true for scholars studying youth's Internet practices "no doubt because of the relatively young age of the Web and thus seeming absence of its history" (9). By focusing on both the content of girls' blogs, as well as the productive practice of blogging itself in relation to feminist history, I hope to begin the process of better understanding girls' feminist blogs as continuing a historical legacy of feminist activism, while also adding fresh perspectives and ideas to the movement.

Finally, Red Chidgey (2012) draws on the work of Michel Foucault to argue for the significance in understanding the potential of feminist digital media production to

create “counter-memories” of feminism (Foucault, 1980). She maintains, “Part of feminism’s cultural battle is thus to secure the role of women’s movements in popular memory. Feminist media can become discursive ‘weapons’ in this struggle: to contest hostile framings and to put forward counter-understandings of what feminism is, what feminism can do, and who a feminist can be” (87). Consequently, it is necessary to explore how girls’ blogging as a feminist media production practice fulfills this function. The questions that inform this chapter then include: How do girl feminist bloggers view their own feminism as related or not to feminisms from previous decades? In what ways do these girl feminists use their blogs to explore, negotiate, and rewrite feminist histories? How might girls’ engagements with histories of feminism challenge postfeminist narratives of feminism’s “pastness”? And finally, how might we imagine girl bloggers’ feminist histories as indicative of a citizenship that offers girls a sense of belonging beyond the temporal boundary of the present?

I will begin by outlining some of the relevant literature on feminist history, specifically exploring how the wave metaphor has structured the ways in which U.S. feminism has been popularly understood. Here I also address recent critiques of the wave metaphor, arguments that I later draw on to contextualize my own analysis of girls’ blogs. I then move on to analyze how feminism is positioned in postfeminist discourses, focusing on recent research by Christina Scharff (2012) and Angela McRobbie (2009). I argue that postfeminist discourses problematically exacerbate the divisions suggested by the wave metaphor in order to discourage collective, inter-generational feminist activism. This postfeminist narrative is often visible in mainstream media where the disavowal of feminism is regularly reported. I conclude my literature review by briefly discussing the importance for feminists to write history, focusing on historiography as a political practice that secures feminism’s future.

I then move on to discuss my discursive and ideological textual analysis of girls' blogs, as well as data collected from my focus group and individual interviews, in relation to the above literature. I detail four primary ways that girl bloggers engage creatively with feminist history: (1) by writing about particular historical feminist figures; (2) by connecting present feminist issues with past feminist struggles; (3) by telling history in new ways using the architecture of the web; and (4) by performing as historiographers through rewriting feminist histories. These practices, I maintain, allow the bloggers to complicate the wave metaphor and to understand their own feminist identities in more fluid ways, suggesting that young feminist bloggers have little investment in portraying themselves as a "fourth wave" of feminism distinct from their predecessors.

Ultimately I argue for understanding girl feminist bloggers as historiographers who not only are learning about feminism online and educating their readers about feminist history, but are actively producing feminist history through their blogging. This argument has three significant implications: First, we can understand the Internet, including girls' blogs, as a useful alternative space for girls to engage with feminist history. Second, this assertion challenges both the wave metaphor and other postfeminist discourses that "generationalize" feminism (Scharff, 2012). And finally, it demonstrates the historical complexity inherent in some girls' feminist blogs, which has been problematically overlooked by feminist scholars. I conclude by contending that this connection to the past allows girl bloggers a feeling of belonging to a movement with a past and a future, which is an important aspect of a citizenship that challenges individualistic and consumer-based varieties most often offered to girls (Harris, 1994).

THEORIZING FEMINIST MOVEMENTS: REVISITING THE WAVE METAPHOR

Despite the long history of feminist thought and organizing in many countries around the world, the wave metaphor remains one of the most dominant ways that historians have theorized feminist history in the United States. In this conception, the first wave is understood as feminist organizing between 1848 and 1920, and focusing primarily on voting rights (Hewitt, 2010a). The second wave, more accurately referred to as the women's liberation movement, began in the early 1960s and continued to the 1980s, and encompassed a range of activism that addressed such issues as reproductive rights, domestic violence, gender roles, education, and work. While there were various feminist ideologies (most often discussed under the categories of liberal, radical, cultural, and socialist) during this time, the liberal feminist agenda focusing on changes to public policy was often privileged as a dominant strategy of women liberationists.

Finally, the third wave is associated with activism that emerged during the 1990s, and is described as a more dispersed movement that, according to Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (1997), "contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures" (3). The third wave has been understood as embracing identity as multifaceted, popular culture, contradiction, and pleasure in ways that distinguish it from previous waves (Karlyn Rowe, 2003; Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003). It is this narrative of rather simplistically defined and conceptually distinct "waves" that I address here in order to better contextualize young feminist blogging.¹

Nancy A. Hewitt (2010b) argues that the wave metaphor was used as early as the 1880s, when Irish activist Frances Power Cobbe wrote that women's movements resembled the "incoming tide... it [sic] has rolled in separate waves... and has done its

part in carrying forward all the rest” (as quoted in Hewitt, 2010b, 2). According to Rory Dicker (2008) though, the wave metaphor did not enter mainstream discourse until a 1968 article in the *New York Times Magazine* by Martha Lear, where she referred to a “second feminist wave” (5). While feminists of this era did not initially embrace this language, Dicker argues that as women’s history became an area of academic inquiry, the wave metaphor was used to trace the history of feminist activism as a political project. Eventually, the language of the “second wave” became a common way for feminists (and others) to understand themselves in relation to a longer history of feminist activism (Dicker, 2008).

The wave metaphor was initially useful for understanding how progressive social change occurs. Indeed, as Flora Davis (1991) argues, “First, there’s a lot of intense activity and some aspects of life are transformed; then... reaction sets in. Stability reigns for a while, and if there’s a strong backlash, some of the changes may be undone. Eventually, if vital issues remain unresolved, another wave of activism arises” (11). This idea of “ebb and flow” captures the non-linear movement of feminism and, as Dicker (2008) writes, “the idea of continual motion, even if it isn’t always forward movement, is part of the appeal of the metaphor” (5). Alison Piepmeier (2009) writes that while the wave metaphor is not perfect, she employs the concept of the third wave throughout her book “because it identifies and catalyzes a particular generational group – a group that encompasses a great deal of diversity of perspectives but that shares relevant similarities” (8). She continues,

It’s a term I use with awareness of its problems but that I am not ready to abandon, in part because it designates certain distinctive characteristics of late twentieth-century feminism. Girls and women who came to consciousness in an era in which second wave feminist ideals were part of the culture – taken for

granted, even if not actually enacted – have a different view of gender than earlier generations (8).

Consequently, it is important to recognize the practical value that the wave metaphor provides for talking – and teaching about – the history of feminism.

However, feminists have recently begun to critique the wave metaphor for its inability to portray a comprehensive portrait of the complexity of the history of feminism. As Hewitt (2010b) argues, “The script of feminist history – that each wave overwhelms and exceeds its predecessor – lends itself all too easily to whiggish interpretations of ever more radical, all encompassing, and ideologically sophisticated movements. Activists thus highlight their distinctiveness from – and often superiority to – previous feminist movements in the process of constituting themselves as the next wave” (5). This notion of distinction is particularly important for understanding how the third wave has been problematically conceptualized as a response to the exclusionary practices and anti-sex rhetoric that supposedly marked the second wave (Hewitt, 2010b). Ednie Kaeh Garrison (2005) notes that while third wave identity may demonstrate a resistance to postfeminist assertions that feminism is “dead,” it nonetheless cannot be understood as unrelated to the second wave. She asserts, “ Even in Rebecca Walker’s 1992 declaration, ‘I am not a postfeminism feminist, I am the third wave,’ is no uncomplicated proposition. In addition to Walker’s well-known *Ms.* article, a cursory survey of early invocations of the concept reveal its strategic power as resistance within the feminist movement more so than resistance to popular proclamations of feminism’s demise” (249).

This process of distinction between the second and third wave has often been shaped around a generational discourse of “mothers” and “daughters.” And while this metaphor has the potential to demonstrate the connections and similar values between the

waves, it is more often framed within a combative and, I would argue, anti-feminist rhetoric of not wanting to be one's mother. Astrid Henry (2004) theorizes this issue in her book *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* where she concludes that "[w]hen we remain stuck in feminism's imagined family, we lose sight of the myriad relations feminists have with one another as well as the possibility of cross-generational identification and similarities" (182). Additionally, she points out that women who come of age between generations "go missing from feminism's narrative of its generational structure," as they don't truly "belong" to the second wave as mothers or the third wave as daughters (4).

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address the complexities of Henry's analysis here, her assertion that feminism must be understood beyond the familial metaphor of mothers and daughters is important precisely because contradictory representations of this idea are rare in both popular media and feminist scholarship. One notable exception is Roberta S. Gold's (2010) work on the intergenerational feminism fostered in New York City's tenant movement. Gold argues that, "the tenant struggles of the 1960s and 1870s amplified the women's liberation movement in New York by linking young feminists with the Old Left generation of female housing organizers" (329). She continues, "The tenant story adds to our understanding of second wave feminism by revealing a set of affectionate mentoring relations between two generations of radical female activists, thereby challenging many narratives of feminist politicization that focus primarily on young women's rejection of what came before, be it postwar domesticity, liberal feminism, or New Left sexism" (329). Gold's research provides a crucial reminder of how familial metaphors obscure this kind of intergenerational activism and friendship that has been an important part of feminist movements both historically and contemporarily.

While my focus here has been on the third wave's distinction from the second wave, it is important to heed Hewitt's (2010b) reminder that this isn't a new phenomenon started by ungrateful third wavers. Women liberationists also engaged in similar rhetoric about their predecessors, often incorrectly presenting the first wave as narrowly focused on suffrage and reformist in scope rather than recognizing the diverse participants, multiple issues, and transformative approaches that encompassed the first wave (Hewitt, 2010b; Henry, 2004). The repetitive nature of these processes of distinction suggest that the wave model itself, rather than a particular group of feminists, may facilitate this type of intergenerational criticism.

While we haven't necessarily seen an emergent "fourth wave" develop in response to the unfinished business of the third wave, the third wave has not escaped critique and incorrect assumptions itself. Some feminists have misrepresented the third wave as overly individualistic, lacking in theoretical rigor, and too invested in popular culture (Steiner, 2012; Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; McRobbie, 2009). Baumgardner and Richards (2000) quote prominent second waver Susan Brownmiller as telling *Time Magazine* that third wave feminists "seem to be making individual bids for stardom," implying that third wavers are more interested in celebrity and status than politics and collective action (as cited in Baumgardner and Richards, 2000). Furthermore, many feminists confuse third wave feminism with postfeminism, problematically conflating apolitical empowerment rhetoric with the third wave (McRobbie, 2009). As a result, third wave feminism is often represented in narrow ways that distort the richness of the movement, much like the discourse surrounding the women's liberation movement.

One of the most problematic aspects of the simplistic and truncated characterizations of each feminist wave is that many women's and girls' voices and

stories get excluded from the dominant story, or “master narrative” that characterizes each wave. Often times these excluded voices are those of women marginalized due to their race, class, sexuality, ability, or age. Becky Thompson (2010) draws Chela Sandoval’s concept of “hegemonic feminism” to argue that the dominant history of the women’s liberation movement has resulted in a hegemonic narrative that imagines feminism as white-led, U.S.-focused, and primarily concerned with sexism; obscuring the complex alliances and contributions of many women to the movement, as well as a diversity of issues and perspectives that are central to feminism. Thompson writes that dominant second wave history, “does not recognize the centrality of the feminism of women of color in second wave history. Missing too from normative accounts is the story of white antiracist feminism, which, from its emergence, has been intertwined with, and fueled by the development of, feminism among women of color” (39). While the hegemonic wave model recognizes women of color’s contributions to feminism as primarily occurring in the 1980s as a response to the perceived racism of the dominant second wave, it completely obscures their contributions before this time and assumes their lineage from white mainstream feminism rather than other movements, such as Black Power (Thompson, 2010).

Additionally, the wave metaphor produces “gaps” between the waves that are assumed to be “feminist-free zones” where little feminist organizing occurred (Hewitt, 2010b, 5). As Hewitt and others have noted, this discourse renders invisible feminists and their work during these supposed gaps, such as before 1848 and from 1920-1960. Not only does the assumption of “feminist-free zones” erase the voices and contributions of feminists during these times, but the assumption also prevents other girls and women from participating in feminist activism that they may mistakenly perceive as dead. A

conversation I had with Carrie during our focus group brought this point to my attention.

Carrie explains:

As with any movement, there's no way to really draw a line between the end of one period and the start of the next. People and their projects continue from one decade to the next and to distinguish between different waves seems somewhat arbitrary to me. Also, for me personally, the idea that the 'third wave' has ended actually stopped me from getting really into feminism for a long time because the part of it that I knew – the riot grrrl movement – was 'dead' and I took that to mean that all of feminism was 'dead' and was not something I could involve myself in.

Carrie's comment reveals how assertions about the "end" of the third wave almost prevented her from participating in activism that was actually still happening (including riot grrrl activism), despite dominant narratives saying otherwise. To Carrie then, the wave metaphor runs the risk of containing feminism in history books, rather than fostering its growth and development.

While feminist scholars have rightly critiqued the wave model, a few have attempted to re-imagine it in ways that might be more useful for capturing the complexity of feminist movements. Garrison (2005) proposes a "resignification of meaning so that different narratives, histories, and voices are made visible as constitutive parts rather than addenda attached at the end of some generic, singular version of feminism" (239). She suggests that the waves of feminism be understood as radio waves, rather than through the standard oceanic metaphor, arguing,

Ocean waves can move objects – kinds of information – but radio waves can be used to communicate information in the form of ideas, words, narrative, consciousness, knowledge. As an analogy, ocean waves infer a movement that carries us along, we get caught up in the action and movement, and come to see

later that we have been part of some massive influx and reflux. Radio waves, on the other hand, infer a kind of intentionality and purposefulness (243-244).

To Garrison then, understanding feminism through radio waves allows for multiplicity, agency, and complexity that is made invisible through the oceanic metaphor. Hewitt (2010b) agrees, writing,

Radio waves allow us to think about movements of different lengths and frequencies; movements that grow louder or fade out, that reach vast audiences across oceans or only a few listeners in a local area; movements that are marked by static interruptions or frequent changes of channels; and movements that are temporarily drowned out by another frequency but then suddenly come in loud and clear... Best of all, radio waves do not supersede each other. Rather signals coexist, overlap, and intersect (8).

This metaphor corresponds with my own discussion of the overlapping nature of feminist counterpublics in chapter three, and serves as a useful example of how many feminists are eager to move beyond the limits of oceanographic metaphors.

Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (2003) also make a useful intervention into this debate, suggesting that the language of “waves” better represents particular social and cultural contexts, rather than a “neat generational divide” (14). In this case, “the third wave consists of those of us who have developed our sense of identity in a world shaped by technology, global capitalism, multiple models of sexuality, changing national demographics, and declining economic vitality” rather than a “daughters” of the second wave (14). This point has informed my own understanding and positioning in the third wave, and usefully draws attention to the cultural contexts that foster particular forms of

feminism – a salient point considering my attention to both postfeminism and neoliberalism in this dissertation.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive analysis of these rich conversations, the above discussion is meant to highlight some of the key critiques of the wave metaphor. These critiques are particularly important to my analysis of girls' feminist blogs and the girl bloggers themselves, as they demonstrate the complexity of feminist movements and the problems that arise when the wave metaphor is used as the dominant framework for understanding feminist history. I will return to this discussion of the wave metaphor later in the chapter with regards to how my study participants understand their own feminist activism in relation to this dominant discourse.

FRACTURED CONNECTIONS: FEMINIST HISTORY AND POSTFEMINISM

Because postfeminism has been an ongoing thread throughout this dissertation, I will comment only briefly here on how postfeminist discourses have framed feminism as a historical movement. Nonetheless, it remains important to consider, as postfeminist discourses shape the cultural context in which young bloggers have grown up. I'd like to return to Angela McRobbie's (2009) concept of disarticulation, which I discussed in chapter three, as it serves as a useful concept to understand how feminism as a political movement has been characterized by postfeminism. Disarticulation, according to McRobbie, is the process by which the collective solidarity between marginalized groups gets pulled apart, severing the power of collective politics.² McRobbie writes,

Disarticulation is a defining feature of the process of undoing. Feminism's wider intersections with anti-racism, with gay and lesbian politics, are written out of the kind of history which surfaces even in serious journalism, and the feminism which is then vilified and thrown backwards into a previous era, is a truncated and

sclerotic anti-male and censorious version of a movement which was much more diverse and open-minded (9).

Disarticulation features prominently in postfeminist popular culture, and suggests that there is little reason for women to identify with one another, let alone form potential political alliances. Here, I am particularly interested in how disarticulation works to sever connections between younger and older women that may generate feminist politics, replacing the collective politics I outline above with an individualist postfeminist consumer-led empowered identity that I have been discussing throughout this dissertation. Indeed, McRobbie uses the subtitle “Postfeminism as daughter’s revenge” to discuss the emergence of postfeminism as a rejection of a feminism characterized as old and uncool, “its moments of warmth and solidarity are... non-transmissible... its successors confident, materialist, postfeminist young women” (40).

Christina Scharff (2012) further interrogates this generationalization of feminism, describing feminist issues as being “temporalized and generationalized” in postfeminist discourses (30). She writes that her study participants overwhelmingly articulated feminism as something that belongs in the past, relevant to an older generation, but not themselves. However, in contrast to McRobbie, Scharff does not understand this dynamic through a mother-daughter trope, but argues instead that it is most useful to “think about the interplay of feminism and generation in terms of the generationalization of feminism” (29). She continues, “Feminist dis-identification intersects with generational difference not through an alleged rebellion of a younger generation against an older generation but through the allocation of feminism to the past. As I will show, this ‘pastness’ of feminism is an essential element of the postfeminist cultural climate” (29).

Other scholars have also interrogated how postfeminist discourses are mobilized in such a way that assumes feminism as a thing of the past. For example, the title of McRobbie's (2009) book, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, signals this key postfeminist assumption. Indeed, McRobbie claims that, "for feminism to be 'taken into account' it has to be understood as having already passed away" (12). However, as McRobbie suggests, the pastness of feminism doesn't mean that feminism is absent from postfeminism. The process of feminism being taken into account necessitates an "double entanglement" where feminist ideas are recognized and articulated, while simultaneously being discredited and repudiated; ultimately leading to the dismantling of feminist politics from public life (McRobbie, 2009, 12). Feminism, in this sense, is something that has happened and is now comfortably part of our cultural sphere, yet assumed to hold little relevance within contemporary culture.

In addition to her interview data, Scharff (2012) analyzes several popular books written by the "new German feminists," such as Meredith Haaf, Susanne Klingner, and Barbara Streidl's book, *We Alpha-girls: Why Feminism Makes Life More Beautiful* (English translation), and Jana Hensel and Elisabeth Raether's, *New German Girls* (English translation). Scharff argues that these texts "offer simplistic, generalizing, and historically inaccurate portrayals of 1970s feminism that is, of course, always referred to in the singular" (121).³ According to Scharff, the new German feminists' lack of a thorough engagement with the history of the women's movement – as well as the neglecting of a lengthy history of academic feminism - results in characterized portrayals of radical, man-hating, and lesbian, a figure that becomes emblematic of a 1970s feminism that is unrelatable to young women today and therefore, best left in the past.

I outline these postfeminist discourses here because they suggest that feminist history is unimportant due to its irrelevancy in the lives of young women and girls today.

Unlike the wave metaphor used by some feminists, postfeminism denies an opportunity for even thinking across generations by flattening the complexity of feminism's history into a singular distorted image of the women's liberation movement. It is also worth noting that "feminism" within postfeminism is limited to the period of the late 1960s-1970s, erasing the lengthy history of feminist activism before this time. I am suggesting then that engaging with feminist history is a necessary part of refuting postfeminism, and is significant to the political act of coalitional building and collective politics demanded by contemporary feminism. I now turn to examine how girl feminist bloggers are doing this, engaging with the history of feminism in creative ways through the practice of blogging.

"THE BADASSES WHO CAME BEFORE US:" YOUNG BLOGGERS EXPLORING FEMINIST HISTORY

Julie Zeilinger's (2012) book *A Little F'd Up: Why Feminism Is Not A Dirty Word* begins not with a description of the feminist blogosphere or the popularity of Slutwalk, but with a chapter titled, "The Badasses Who Came Before us: A Brief History of Feminism." Julie opens the chapter by writing,

I know what you're thinking: History is boring...[But] there are three major reasons I think it's really important to understand the history of the women who came before us before we delve into all the shit we're dealing with right now... Reason #1: Our generation desperately needs some perspective... Reason #2: History repeats itself and all that jazz... Reason #3: It makes sense to start at the beginning... So without further ado, let's talk about the history of feminism!

Julie goes back to 1786 BC. when ancient Babylon's Code of Hammerabi legislated women as property of their father or husband. She traces women's position in society through Aristotle's theorizing (dubbing him a "master" of sexism), the development of religion (under the heading "Muhammad Was a Feminist"), the Enlightenment (or, according to Julie, "Not So Enlightened, Actually"), and finally, the first, second, and third "waves" of feminism of the nineteenth, twentieth, and now twenty-first centuries. Julie includes side-boxes that introduce short bios of prominent feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Sojourner Truth, Gloria Steinem, and Rebecca Walker, highlighting the specific contributions of a diversity of feminists. While it is of course impossible to tell "the" history of feminism (which is more accurately described as histories), the sixty seven-page chapter does a decent job making feminism's lengthy and complex past accessible to readers who may begin with little (or no) knowledge of the movement.

Julie's inclusion of feminist history in her book for teenage girls is significant to consider in relation to the feminist and postfeminist discourses I have outlined above. Indeed, like Amandine's quote that begins this chapter, it complicates many of the assumptions about young feminists as overly individualistic, ahistorical, and eager to take for granted the rights they enjoy. My goal in this chapter, however, is to move beyond merely demonstrating that young feminist bloggers are interested in feminism's history, although this point remains important. Instead, I argue that their creative engagements with feminist history, particularly as historiographers, is a significant move that establishes a sense of belonging that is essential to girl bloggers' citizenship claims. Writing history, in this sense, functions as a political act that contributes to blogging as a practice of citizenship. Furthermore, this writing of women's history has been a significant part of feminist activism since the nineteenth century. Girl bloggers, in this

sense, are contributing to this lengthy history of feminist historiography by continuing this practice on their blogs (Stanford Friedman, 1995; Cowman, 2009).

This practice of producing history also continues the work of grrrl zinesters active in the 1990s, who often constructed a “female specific history” in their zines (Kearney, 2006). Kearney (2006) argues that this practice allowed feminist zine makers to showcase the contributions of older feminists in order to recognize the lineage between these feminists’ work and their own. For example, she describes how the zine *Ms. America #2* included a spread on “Riot Grrrandmas” like Harriet Tubman, Virginia Woolf, and Susan B. Anthony, linking past historical feminists with contemporary riot grrrls. As Kearney argues, “This ‘herstory’ not only reclaims girls and women for feminist history, but also works to position grrrl zinesters within a particular historical trajectory and thus mode of identity” (174). Consequently, zinesters often positioned historical feminists as role models for contemporary girls in much the same way that bloggers do today, something I will discuss further in the next section of this chapter.

Feminists have long valued women’s – and feminism’s – history as a significant part of feminism’s political project. For example, Krista Cowman (2009) writes that in 1707 Mary Astell, a British feminist, acknowledged the writing of history by women as “primarily a political act” (143). More recently, Cowman describes how young British college-educated women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often worked as amateur historians, using new social science methodologies to conduct both historical and contemporary research to better the lives of women. Cowman notes how much of this research was funded by notable bodies such as the Women’s Industrial Council, which “linked feminist activism with historical research” (144). She reports, “Such work, which included Clementina Black’s investigations into sweated labor (1907) and married

women's work (1915) alongside thorough statistical reports on the conditions of laundresses and homeworkers, was effectively contemporary history" (144).

Similarly, Cowman acknowledges the important, yet often overlooked, contributions of British suffragette's autobiographies to feminist historiography. Moroula Joannou (1995) describes these works as an "active record of women intervening in history and making history" (32). The autobiographies again challenged dominant structures of history writing, retaining their feminist predecessors' belief that history must be written for a purpose beyond merely creating an objective account of past events (Cowman, 2009). Suffragette autobiographies, in this sense, were activist documents that were written with the political agenda of taking women's rights beyond the right to vote. Unfortunately, Cowman notes, these documents, along with the work of the amateur historians I discuss above, remained on the margins of the historical record. This was in part due to the belief that these documents were the "product of activism, written for a political purpose or by politically involved individuals," which did not correspond with academic historian's belief that true history was objective, impartial, and detached (146). This unwillingness to accept these forms of "alternative" histories demonstrate a divide between academic and nonacademic histories that have continued to shape feminist histories even with the development of women's studies and women's history programs.

The institutionalization of feminism in universities through the efforts of the second wave was an important step in legitimizing the history of feminism, documenting women's stories, and archiving women's historical records. While it is not my intention to detail this complex process in depth here, it nonetheless remains important to acknowledge that this institutionalization did not often alter the power structures that privileged men as representing history, change, linear time, and great achievements (Paletschek, 2009). Indeed, as Sylvia Paletschek (2009) notes, women's history that did

not mimic the (masculine) form of history as revolving around “great men” and “great ideas” remained marginalized as “not truly worthy” and “not important,” given sidebar status in history textbooks and passing mention in curricula rather than serious scholarly engagement. This is an issue that I will return to later in this chapter in relation to my interview data and textual analysis as it raises the question as to what “counts” as history. As a result, the general public’s knowledge of feminist history is centered around a few “great women,” like Gloria Steinem, “great works,” like Betty Frieden’s *The Feminine Mystique*, or “iconic” media images, like suffragettes holding placards. This is not surprising, considering that when feminist history is addressed in high school curricula, it is presented in such as manner. A *Time Magazine* cover from 1998 documents this simplistic history nicely (Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 *Time Magazine* cover, June 29, 1998,

Author screen shot from *Time Magazine* website

Thus, while women's and feminism's history may be more prominent within historical records today than in the past, the stories that we do know fail to account for the diverse and complex movement that feminism was and continues to be.

For example, girls' participation in feminist activism remains invisible in both mainstream and feminist historical accounts. My own literature review of this topic yielded few results, yet research by Jane Hunter (2002) and Kirsten Pike (2011) demonstrates that girls have been passionately engaged with issues of gender inequality since the late nineteenth century. Consequently, there is still much work to be done in terms of both historical research and writing feminism's history, practices that should be viewed as activism. As Susan Stanford Friedman (1995) argues, "The unending, cumulative building of broadly defined histories of women, including histories of feminism, is a critical component of resistance and change" (29). This sentiment can also be seen in the early research of the "amateur historians" I discuss above, for example, and, I will argue, girl feminist bloggers.

It is important to recognize history as not only about the past, but about the present and future as well. Stanford Friedman reminds us: "As a heuristic activity, history writing orders the past in relation to the needs of the present and future. The narrative act of assigning meaning to the past potentially intervenes in the present and future construction of history. For feminists, this means that writing the history of feminism functions as an act in the present that can... contribute to the shape of feminism's future" (13). In this sense, writing feminist history is not just activism, but also a necessary

activist strategy needed to give feminism a future. It is this framework that I adopt when thinking about how girl bloggers write and engage with feminist history.

THE “PIED PIPER OF FEMINISM:” AFFECTIVE ATTACHMENTS TO FEMINIST ROLE MODELS FROM THE PAST

In a December 2012 interview on CBC radio’s *Q* Kathleen Hanna, prominent riot grrrl and lead singer of the punk band Bikini Kill (1990-1996), admitted, “The whole reason I got on stage was to be the Pied Piper of feminism” (Ghomeshi, 2012). Hanna’s comment is interesting because it highlights her role in delivering feminism as an accessible discourse to her girl fans, many of whom may not have previously encountered feminist politics in their lives. Hanna’s adoption of a girl subjectivity likely contributed to her accessibility for teenage girls and young women, who could identify with many of the feminist issues that Hanna raised through her music, live performances, and interviews. It is little surprise then that Hanna continues to be cited, including by several girls in my focus group, as an influential feminist role model.

During my research I discovered that feminist role models are significant way for girl bloggers not only to learn about feminism, but to explicitly connect to the history of feminism. In the online focus group the bloggers discussed a wide range of what I’m calling “feminist role models,” spanning both contemporary and historical figures, pop culture icons, “professional” feminists and what Renee called “everyday feminists,” referring to bloggers and feminist commentators. Several bloggers I interviewed mentioned the founder of *Feministing* (now primarily an author and public commentator) Jessica Valenti as a major contemporary feminist influence, along with Hillary Clinton, Tina Fey, Lady Gaga, Eve Ensler and M.I.A. as contemporary feminist role models.

Feminist bloggers such as Courtney Martin, Latoya Petersen and Julie Zeilinger were also well respected amongst my study participants.

As someone who was very interested in contemporary feminists as a teenager I was surprised that almost all of the bloggers mentioned at least one historical figure as a major feminist influence, in addition to the contemporary role models I list above, and spoke about them in passionate ways. “I’ve really got a thing for Betty Friedan rather than Gloria Steinem,” Amandine tells me when I ask about her feminist role models. She also cites “old-school second wave feminists” like Shulamith Firestone, and Letty Cottin Pogrebin as particularly influential to her identity as an Orthodox Jewish feminist. Interestingly, Amandine claims that she’s not into “modern feminist authors” and was disappointed by Valenti’s (2007) *Full Frontal Feminism*, a book that is popular amongst young feminists. Despite being a feminist blogger, Amandine’s feminist role models are not fellow bloggers but women who were most active several decades before she was born.

Abby also tells me that Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a Jewish feminist activist, journalist, and author who co-founded *Ms. Magazine* with Gloria Steinem, is her biggest feminist influence: “I read her book *Deborah, Golda, and Me* about six months ago, and there have been few things that have made me feel more secure in myself than reading that book and discovering that my thoughts and fears, hopes and dreams, are shared by such a woman.” Similarly, Madison claims, “I learned about feminism through history, so a lot of the feminists I admire come from history. I like Alice Paul, Gloria Steinem, Kathleen Hanna... I’m also a sucker for Jessica Valenti, probably because she’s the one who inspired me to start a blog and we now have some personal contact because of it.”⁴ These conversations revealed the importance that feminist history plays in these bloggers’ own conceptions of and feelings about feminism. While Madison does mention

some contemporary feminists, such as Valenti, her inclusion of these present-day figures could be seen as a way to link the present to the past and recognize contemporary women as historical subjects.

Girl bloggers often write posts about the historical feminists they admire, a crucial part of how they engage with history and encourage their readers to do the same. For example, a lengthy October 2010 post called “Finally, A Post About Gloria Steinem” by Renee details the life and work of Steinem and what she means for Renee’s own relationship to feminism. Renee writes,

If I’ve learned anything from Gloria Steinem, it’s simply to accept yourself for who you are. I mean, claiming the feminist label a million thoughts ran through my mind: what will people think of me? What will my friends say, or my parents? Will people look at me differently in the future? Will they understand? It was almost as if my entire success as a feminist was dependent on how others viewed me. Isn’t that messed up? But after reading about Steinem and her amazing history, I knew she never cared about what people thought about her. Whether they worshipped her, mocked her, exalted her, or despised her, it had absolutely nothing to do with who she was as a person. So, in a way, Gloria Steinem has helped me to accept myself for who I am, and simply be.

In addition to educating readers about Steinem and her work through both details about Steinem’s life and accomplishments; as well as Renee’s own feelings about the founder of *Ms.*, Renee’s post inspired some interesting comments discussing the merits of Steinem’s work in relation to that of Betty Friedan. One commenter also recommends the work of bell hooks, Catherine MacKinnon, and Simone de Beauvoir as other must-reads for feminists. In this sense Renee also learns from her readers, assuring one that, “I’ve been meaning to read *The Feminine Mystique* – I’ll do it as soon as I have some free time ;).”

Renee is not the only blogger to write about her feminist influences from the past. To wit: Amandine wrote a thoughtful tribute to Shulamith Firestone upon her passing in August 2012, directly relating her own experience as an Orthodox Jewish feminist with that of Firestone. Amandine posts:

I got into women's rights advocacy when I wrote a paper about second wave feminism. When I did research for the paper and read second wave classics, those books really resonated with me... While I credit Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* as my official feminist click moment, reading Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* was certainly a close runner-up, part of the overall realization... It also fascinated me that someone with a name as Jewish as Shulamith could be a feminist. I know it sounds a little silly, but when I thought of feminists (especially when I first heard of Firestone and was not yet familiar with most major feminists), I thought of white bread [sic] American names like Betty and Gloria, not Shulamith. When I read Firestone's short bio on the back of the book and saw that she attended Yavneh of Telshe Yeshiva, a clearly Orthodox school, that fascinated me even more. While it wasn't a conscious thought, it struck me as "if she can be so ethnic and such a classic feminist, why can't I?"

Amandine's and Renee's postings serve a dual function, allowing the writer to articulate her own feminist narrative in relation to a lengthy history of feminism, while also introducing readers to the work of important historical feminist figures. This connection to one's own feminism is important to consider, as I'm suggesting that bloggers articulate more than an appreciation of these past feminist role models, but an intense affective connection that facilitates a sense of belonging to a larger cause. For example, this can be seen in Abby's quote from above when she says that "there have been few things that have made me feel more secure in myself than reading that book and discovering that my thoughts and fears, hopes and dreams, are shared by such a woman." Renee's comments

about Steinem reveal a similar emotional engagement that credits Steinem with learning to accept herself and “simply be.”

In her book *Selenidad: Selena, Latinos, and the Performance of Identity* Deborah Paredez (2009) argues that Selena’s performances “document and serve as methods for experiencing latinidad as an affective mode of belonging” for the late Tejano pop singer’s fans (xv). Paredez draws on the work of Ramon Rivera-Servera to describe how Latina identity is generated as affect through Selena’s performances, working “as a sensibility, a shared feeling of placeness, and at times placelessness, within the U.S. national imaginary” (2009, 33). In this sense, Selena’s girl fans are not merely enjoying the pleasure of a musical performance (although this is most likely occurring), but are experiencing new agential possibilities of being Latina that is intimately tied to a sense of belonging to a larger community. Perhaps most important though is Paredez’s recognition of the political possibilities inherent in this “affective mode” that offers a collective form of resistance and social action to young Latinas.

I am suggesting that Paredez’s analysis can provide insight into how the act of writing about their feminist role models may function politically for girl feminists. For example, Amandine’s written tribute to Firestone attributes her own present feeling of belonging to the feminist movement to Firestone, who demonstrated to Amandine that a Jewish ethnicity was not in conflict with feminist values. Similar to Selena’s Latina girl fans that Paredez discusses, Amandine was able to navigate her own sense of marginalization and “placelessness” through her affective attachment to Firestone. The end of Amandine’s tribute post reveals some of these sentiments. She writes, “I just feel so bad that Firestone was alone at the end. I would have been there for her faithfully. She truly changed my life, influenced my views on feminism and the world at large; it would have been the least I could do in return.”

Nonetheless, as Paradez emphasizes in regards to Selena, it was Firestone's ability to connect Amandine to a larger community of Jewish feminists both past and present (and later teenage feminists as well) that is crucial to Amandine's politicization, a process that I discussed in depth in chapter three. Consequently, I am not advocating for the historical feminist role models I discuss here to be viewed as examples of individualism within feminism's history, but instead as figures embedded within larger communities of feminists spanning past, present, and future that are able to generate affect that ultimately holds feminist communities together over periods of time.

CONNECTING PAST TO PRESENT: THE CASE OF NO-COST BIRTH CONTROL

One of the most important ways in which girls incorporate feminist history into their blogs is by demonstrating the similarities between past and present feminist issues. Indeed, this continuity between past and present is what interests many girl bloggers in feminist history. During a focus group discussion about Amandine's interest in the history of feminism, she reports, "I think what really struck me at first, and really continues to hook my interest [in feminist history] is the fact that so many of the second wave goals haven't really been met. We fought for equal pay, we still only make 77 cents (and that's if you have white privilege). We fought for reproductive rights, and so many are being taken away; it's terrifying." Amandine's point is important and reflects the connection between feminism's history, feminism in the present, and feminism's future, as she recognizes how both successful and failed feminist struggles of the past continue to influence present public debates and future policy, as in the case of ongoing reproductive rights legislation at the state level.

As I discussed in chapter three, many girl bloggers are passionate about reproductive rights; therefore, it is not surprising that birth control became an important topic of discussion in relation to feminist history. I was particularly stuck by the ways in which bloggers included a historical discussion of birth control (most often, the birth control pill) into their posts. For example, in a July 2011 post titled, “No-Cost Birth Control Matters!” Amandine provides a detailed overview of the history of birth control, starting with mention of it in early Egyptian civilizations (some, according to the post, used “crocodile dung” as a diaphragm!), moving through the work done by twentieth century activists, like Margaret Sanger, important court cases in the 1960s and 1970s that finally legalized birth control in the U.S., and ending with contemporary debates about no-cost birth control that have dominated headlines over the past year.

Similarly, Kat’s blog’s focus on sex education has meant that she writes frequently about the history of birth control. In a January 2011 entry titled “History of the Birth Control Pill,” Kat posts a short video from Planned Parenthood celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the birth control pill. On May 9th of that year she published a re-blogged tumblr post that reminds readers that it was on May 9, 1960 that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the world’s first commercially available birth control pill. The post acknowledges the long struggle for birth control since Margaret Sanger opened up the first birth control clinic in 1916 and highlights how the legalization of the pill is fundamental victory for women’s rights. Kat’s postings are brief in comparison to Amandine’s lengthy post, but nonetheless make the history of the birth control pill accessible and digestible to readers.

As Kat’s postings demonstrate, images and videos are frequently used by bloggers to incorporate history into their blogs and can easily be reblogged and circulated amongst readers easier than a lengthy written post. For example, in a posting titled “For Teens:

Why Talking About Birth Control Matters” Renee includes a photo that appears to be taken in the 1960s of a woman holding a Planned Parenthood sign reading “You can decide how many children you want... Planned Parenthood can help... with information on birth control and infertility services” (Figure 5.2).



In the 50's and 60's, many women were hearing about their reproductive options for the first time. (Shock!)

The average woman spends three quarters of her reproductive life trying to *prevent pregnancy*, so yeah, birth control is a big deal. The National Women's Law Center is hopeful that the DHHS will "see the light" on this issue, and ultimately heed the *recommendations given by a non-partisan, independent panel of scientific and medical experts at the Institute of Medicine* (the panel's recommendations range from providing "yearly well-woman preventative care visits" to "screening and counseling to detect and prevent interpersonal and domestic violence").

For the millions of women who rely on birth control to keep their options open, and for your future and mine, I really hope the DHHS is able to reach a favorable consensus. In teen lingo: *I hope they don't screw the heck up.*

Figure 5.2 Image from Renee’s post, author screen shot

By choosing to use this historical image rather than a more contemporary one, Renee puts her post in conversation with the past struggles for access to birth control. In another 2011 entry, Renee discusses a paper she wrote for her American History class about the history of the birth control pill. She posts the introduction to her paper along with the PBS Special called “The Pill” (in six parts) that her paper was based upon. Again, Renee privileges the use of video to supplement and enhance her historical post.

I am suggesting that by incorporating images and videos (as well as links, memes, infographics, and other visual data) into their historical posts, the bloggers I discuss here are attempting to make history more interesting to their readers by harnessing the affective function of image-based media. Tiziana Terranova (2004) argues that the significance of the image within digital media “is the kind of affect that it packs, the movements that it receives, inhibits, and/or transmits” (42). Jodi Dean (2010) builds on Terranova’s scholarship by arguing that her analysis can be expanded to include the numerous contributions to digital networks, “including music, sounds, words, sentences, games, videos, fragments of code, viruses, bots, crawlers, and the flow of interactions themselves as in blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube” (115). Dean continues, “The most interesting aspect of the image, in other words, is the way that it is not simply itself but itself plus a nugget or shadow or trace of intensity. An image is itself and more” (115).

While Dean goes on to ultimately argue for the constraining and never-quite-satisfying quality of the image’s affect, the analysis of my own data departs from Dean’s theoretical intervention to suggest that the affective dimension of images and other modes of online interactions (e.g. links), is viewed positively by the girl bloggers, especially when in relation to topics that, like history, may be considered “boring.”⁵ For example, when I asked Kat during a phone interview why she chose to use so many videos and

links in her work, she told me that it's the interactivity that this type of visual data fosters (rather than solely written posts) that makes her so excited about blogging as a media production practice. This desire for interactivity and the affect it creates may be especially pertinent for girls who are often marginalized from the production of history, offering up a significant opportunity to actively engage with the past.⁶

A December 2010 post on the *FBomb* by Julie called "Reproductive Rights: The Stuff That Got Left Out In School" also takes a historical approach to thinking about birth control. In the post Julie discusses how teenage girls often know little about the importance of reproductive rights and "don't have respect for or an understanding about the trials our moms and grandmas had to go through so that we have what to us seem like the basic rights of being able to control and make choices about our bodies." She writes,

Now, I don't think this is entirely the fault of a generation that's being painted as total self-obsessed brats... I think a lot of the blame can be put on our schools. When I took AP U.S. History we spent maybe a week total on women's rights and the feminist movement. As far as reproductive rights go, Margaret Sanger was mentioned, and then we moved on... On the *FBomb*, we spend a lot of time talking about feminism as it relates to us personally, in pop culture and in current events, which is awesome. But I think there's probably room to fill in for the education we're apparently not getting in school. For my Gender, Culture, Power class, I made a pretty intense timeline about the history of the American reproductive rights movement. I've reproduced some entries from it below. Hopefully this will help at least a few people realize that the rights we have over our bodies are fairly recent and also potentially easy enough to lose tomorrow.

The post goes on to describe some of the major highlights in the fight for reproductive rights in the U.S., including the Comstock Laws of the 1870s which made contraception illegal, Sanger's birth control clinics and resulting legal battles in the early twentieth century, the legalization of the pill and abortion in 1960 and 1973 respectively, the

changes to reproductive rights laws following the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and then Bill Clinton in 1993, and the 2009 murder of Dr. George Tiller, a Kansas doctor who performed late-term abortions.

I quote Julie at length above because the post makes evident the clear link that she is attempting to establish between past and present, ending with a sad event that reinforces how divisive reproductive rights are even today. Julie also includes a link to “a more comprehensive timeline” on Planned Parenthood’s website, directing readers to find out more if they’re keen.⁷ I am also interested in this post, however, because of its clear educational mission. Julie recognizes how girls are not getting taught the history of women’s rights in high school, and she uses the *FBomb* as an educational tool to “fill in” for the lack of attention to this topic in school curricula. The enthusiastic comments from readers following this post is a testament to Julie’s assessment of the high school curriculum.

For example, Katherine C. writes, “YAY!!!!!! *applause* I am a huge fan of women’s history and you would not believe (or, actually, you probably would) the crap I take for it in history class. Brava!” Similarly, Marisol reports that, “You know, I’ve never actually heard of Margaret Sanger before now (yes I stay awake in history class; she’s just not in our curricula at all). But she sounds like a badass that I need to find out more about!” Zoe writes, “Cool and informative. Thanks!” And Bri comments, “Wow. It really shows you how recent all of that is. Contraception was illegal in 1936. That wasn’t very long ago at all and Roe V Wade was 1973, my mother was already a young girl at that time. In one way it’s disturbing how slow the process has been and makes me think of how long a way we have to go, but there is also hope. We may be moving slowly, but we’re moving.” These comments simultaneously reveal an interest in and lack of basic knowledge of the history of reproductive rights, and emphasize the educational role that

posts like these play in the feminist blogosphere. In this sense, girl bloggers perform as teachers through their discussions about feminism's histories.

The pedagogical function of blog posts, such as Julie's, must be viewed as part of a lengthy educational history within feminist media. For example, Linda Steiner (1992) documents how suffrage periodicals were crucial to the movement, explaining and legitimizing its instrumental and expressive purposes to both committed participants and those uninitiated to the suffrage agenda. We can also consider how publications from the women's liberation period served a pedagogical function, such as the seminal 1971 book *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which contained information related to women's health and sexuality from a feminist perspective.⁸ Steiner argues that feminist media producers have long been "dedicated to bringing forth knowledge to bring about transformation, not neutral observers distributing information commodities" (124). This is a significant point, in that we must recognize how feminist bloggers such as Julie and her predecessors expect that the information they relay will be used to motivate and politicize their readers. In this sense, we again see how education functions as an activist strategy (something I argue in chapter two in relation to girl feminist bloggers) that has been important for feminists for over a century.

The above examples from Amandine's, Kat's, and Renee's blogs, as well as the *FBomb*, demonstrate a variety of approaches to the inclusion of feminist history in blogging. Amandine's well-researched discussion outlines how seemingly "current" feminist issues often have historical lineage, drawing detailed links between feminist past and present. Kat's use of historical infographics and videos lend themselves to be reblogged and circulated easily amongst readers, providing "reminders" about important days in history for women's reproductive rights. Renee's uses of videos and images provide visual documentation of the past that she puts in conversation with contemporary

concerns, and Julie's timeline of reproductive rights history maps the development of these rights in an easy to read format.

However, all of these examples use feminist history as a lens for the bloggers to better understand their own feminism in the present, mobilizing history as a source to ignite their own and their readers' activism. Education becomes key to this process, as Julie notes, as this knowledge becomes foundational to feminist activism in the present. I want to suggest that this process also helps bloggers to understand themselves as historically situated subjects, in that the present is also historical. Thus, by sharing her own thoughts on the importance of birth control as a teen, Renee positions herself as a historical subject that is both conscious of the past and aware of the future – a positioning that youth are often assumed to not inhabit (Lesko, 2001). Finally, in looking to the past these bloggers acknowledge the ways that feminist history is intricately tied to feminism's present in a way that is often obscured with discourses of postfeminism and the wave metaphor, which I will address later in this chapter.

“WE WON’T STOP... ‘TIL WE HAVE SUFFRAGE”: TELLING HISTORY IN “NEW” WAYS

Feminist historians have criticized the ways that mainstream history has been constructed as linear, progressive, objective, and academically-situated; a form that often excludes women's experiences and voices because of their positioning outside spheres of power. New forms of history then, such as oral history, have been important for feminists in order to make visible women's contributions, and as Joan Sangster (1994) argues, contest the reigning definitions of social, economic, and political importance that obscured women's lives. This is not a recent phenomenon as there is a lengthy history of feminists creatively telling their own histories in innovative ways. For example, Krista

Cowman (2009) describes how British suffragettes, often restricted from the masculine domains of politics and academic history, recorded and disseminated history through visual forms, such as Cicely Hamilton's Pageant of Great Women, first staged in 1909. She also notes how suffragettes would often adopt historical costumes for suffrage processions as a means of presenting precedence, honoring the past, and creating spectacle that we often forget has a longstanding role in feminist activism.

I'm suggesting that the feminist blogosphere offers a space that encourages this feminist tradition of stepping away from notions of masculinist history defined by seemingly objective dates and names, in favor of presenting history in creative and playful ways. This "playful activism" embodies the spirit of many feminist blogs and third wave feminism more broadly (Keller, 2012b; Heywood and Drake, 1997). While third wave feminists, such as media commentators Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2000), often claim playful activism as something unique -- or at least defining of -- the third wave, I maintain that this strategy must be understood as extending from a much longer history going back over at least a century, as I describe above.

A video posted by Amandine to her blog in April 2012 is an excellent example of how feminist history is being told in creative new ways online. The video, "We Are Caught in a Bad Romance 'Til We Have Women's Suffrage," a parody of Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" music video, is about the fight for women's suffrage in the U.S. and features dancing suffragettes singing about the need to get the vote.⁹ The video opens with a sign announcing the "National Women's Party" with the suffragettes singing, "Vo Vo votes ah aah, whoa aa, won't ta aah, stop ha, ooo la la, 'til we have suffrage! It's gotten ugly, they passed the 15th, still women have no right no guarantee to liberty... child, health, wealth or property!" in the tune of the popular Lady Gaga hit song. Throughout the five-minute video a story of suffrage is depicted, including violent

demonstrations, mustached men singing that women, “don’t need to vote,” and wives dropping children onto husband’s laps as they head out the door to protest (Figure 5.3).

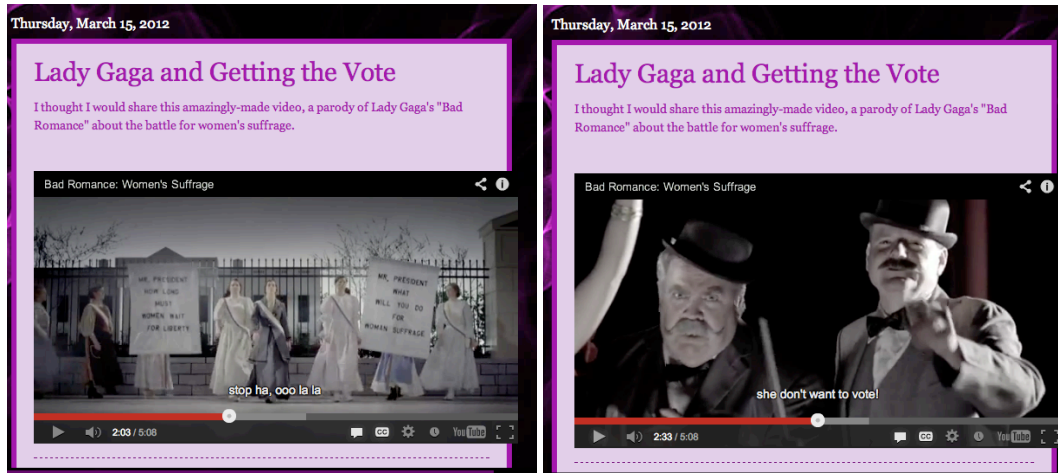


Figure 5.3 “We Are Caught in a Bad Romance ‘Til We Have Women’s Suffrage,” author screen shot, copyright Soomo Publishing

While this video may not be “educational” or “historical” in the traditional sense (it lacks dates, names, and places, for example), it is nonetheless circulating American feminism’s history amongst a wide audience that may not read a 1000-word blog post about suffrage. Similar to the British suffragette’s plays or costume processions I discuss above, a video such as this one is meant to attract attention through an unusual display that is playful and fun, yet undeniably political and educational.

Nonetheless, it is important to understand why this type of historical engagement is so important to bloggers. Why would a blogger like Amandine post this video to her blog? First, a video can be quickly reblogged and shared, something that my participants stressed as being very important in the online environment. A video can be circulated with the click of a button and can be reposted to personal blogs and social networking

pages. This quick spread of information has been crucial to contemporary feminist initiatives, such as the “Planned Parenthood Saved Me” campaign.¹⁰ Additionally, the video has pop culture cache, drawing on the global popularity of Lady Gaga, her catchy “Bad Romance” song and edgy accompanying music video to draw attention to the importance of suffrage. This tie to Lady Gaga will most likely attract Gaga’s younger female (and male) fans, which may not normally come into contact with or watch a feminist video. Finally, the Bad Romance suffragette video has contemporary relevance in this U.S. election year, where there has been increased attention to both voting legislation and the “war on women” in popular media. These qualities make it ideal for a blog post where image-based, interactive and easily digestible material can be displayed easily and circulated widely. Consequently, a video like this then can be viewed as more than just a fun post, but as a strategy that employs new media production and circulation to put feminist past in conversation with present.

Carrie’s blog also provides an interesting example of how feminist history is being told in creative ways online. In late summer and fall 2012, guest blogger Alanna wrote a series of posts about zines, detailing how girls can make their own.¹¹ This blog series is interesting to think about in relation to history because it calls upon girls to take up the creation of a historical document via a new media platform (a blog). As numerous scholars including Duncombe (1997), Schilt (2003), Kearney (2006), and Piepmeier (2009) note, zines and other handmade pamphlets have been an important medium for earlier generations of feminists, produced since the 1850s. Piepmeier argues that these feminist participatory media productions “have offered a snapshot of their own cultural moment’s take on issues [such as gender, identity, community, and resistance]” (29). Within this context, zines function as historical documents that not only capture moments

of feminist history, but also incorporate “scrapbook” skills traditionally privileged in girls’ and women’s culture, including collage-making, drawing, and personal writing.

Piepmeyer describes how, as the Internet became increasingly accessible to more people in the late 1990s and early 2000s, both scholars and popular commentators began to assume that blogs would replace zines. She explains, “Zines, then, can be seen as a sort of nostalgic medium, harking back to a punk or grunge era that no longer exists” (14). While Piepmeyer goes on to argue that zines continue to be produced within the age of digital culture, it is interesting to note that it is the history of the medium that seems to fascinate Alanna and other bloggers.

For example, the second entry of Alanna’s three-part series, “Zines: A History Lesson,” documents the history of zine culture, beginning with the science fiction fanzines of the 1930s. She goes on to describe the evolution of the subculture through 1960s counterculture publications like Vancouver’s *The Georgia Straight* and New York’s *Rat*, punks’ use of the do-it-yourself (DIY) medium in the 1970s, and the feminist riot grrrl zines of the 1990s. While Alanna does not explicitly state why we should care about the lengthy history of zines as a political medium, I understand this detailed entry as suggesting that part of producing a zine requires a historical knowledge of the medium, often in the form of aesthetics, tone, and politics. For example, Alanna describes how the punk aesthetic and DIY philosophy is “crucial” to the development of zines and she includes photos to give the reader a feel for the aesthetics (Figure 5.4).

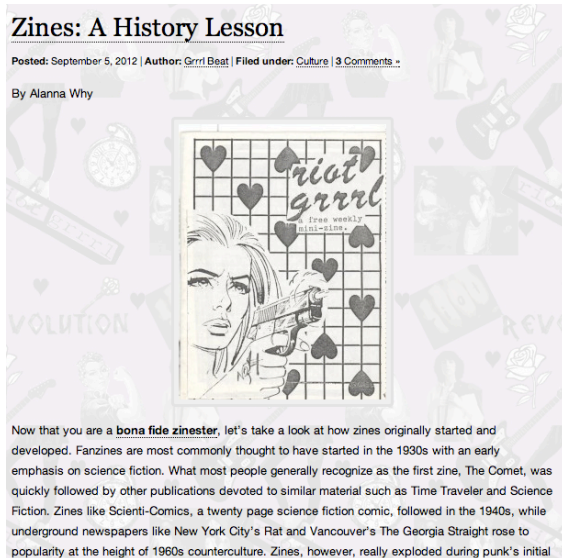


Figure 5.4, “Zines: A History Lesson” post by Alanna on Carrie’s blog

Author screen shot

I want to suggest that posts such as these take a unique approach to feminist history, simultaneously educating readers about the history of zinemaking as a feminist activist practice, while encouraging them to participate in the process of producing history through the creation of their own zines, something that I’ll discuss in more detail in the next chapter section. Thus, rather than merely produce blog posts that discuss feminist history for others to read, posts like Alanna’s promote an active engagement with history through a medium that has a lengthy legacy within feminism dating back over 150 years. Consequently, the use of “new” media to deliver “old” media to readers demonstrates the potential of blog spaces to be used for engaging with feminist history in unique and exciting ways.

REWRITING FEMINISM? GIRL BLOGGERS AS HISTORIOGRAPHERS

In addition to using their blogs to tell women's stories in new ways, girls are also challenging dominant histories of feminism, encouraging their readers to rethink some of what has become feminist "common sense." Of course, these bloggers are not the first to critique the privileged and published versions of feminist history as, for example, reproducing social hierarchies through excluding the voices of women of color, lower-class women, lesbian women, Third World women and girls. As I outlined earlier in this chapter, these feminists have struggled to tell their stories that have often been obscured from "hegemonic feminism" (Sandoval, 2000). Of course, I am not suggesting that white, middle-class women have purposefully attempted to write out the voices of other feminists from history. Instead, this process is embedded within larger structures of social power and domination.

In the introduction to *Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century*, Lyz Bly (2012) writes how her own archival research made it clear to her "how much media images shaped [her] generation's image and understanding of the women's liberation movement of the 1970s" (2). Interestingly, this sentiment was also echoed by one of my participants as well who claims that her knowledge of feminist history had come solely from mainstream media images, primarily images of women at mass rallies and protests, prior to her engagement with feminist blogging. This suggests the importance for feminists both to produce their own media and to ensure its documentation as a necessary strategy to guarantee the survival of feminist histories, rather than history.

In her article, “Reading between the Waves: Feminist Historiography in a ‘Postfeminist’ Moment,” Deborah L. Siegel (1997) cautions feminists to avoid reproducing historical accounts that obscure the heterogeneity of feminisms at any given moment. However, she argues that historiography can nonetheless be an important tool for challenging limited historical narratives. She writes, “Inasmuch as we need to problematize the writing of history so as to avoid the re-creation of master narratives, we must nevertheless continue to make history through the very act of making historiography” (62). Siegel advocates for young feminists to “read, write, and make feminist history as process... [to] understand feminist history as perpetually in motion” (60). Her poststructuralist framework is useful for understanding history as discursively formulated narrative that can never adequately reflect an objective “truth” about any iteration of feminism. In a similar vein, Stanford Friedman (1995) advocates for “constructing histories in the plural,” suggesting that the need to make history as a political act must exist simultaneously with problematizing the practice in order to avoid the creation of grand narratives.

Based upon this literature, I am suggesting that the girl feminist bloggers I spoke to act as historiographers through the practice of blogging about feminist history. Drawing upon Stanford Friedman’s excellent discussion of what a historiography of feminism might look like, I am defining the act of feminist historiography as the writing of histories that construct stories of girls’ and women’s experiences using a feminist perspective with attention to one’s own position of power within the historical narrative and the goal of social transformation or, an “oppositional bite” (Stanford Friedman, 25).¹² Kearney’s (2006) discussion of grrrl zinester’s rewriting of feminist history reminds us that this practice must be again understood in relation to an important tradition of feminist intervention into dominant histories. For example, Kearney notes how zinesters

often attempted to write the contributions of women of color into their zines, as well as pop culture icons that push the boundaries of “traditional standards for female and feminist identity” (177). Consequently, the examples I discuss here should be understood as part of this important history.

Madison is one of the bloggers who performs as a historiographer through blogging. In a July 2012 post called, “I’m Over Rosie,” Madison discusses her frustration with Rosie the Riveter as one of the only visible symbols of women history and encourages her readers to embrace the history of, what she calls, “real women.” She suggests that feminists have “clung on to [Rosie] so tightly” in part because “we are so desperate for some recognition of our accomplishments and our history that we took the first thing we got and ran with it.” Madison’s critique is smart and challenges dominant representations of feminist history by suggesting that we must make more of an effort to celebrate a range of women, such as the Women’s Air Service Pilots who flew during WWII or the Air Service Nurses who played key roles in WWII and Vietnam, in order to understand the diversity of women’s historical experiences. She writes,

I say, we give up Rosie. I’m not going to take her down from my wall, or throw away my t-shirts, but I am going to stop collecting things with her face on it just because it’s the only thing I can find that’s women history related. Instead of dressing up as Rosie for Halloween, maybe I’ll dress up as Alice Paul (the founder of the National Women’s Party) or Marie Currie (who won two noble prizes). I’ll celebrate the accomplishments of those women, real women.

In such a posting Madison challenges her readers to think about feminist history in new ways and even provides a lengthy list of “badass women in history” where readers can educate themselves further on women’s and feminist histories. Madison’s list contains a diversity of women, including lesser-known activists such as Yuri Kochiyama and

Sacagawea, as well as more prominent women such as Maya Angelou, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Susan B. Anthony.

Madison's commitment to expanding her reader's knowledge of feminists throughout history can again be seen in a July 2012 posting where she re-blogs a tweet from Think Progress (a liberally-minded blog) that reads: "TODAY in 1848, pioneers including Susan B. Anthony & Elizabeth Cady Stanton, met in Seneca Falls, NY and founded the Women's Movement." Madison begins her post by writing, "Oops! Historical slip-up of the day" and proceeds to explain that Think Progress' tweet is incorrect, as Anthony did not attend Seneca Falls and didn't meet Stanton until 1851. Madison corrects that it was actually Lucretia Mott who helped organize the conference. The second part of Madison's post is worth citing at length:

Why does this matter? Women's history is not very well known as it is, most people can only name the big names: Stanton, Anthony, and Paul. It's important that we get history right so that all women can get the recognition that they deserve. Anthony, Paul, and Stanton didn't do it alone, and it's our job as progressives and feminists to make that clear. Women are routinely erased from history as it is, we shouldn't erase them further by getting our facts wrong when we talk about them. When I tweeted at Think Progress to correct them they didn't respond. I'm disappointed, you would think a progressive organization would care about getting the facts right.

Madison's entry reminds us that the contributions of many women are routinely erased from the history of feminism, which has consequences for the ways in which later generations of people understand the movement. Specifically, she implies that (masculinist) historical records often privilege the contributions of a few selected "stars" while obscuring the important contributions of many others. I would argue that this dominant approach to history reflects an individualist ethos at odds with how feminism

(and other progressive political movements) actually came to be. While Madison says that she's disappointed that Think Progress didn't seem to care about "getting the facts right," her explanation suggests that this issue is about much more than "correct facts," but about a politics of history. By arguing that it's our job as feminists and progressives to "correct" the record, Madison maintains that history remains a contentious space that feminists have a responsibility to pay attention to.

Nonetheless, despite her interest in honoring and celebrating "real women" and her acknowledgement of women's erasure from dominant histories, Madison still focuses her discussions of feminist women's history on prominent women that have been heavily celebrated, such as Alice Paul and Marie Currie. In doing so, she problematically reproduces a historical narrative centered on "great women," of the past in much the same way that hegemonic history has celebrated "great men." Madison isn't the only blogger to do this, though; indeed, I was surprised by the fact that none of the bloggers mentioned their moms or other "everyday" women/girls they know as feminist role models and worthy of historicizing. This oversight points to the ways in which the lives of everyday women are often overlooked as being historically irrelevant, and how even well-intentioned feminists can reproduce this assumption.

Likewise, Amandine's blog reveals her interest in intervening in dominant historical narratives of feminism, especially those that assume Western religions to be only patriarchal. Amandine, who identifies as Jewish Orthodox, frequently posts about historical Jewish women (and non-Jewish women as well) whom she argues have made important feminist contributions to the religion, yet often remain absent in both Jewish and feminist history. For example, one of her first posts explores the figure of Deborah, the Wet Nurse of Rebecca, as a woman deserving of more attention for her potentially

important role in Jewish history.¹³ Another one of her early posts about Belva Lockwood reads:

When one hears First Wave Feminism or suffrage movement, one normally thinks of women like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. If you know more about the women's rights movement, you might think of women like Alice Paul, and Carrie Chapman Catt. These are all women who made enormous contributions to the women's rights movement, and their accomplishments should never be downplayed. However, there is another key player of the suffrage movement that has fallen into obscurity: Belva Lockwood.

The post goes on to talk about Lockwood's many accomplishments as a lawyer and her important role in feminist history, and Amandine is essentially writing Lockwood back in to feminism through introducing her story to blog readers.

Finally, the *FBomb* offers another model as to how girl bloggers are rewriting history. Every Sunday since the site's inception Julie has posted a feature on a woman or girl artist under the heading, "Support Women Artists Sunday." The weekly feature aims to recognize the contributions of women and girls to the arts, contributions that are often not publicly acknowledged or recorded in dominant histories, such as syllabi for history of film classes. While Julie does write about contemporary artists also, her inclusion of women artists from the past (both recent and more distant past) is what I'll focus on primarily here. However, by including contemporary artists, Julie is placing them within history, creating an archive where future readers may be able to read about them, an idea I will return to in the next section of this chapter.

It is also important to note that while "Support Women Artists Sunday" is not explicitly focusing on feminist artists, many of the artists featured are indeed presented as feminist and are often positioned within their historical and cultural context, reflecting their struggle within a patriarchal culture. Thus, I am arguing that while the "Support

Women Artist Sunday” feature is not explicitly promoted as an exploration of feminist history, it often functions as such, demonstrating the fluidity needed to understand the ways in which history is threaded through girls’ feminist blogs.

For example, on January 1, 2012, Julie writes about Vera Chytilova, a Czech filmmaker who was influential in the Czech New Wave movement in the 1960s. A female filmmaker in an industry that continues to be male-dominated, Chytilova’s films often dealt with critical social issues and were consequently censored by the communist government. The *FBomb* post introduces Chytilova to readers while writing her into feminist cultural history. Similarly, the 1980s new-wave group The Go-Go’s was the topic of a September 2011 post where Julie notes how the group was “one of the first commercially successful female groups that wasn’t controlled by male producers or managers.” She also notes how their style, influenced by both the new wave and punk movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s “was raw and rocking; it may not have directly inspired the female alternative rockers and riot grrrls of the ‘90s, but it certainly foreshadowed it.” Another post covers Ani DiFranco, whose most prolific time as a songwriter was around the time that many FBombers were still in diapers in the mid-1990s. The article emphasizes DiFranco’s DIY (do-it-yourself) feminist roots that informed her decision to remain an independent artist throughout the entirety of her career, and again introduces an influential feminist artist to young readers.

Other bloggers have also intervened as historiographers to feminist cultural history. For example, in a November 2011 post titled “The Women *Rolling Stone* Forgot,” Carrie writes,

This week, *Rolling Stone Magazine* published a list of the 100 greatest guitarists of all time – and only two of them are women. ... I can’t help but feel that some serious oversights have been made, not only by the voters (made up of mostly

famous male guitarists), but by the music world at large. So, without further ado, here are just some of the many fabulous ladies who I think should have been on Rolling Stone's list and who should be recognized and respected as the incredible guitarists that they are. Comment with your favorite female guitarists!

Carrie goes on to feature Carrie Brownstein (Excuse 17, Heavens to Betsy, Sleater-Kinney, Wild Flag), Lita Ford (the Runaways), Sister Rosetta Tharpe ("original soul sister" of the 1930s and 1940s), and Allison Robertson (the Donnas) as female guitarists worthy of attention. In doing so, Carrie intervenes in the hegemonic historical record legitimated through *Rolling Stone*, using the space of her blog to write her own history and inviting others to do the same through the comments section.

It is significant to note how women in popular culture, especially female musicians, serve as feminist role models for my study participants and their peers. This is not surprising, considering how popular music has been and continues to be one of the primary spaces for feminist expression, communication, and networking (Kearney, 2006). For example, Kearney (2006) outlines the ways in which grrrl zinesters frequently wrote about female musicians, often "resurrect[ing] and reclaim[ing] female performers who have been disparaged or silenced as a result of their radical, eccentric, or perverse ideas or behavior, thereby refusing simultaneously both male history and traditional standards for female and feminist identity" (177). Kearney suggests that this may be due to the ability of popular musicians to speak to young people who may be alienated by academic feminist rhetoric, and, I would add, adult feminists who may disregard girls' experiences and ideas.

Thus, by re-writing feminist musicians and other popular culture figures into history, girl feminist bloggers are challenging not only a masculinist history of popular culture (which has largely excluded the contributions of women), but also an adult-

centered feminist history that tends to omit/disregard women and girls who have performed feminism primarily within popular culture spaces. In doing so, girl feminist bloggers produce and circulate new feminist counter-memories that highlight girls' interest in and commitment to feminism.

However, I do want to acknowledge how many of the women that girl feminist bloggers are writing about in their historical posts are white and American, with only the odd exception (Carrie's mentioning of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, for example). Consequently, we must remind ourselves that while the girl bloggers I spoke to verbalize their commitment to democratizing history, their postings again only represent a partial history where the voices of women of color, non-American, and lesbian women remain somewhat marginal. When women of color are discussed, for example, it is often already celebrated women that receive mention, such as bell hooks or Maya Angelou.

I was also surprised to see that the bloggers did not attempt to highlight girls' contributions to feminist history. Considering the importance that my study participants place on age within their own feminist practices, the invisibility of girl feminists as historical role models on girls' feminist blogs suggests a significant dissonance. This lack of attention to girl feminists' positioning in history is likely due to the paucity of information on such girls. Indeed, my own research into the history of girls' feminist activism has revealed little scholarship or popular press about the topic.¹⁴ This significant historical gap is easily reproduced, and problematically renders feminist girls' historical record invisible on contemporary feminist girls' blogs.¹⁵

RESEARCHING WOMEN'S HISTORY: THE CASE FOR ONLINE NETWORKS

It is probably not surprising that few bloggers I interviewed claim to have learned about feminist history in school, with the exception of a few girls lucky enough to have a rare feminist teacher in a private middle or high school. Where then can girls learn about feminist history? In the third chapter of this dissertation I argue to understand girl feminist bloggers as part of networked counterpublics whose sustained connections are valuable and vital to sustaining the feminist blogosphere. Through my interviews, I discovered that it is these networks that also provide resources for girls' historical research on feminism, and in turn, girl bloggers aim to "pass on the favor" through serving as a resource for feminist history for their readers. In this sense, girls can be historiographers in part because of their participation in networks that provide them access to a variety of online resources where they can conduct their own research on feminist history.

Almost all of the bloggers participating in the focus group spoke of various blogs, websites, and other online resources that serve as their primary resources for learning about feminist history that they then include in their own blogs. For example, Kat tells me, "I honestly think I've learned the most from tumblr. I owe it all to the blog *Historical Slut*. She is always posting about the history of feminism and female issues. I found this blog from following other feminist tublrs. It is one of my favorites." Likewise, Courtney explains,

I feel like I learned the most [about feminist history] from blogs on tumblr, and a few elsewhere. *Lipstick Feminists* is probably where I have learned the most.

They're usually super good about reblogging/making posts about important days for feminism or leaders in the movement. [Amandine's blog] is also one of my favorites, very insightful and easy to read... I've definitely come across a LOT more names, women like Marie Curie and Rosalind Franklin. Just a lot of stuff I never got the chance to learn in school.

Amandine often uses online sources like the *New York Times* archive and is also “particularly fond of using videos of interviews or events as sources, it's actually how I made a really cool feminist second waver friend!” These responses remind us how feminist blogs (as well as other online resources) are serving an educational function that is a crucial part of circulating feminist knowledge amongst a diversity of readers.

In this sense, girl feminist bloggers use the Internet as an archive, “poaching” from various sites in order to write their own feminist histories (de Certeau, 1984). Internet scholars have discussed the web in such a way, highlighting how web 2.0 sites like YouTube, for example, serve as what Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2009) call a “living archive of contemporary culture from a large and diverse range of sources” (88). Similarly, Jodi Dean (2006) argues that blogs “are archives, specific accountings of the passage of time that can then be explored, returned to, dug up” (n.p.) Based on my conversations with the bloggers, it seems as though the girls are indeed using online sources in such a way and incorporating their findings into their own posts.

This practice then also points to the bloggers' role as archivists, creating their own “mini-archives” of feminist content that circulates amongst their networks. For example, Amandine's entry about Belva Lockwood involved using the online *New York Times* archive to research the post, which then circulated via Amandine's various feminist counterpublic networks, such as those focusing on teenage and Jewish feminist issues. Many of Amandine's readers would not have read the original *New York Times* articles and thus, Amandine's decision to circulate such as history becomes fundamental to the

inclusion of women like Lockwood within the young feminist blogosphere and the creation of counter-memories. Through the use of feminist zines, blogs, and other digital grassroots projects, Chidgey (2012) argues that

tentative counter-memories are therefore produced, cited, and circulated, creating new archives of meaning whilst also revisiting residual investments. These counter-memories draw on mainstream media accounts, challenge them, and further appropriate commercial platforms such as YouTube and Issuu to popularize and disseminate personal narratives held in a collectivity... An uneven terrain, feminist cultural memory embraces the experiences, artefacts, stories and also silences – from the personal to the institutional, and always mediated – that shape identities, structures of belonging, and affective economies. As such, memories have political consequences (95-96).

I cite Chidgey at length because she makes two key points relevant to my own analysis. First, her recognition of the intertwining of mainstream media and commercial platforms with girls' feminist blogs demonstrates how participatory culture functions as a significant aspect of girls' practice of historiography (Jenkins, 2006). We can see this in many of the examples I've discussed, such as the Lady Gaga video posted by Amandine, or Carrie's talking back to *Rolling Stone Magazine* by writing about her favorite female guitar players. Thus, the "mini-archives" produced and circulated by girl feminist bloggers must be viewed as part of a wider, contemporary participatory media culture that they're contributing to through their own labor of researching, writing, and circulating their historical posts.

Second, I want to highlight Chidgey's acknowledgment of the connection between feminist cultural memory and structures of belonging, something I've emphasized throughout this chapter. By performing as historiographers and creating "mini-archives" girl feminist bloggers are producing links to the past that allow them to

imagine themselves as belonging to a larger movement of women and girls beyond their current historical positioning, challenging the “pastness” of feminism promoted by postfeminist discourses. The “mini-archives” they create extend this structure of belonging into the future, where other girls may discover them and learn about feminist history from the stories they tell. I will return to discuss the implications of feminist archives and blogging in the conclusion to this dissertation, as it raises important questions about the future of feminist histories.

MOVING BEYOND THE WAVES?

Thus far I have outlined the various ways that girl bloggers have been engaging with feminist history on their blogs. But how do bloggers view their own positioning in feminist history, particularly in relation to the dominant wave metaphor used to describe such history and feminists’ place in it? I will conclude this chapter by returning to my discussion of the wave metaphor in order to understand how girl feminist bloggers position themselves within this narrative.

In November 2009 the *New York Times Magazine* published a question and answer interview with feminist blogger/author/public speaker Jessica Valenti titled “Fourth-Wave Feminism.” The article generated speculation about this supposed “fourth wave” based on Valenti’s response to the question posed by Deborah Solomon if she considered herself a third wave feminist: “I don’t much like the terminology, because it never seems very accurate to me. I know people who are considered third-wave feminists who are 20 years older than me.” When Solomon followed up by asking, “maybe we’re onto the fourth wave now?” Valenti responded with, “Maybe the fourth wave is online.” Valenti later commented on her personal blog that when she found out the title of the

interview, she “instinctively made a face” (Valenti, 2009). She writes that while she’s never been a fan of the wave model because it contributes to generational tension, she nonetheless believes that “feminists today do things differently than feminists in the 60s, or the 90s, or shit, even two or three years ago.” She explains,

That’s the incredible thing about feminism; it’s constantly evolving. After all, we kind of have to; the world and sexism and patriarchy aren’t stagnant things, so we can’t be either. I also think there’s something to the idea that there’s a new model for feminism being built online. For better or worse, the Internet has changed feminist organizing, writing and networking *forever*...

So maybe the work we’re doing *is* the fourth wave. But it’s probably more accurate to describe what’s going on online as fourth *waves*. Because there’s no one cohesive movement, or one feminist platform, or one feminist leader. There are multiple online feminisms and feminist communities. To some, those who feel a social justice movement needs a monolithic center, the ideas of ‘waves’ may seem disorganized or odd. But really, it’s perfect...

So perhaps I was wrong; maybe the wave model is useful after all – *if* we use it to honor the complexity and nuance that is feminism, instead of relying on a strict framework that homogenizes what is, in its essence, wonderfully complicated (emphasis in original).

Valenti’s response illustrates the complex ways that feminist bloggers are grappling with the wave metaphor, and while problematizing it, she leaves the possibility of fourth waves open for others to pick up or not.

Before I began my interviews I expected the bloggers to identify with this supposed emerging fourth wave, considering their use of the Internet in their own feminist activism as bloggers. Indeed, Julie’s personal website claims that she’s “one of the leaders of the fourth wave feminist movement” (Zeilinger, 2012b). However, I was

surprised to discover that none of my study participants identified as fourth wave and several had never heard of the term. Amandine tells me,

I've heard of the fourth wave and I think it's stupid. I like the wave metaphor because historically, it's very accurate: very active, not so active, very active, no so active, very active. From the 90s until now, there hasn't really been a period of 'not so active,' so I don't see why there has to be a fourth wave just yet. I understand that people could argue that there have been two halves to the third wave, since the age of the Internet heralded Feminism 2.0 mid-wave, but to argue for a fourth wave IMHO [in my humble opinion] is jumping the gun.

Amandine's comment highlights the issue of breaks between the waves, or the 'feminist free zones' I discussed earlier in this chapter (Hewitt, 2010b).

Similarly, Renee argues that, "I don't think we're ready to move on [to a new wave] just yet. If the third wave has been ushered in with the advent of technology and various communication methods, I think the fourth wave should coincide with the 'next big breakthrough,' though I don't know what that will be." Even Julie tells me that, "I personally don't identify with the third wave... but I don't really think we're in a fourth wave either. If the fourth wave is defined by use of the Internet, I know women in their 30s who are still considered 'young' bloggers and who really pioneered feminism on the Internet so it doesn't seem right for my generation of teens/ 20-somethings to claim this movement as solely our own." Julie's comment again points to the complicated intersection between waves and generations, revealing uncertainty about the start and end of particular generations and waves.¹⁶

Despite having reservations about simplistic relationships between generations and waves, some bloggers ultimately understood their own wave positioning in relation to when they were born, but even this marker remained somewhat murky for the

bloggers. For example, while Julie, who was born in 1993, does not identify as third wave, Amandine, who was born in 1995 reluctantly considers herself a third wave. She tells me, “I do consider myself part of the third wave because time-wise that’s how it worked out for me. However, in general I don’t really like third wave feminists, and I think the issues they spend so much time and effort on are such an embarrassingly large waste.” In addition to finding the third wave “trying too hard to be politically correct,” Amandine dislikes what she perceives as the third wave obsession with sex to the detriment of other issues. She elaborates,

I’m not trying to say that sex and all the related issues (pregnancy and abortion, bullying based on perceived promiscuity or lack thereof, pornography and sex work, etc) isn’t important, since it is, but many younger feminists only pay attention to sex-related issues and abandon other ones. For example, childcare. This is a women’s issue that has yet to be solved, but it’s absolutely critical to women’s equality in the workplace and economy. And yet feminists pay little attention to it.

Amandine’s comment surprised me as I assumed that if girl bloggers were not identifying as fourth wave, that the third wave would then serve as a primary identity for the bloggers.¹⁷ However, as Amandine suggests, third wave identification is complicated for the bloggers. While Amandine considers herself a part of the third wave she does not necessarily consider herself a third wave feminist. Carrie, on the other hand, views the third wave not as Amandine describes it, but more centered on the riot grrrl movement, which was her entry into feminism as a musician. Amandine and Carrie’s view of the third wave reveal how people experience the waves in different ways depending on personal experiences. In other words, the “third wave” can’t mean only one thing, but can

be viewed as a historical period, an ideological perspective, and/or a collection of multiple issues and strategies.

Renee also echoes these ideas when she tells me, “I thought of myself as a feminist before I thought of myself as a third waver... Honestly, I think I’m more connected to my identity as a feminist than I am as a third waver, because... it does kind of divide you from the older generation. I think feminist is just good because it unites everybody.” Nonetheless, she sees some value in both understanding herself as part of the third wave and the wave metaphor in general because, “if you want to get sappy about it, waves just keep on coming!” Renee explains,

I feel like when it comes to the different waves, you don’t get to decide – you’re just born into one. So when you’re in there you might as well try to be a good representative of that wave. And honestly, when you see the first wave, second wave, you see all these amazing things they’ve done and so just to consider yourself part of the third wave – I just get a proud feeling from it – that I’m on par with the women in the past that have done such cool things.

Interestingly, Renee explains her third wave identity as being very much connected to the history of feminism. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, this differs somewhat from feminist writing in the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, when a third wave feminist identity seemed to be a significant identifier that was mobilized to indicate third wavers as distinct from their predecessors.¹⁸ While it is impossible to definitely conclude why this shift seems to be occurring amongst some young bloggers, the cultural context that bloggers grew up in may suggest some possible answers. For example, in an era characterized by disintegrating coalitional organizing and collective politics, bloggers seem to be eager to articulate themselves as part of a movement that has a sense of

historical lineage. This is evident from Renee's comment that she gets a "proud feeling" not from forging a new feminist politics different from past feminisms, but from being a part of a larger feminist continuum.

I am arguing that the feminist history lessons that happen in the blogosphere contribute to encouraging girls to think more critically about the wave metaphor, leading to more ambivalent identifications with the third wave than I expected. This does not mean that all bloggers reject the wave metaphor, although some, like Madison, do. Madison tells me that while she used to like the wave metaphor, her experience as a blogger on tumblr – and specifically her interactions with the blog *Historical Slut* - has changed her mind, and she now sees the wave metaphor as unnecessarily separating women's organizing and discrediting the feminist work that continues to happen between the supposed waves. She says,

I feel like in school or formal history settings the wave metaphor makes it seem like you had all these feminists in the 20s and then they just died out until the 1970s!... But when you actually learn the history of women's movements, you realize that Alice Paul was working all the way into the 30s and 40s, you realize that things were a happening all the time – it really complicates the wave metaphor – where do things start or end? It's constant.

Madison's point is an important one, as it again highlights how feminist work can become erased through relying on dominant historical narratives. "I don't know if we're in the third wave now, or if it ended, or what's going on, but I'd like my feminist work to be valued, just as much as if we're in a wave. So I'm not really a fan of the wave metaphor," she concludes.

CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A TEMPORAL CITIZENSHIP OF BELONGING

In this chapter I have argued that girl feminist bloggers often act as historiographers, conscientiously intervening into hegemonic history by re-writing histories of feminism on their blogs. Often, they'll draw on the interactive functions of the web to share feminist histories in new ways that mobilizes the production of affect through videos, images, and sound. I maintain that we must understand these practices within a larger cultural framework where feminism and its histories are often absent from school curricula, and derided with a postfeminist popular culture which suggests that feminism is something of the past. Consequently, girl feminist bloggers' production and circulation of feminist histories – as well as their own contributions to history through sharing their personal stories – is an important part of their activist practice, fulfilling both an educational function as well as generating feelings of belonging that extend into the past and future.

Of course, we must still recognize the histories that girl feminist bloggers tell as partial, addressing some of the exclusions present in hegemonic histories (both feminist and mainstream), yet reproducing others. I am most troubled by their lack of attention to girl feminists within history, considering the bloggers' pride in their own teenage feminist identities, as I discussed in chapter two. I anticipate that this neglect is likely due to the dearth of information about girl feminists throughout history that is accessible to girl feminist bloggers. This is an area worthy of further research, a point I will return to in the concluding chapter of this dissertation. I do, however, recognize their support, sharing, and inclusion of each others' stories on their blogs (as I outlined in chapter three) as producing a history of themselves, which may mean that future girl feminists will have

access to the insights, strategies, and politics of the girl feminists I discuss here. This is also a point I will further consider in my conclusion.

Finally, I am arguing that my discussion throughout this chapter has significant implications for thinking about feminist blogging as a practice of citizenship that expands the “social practice of belonging” temporally (Caron, 2011, 73). There is a lack of attention to the temporality of citizenship within citizenship studies, yet I believe that this has exciting implications for thinking about youth citizenship more broadly, as it challenges the “stuck-ness” of youth in the present and/or future, as I outlined earlier. By learning about and producing their own feminist histories, girl bloggers are able to locate themselves as historical subjects that belong to a larger movement, a feeling that is powerfully articulated by my participants throughout this dissertation. In other words, feminist blogging as a practice of citizenship allows girls to access (feminist) histories in ways that may be otherwise unavailable to them. Consequently, this sense of belonging provides new modes of imagining oneself as a citizen outside of neoliberal conceptions of the individualized, consumer citizen that is rooted in the present.

Endnotes

¹ I acknowledge that this brief summary glosses over much of the complicated aspects of each wave. Instead, I am attempting to outline what Hewitt (2010a) calls the “master narrative” of feminism in the simplistic way it is often represented.

² McRobbie draws heavily on the work of Stuart Hall and his concept of “articulation” here as “a process where various progressive social movements (trade unionism, feminism, anti-racism, gay and lesbian rights), might forge connections and alliances with each other, and in doing so would also be constantly modifying their own political identities” (McRobbie, 2009, 25).

³ These books can be compared to a slate of books published by young American women in the early 1990s, including Katie Rophie’s *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and*

Feminism, Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, and Rene Denfeld's *The New Victorians: A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order*. Like the new German feminists discussed by Scharff (2012), these books often misrepresented – and even vilified - the feminism associated with the 1970s women's liberation movement as being harmful to contemporary young women.

⁴ It is interesting to note that Madison positions Kathleen Hanna as a historical figure, despite the fact that she remains active in feminist politics today. I am suggesting this is due to the fact that most bloggers know Hanna through her participation in riot grrrl as the singer of Bikini Kill, who broke up in 1996 (a year when most of my participants were toddlers of small children). Consequently, these young bloggers seem to view her as historical, although this characterization is not necessarily accurate.

⁵ It is beyond the scope of this discussion to engage with Dean's fascinating overall argument in depth here, which uses psychoanalytic theory to further explore the production of affect within digital media. See Dean (2010) for further reading.

⁶ See Lister et al. (2003) for an expanded discussion about interactivity within digital media.

⁷ This post was written before the latest assaults on women's reproductive rights in the U.S. in 2011 and 2012. Julie includes the following link for more information on the history of birth control in the United States: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/who-we-are/history-and-successes.htm>.

⁸ It is interesting to note that the book *Our Bodies, Ourselves* began as a stapled newsprint pamphlet titled *Women and Their Bodies* in 1970. The booklet was created by twelve women who participated in a workshop on "women and their bodies" at a Boston-area women's liberation conference in 1969. According to the *Our Bodies, Ourselves* website (2013), the women had discussed their own experiences interacting with their doctors and shared their knowledge about their bodies. Based upon this experience, they decided that women's voices were often problematically missing from conversations about women's bodies and produced and distributed *Women and Their Bodies* as a response to this culture. The DIY booklet was an underground success and was later published as an expanded edition by Simon & Schuster and renamed *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. I highlight this important history here because it demonstrates both the pedagogical function of feminist media, as well as the power of DIY media production to influence social transformation. See <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/about/history.asp> for more information about this history.

⁹ I am not including the URL to Amandine's posting in order to protect her privacy. However, the video was created by Soomo Publishing and can be viewed on their website

at <http://soomopublishing.com/suffrage/>. Other information about the making of the video can also be found here.

¹⁰ The “Planned Parenthood Saved Me” campaign was launched by Deanna Zandt in early February 2012 after the Susan G. Komen Foundation announced they would be ceasing to fund Planned Parenthood in late January 2012. In order to publicize how important Planned Parenthood is to the lives of American women, Zandt asked women to send in their stories about how Planned Parenthood has “saved” them and published them on her tumblr blog. She received many touching stories about Planned Parenthood helping women through the aftermath of sexual assault, providing life-saving medical screenings that found early stage cancer, and making available contraceptive and family planning information that prevented unwanted pregnancies. Zandt received the 2012 Maggie Award from Planned Parenthood for her efforts. See <http://plannedparenthoodsavedme.tumblr.com/>.

¹¹ It is interesting to note that a similar article title “How to Make a Zine” appeared in *Rookie Magazine* in May 2012, suggesting the popularity of zines amongst young feminist bloggers.

¹² Based upon my own theoretical orientation, I have drawn more heavily on Stanford Friedman’s discussion of a poststructuralist approach to feminist historiography. However, it is important to recognize that there are multiple ways that one may approach feminist historiography.

¹³ Amandine also regularly posts feminist analyses of Jewish prayers and songs, challenging her readers to rethink some of their assumptions about religion and feminism. These types of postings demonstrate extensive research, and Amandine claims that she spends many hours researching these types of posts. In other words, this information does not just appear, but requires significant labor to unearth from online archives and other sources that can be difficult to navigate – a skill Amandine has developed as a historiographer.

¹⁴ However, websites such as *Girl Museum* (<http://girlmuseum.org/>) do exist and would serve as a useful resource for bloggers interested in rewriting the contributions of girls back into history.

¹⁵ I am suggesting that this is a topic in need of further research. How might we as feminist scholars produce girls’ history as public knowledge? How might we better educate girls on their contributions to the movement? These are crucial questions for feminist scholars interested in the future of feminist activism.

¹⁶ Julie’s comments are interesting considering the label of “fourth wave feminism” that appears on her website. I suspect that this discrepancy may suggest the marketing appeal

of the wave metaphor, rather than any interest amongst young feminists themselves in the label.

¹⁷ This assumption is likely due to my own identification with the third wave through popular culture as a teenager in the late 1990s. It was in this period where many prominent “third wave” texts emerged, such as Heywood and Drake’s (1997) *Third Wave Agenda*, and the label seemed to be at the height of its popularity at that time.

¹⁸ I want to acknowledge that not all third wave feminists emphasized the distinction between themselves and the women liberationists. For example, I previously discussed how Kearney (2006) described the connections that many riot grrrls forged with older feminists through their zinemaking. It is also useful to note that some of the perceived divides between the feminists of the women’s liberation movement and the third wavers may be manufactured by writers such as Katie Rophie, whose feminist credentials are questionable, despite her own identification with the label (Henry, 2004). Nonetheless, the shift from girls and women using the third wave label in feminist publications to the lack of wave identification as evidenced by many feminist blogs point to an interesting shift worthy of further study. See Piepmeier (2009) for a discussion of this debate.

Conclusions: Anticipating the Future of Girlhood Feminisms

“Feminists still have a lot of work to do in terms of countering the negative stereotype of feminism in the media and the overarching idea that feminism is dead, but I think that teen girls today are completely ready and willing to take on that fight”

-Julie Zeilinger, email interview

On Saturday, November 10, 2012 *CNN.com* published an article asking: Where are all the millennial feminists? The article, written by college student and former CNN intern Hannah Weinberger, grapples with the supposed disavowal of feminism by young women today. And while Weinberger does include the voices of young feminists such as Julie Zeilinger, the author’s prognosis for feminism remains uncertain at best, portraying a movement hampered by the resistance of too many young women to be truly revolutionary today.

Articles like Weinberger’s are not uncommon, and its publication on a popular news site as I’m completing this dissertation speaks to the urgent need to better understand contemporary feminism and girls’ participation in it. As I’ve demonstrated throughout this dissertation, Weinberger’s article does not tell the whole story about contemporary girls’ commitment to feminist politics. Indeed, as stories like hers assert girls’ resistance to feminism, Renee, Amandine, Madison and the other bloggers that participated in this project are busy organizing campaigns to block abortion legislation in Michigan, critiquing media representations of girls and as Courtney says, “spreading the good word of feminism.” This dissertation is my attempt to hear their voices and make sense of their actions within a larger cultural context dominated by postfeminist and neoliberal discourses that too often present girls as apolitical and with limited options for citizenship.

Consequently, I view this project as having distinctively political stakes. The conservative claim that contemporary girls are not invested in feminism problematically suggests that girls are already equal and excuses us and them from addressing the sexism, ageism, racism, classism, and heterosexism that affects the lives of many girls in this country. I provide evidence that disputes this conservative assertion by demonstrating that some girls recognize their unequal access to power and are acting to challenge the power structures that facilitate them. Their actions, in other words, force us to acknowledge patriarchy and other systems of social inequality in the lives of girls. Furthermore, recognizing feminist girls alters the ways in which we understand girlhood, upsetting the hegemonic constructions of girls as apolitical, a lingering assumption despite the fact that we celebrate contemporary girls as independent, visible, and active. This disruption of gender norms raises the prospect of girls as having the power to alter dominant gender ideologies – something that remains frightening for many people.

This dissertation is not merely a study of bloggers or girls' Internet practices. Instead, I hope to contribute to a more thorough and complex understanding of contemporary feminism itself. I have shown not only how feminism is being performed by a new generation of girls, but how this performance continues longstanding feminist practices, such as consciousness-raising, the unearthing of feminist history, and of course, producing media. That these practices are now happening through the use of new media technologies is significant, yet must be considered alongside the cultural narratives celebrating individualism, girls' visibility, and the "pastness" of feminism, which I've shown as informing girls' online performances of feminist identities and practices of feminism. In this sense, I see this project as the first step in mapping a cultural history of girls' participation in feminism in the early twenty-first century. Consequently, this

research contributes to several interdisciplinary scholarly fields, including girls' studies, women's/feminist studies, cultural studies, digital media studies, and citizenship studies.

First, as I've described throughout this dissertation, feminist scholars from several disciplines have produced excellent research analyzing postfeminism and its limitations for girls and young women (Budgeon, 2001; Zaslow, 2009; Currie, Kelly, Pomerantz, 2009; McRobbie, 2009; Hains, 2012; Scharff, 2012). Some of this work also addresses girls' agential responses to postfeminist expectations. To wit: Dawn Currie, Deirdre Kelly, and Shauna Pomerantz (2009) describe how the skater girls they interviewed actively fight against the sexism inherent in skateboard culture, even if they did not explicitly identify with the feminist label. But while feminism certainly haunts these discussions, it remains somewhat periphery to inquiries about postfeminism. Consequently, as scholars such as Rosalind Gill (2007) and Angela McRobbie (2009) have reminded us, we know that feminism must be culturally present in order for postfeminist logic to function, yet there has been no research to date locating girls' feminist politics within such a cultural environment.

My research addresses this blind spot by not only making feminist girls visible within scholarly literature on postfeminism, but by demonstrating the significance of their feminist and activist identities within a culture where these subjectivities are often disparaged – especially for girls. I have argued that the practice of feminist blogging has been a crucial way for girls to explore feminism, engage in activism, connect with likeminded girls, speak agentially in public, and understand themselves as part of a lengthy historical movement. In this sense, blogging can be understood as facilitating resistance and a political subjectivity amongst girl feminist bloggers in ways similar to the media production practices used by riot grrrls in the 1990s. Consequently, this project builds upon the feminist scholarship on riot grrrl's cultural production, including that by

Mary Celeste Kearney (2006), Kristen Schilt (2003), and Alison Piepmeier (2009), in order to contextualize and historicize girl bloggers' feminist activism. In doing so, I intervene in the scholarly work on postfeminism referenced above by suggesting that girls' feminist blogging participates in a lengthy history of girls' media production that is often marginalized within feminist scholarship in favor of examining girls as cultural consumers, rather than producers.

Second, I aim to put the field of girls' studies in conversation with citizenship studies, a field that has paid little attention to girls. I accomplish this by drawing on recent cultural studies scholarship by Joke Hermes (2005) as well as Elisabeth Klaus and Margreth Lunenborg (2012) which has focused on rethinking normative modes of citizenship as one's relationship to the state, by considering "cultural citizenship" as "the ways individuals participate in practices and collectivities that form around matters of shared interest, identity or concern" (Burgess and Green, 2009, 77). I hold a gendered and age-conscious lens to this work in order to reconceptualize citizenship for girls as a practice of accessing the public sphere by mobilizing one's critical voice in community with other girls. Based on this definition, I contend that feminist blogging functions as a practice of citizenship for girls, providing a crucial point of access to the public sphere, a space to perform politicized identities, and a forum to connect with other feminist girls and women and feminist history.

In this sense, I take up Caroline Caron's (2011) call for girls' studies scholars to develop a politicized language to better understand girls as political actors and citizens in the present, rather than future citizens. This move extends adult-centric theorizations of citizenship to recognize how media production (and other cultural practices) can function as a political, activist, and feminist projects accessible to girls. I argue that this is especially significant for girls' studies scholars researching girls' Internet practices.

Despite both the scholarly and popular interest in what girls are doing online, almost none of the feminist academic work to date has engaged with girls' Internet practices as politically significant.¹ As new media technologies become increasingly prevalent in the lives of more girls this oversight is problematic and must be addressed by girls' studies scholars in order to better theorize girls as political agents. Nonetheless, we must also remember to ask which girls have access to this citizenship, as my research suggests that issues of class, race, location, and other identities continue to structure girls' ability to become and continue performing as feminist bloggers.

I also want to argue that framing girls' feminist blogging as a citizenship practice allows us to reclaim a language of citizenship to counter neoliberalism. As I have documented, neoliberal discourses offer girls a limited way to practice citizenship as consumers of commercial goods. The rhetoric of consumer citizenship problematically glosses over how, as Rian Voet (1998) argues, neoliberalism is actually antithetical to citizenship as I've described it above. By articulating girls' feminist blogging as a citizenship practice we recognize alternative modes of doing citizenship for girls, as well as acknowledge the agency of girls to create their own citizenship through practices such as blogging. In this sense, citizenship is not something dictated by neoliberal discourses, but something that girls cultivate and circulate themselves based on their own needs and experiences.

Finally, this project contributes to both the fields of digital media studies and feminist cultural studies through proposing a model of conducting online ethnography from a feminist perspective, emphasizing collaboration and viewing the focus group blog as a form of feminist community building and media production. In this sense, I apply Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh's (2002) "girl method" to an online environment in order to privilege girls' voices across multiple contexts including their

blogs, personal interviews, and in conversation with their peers via the online focus group blog. I suggest that this may be a useful model for feminist researchers wishing to study girls' online cultures, as it allows researchers to place girls' voices at the center of the research inquiry, while situating girls' Internet practices within a larger social and cultural context.

Consequently, this project builds on existing digital media studies scholarship that employs an ethnographic cultural studies approach, such as Mary Gray's (2009) *Out in the Country*, while contributing a unique focus on girls. While there is an increasing interest amongst digital media scholars to understand new media practices as integrated within the daily lives of people and their cultural context, there remains a limited amount of research that takes this agenda as its primary focus. Thus, this project contributes to the bridging of digital media studies with a theoretical and methodological approach informed by cultural studies by placing an analysis of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses alongside girls' blogging practices.

CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS

As in any research project, this research is limited by several factors. Perhaps most obviously, financial resources constrained how I was able to conduct my research. Originally I had hoped to meet several participants in person, conducting some face-to-face interviews and getting the opportunity to witness my participants in their home communities. However, a lack of financial resources and research funding prevented me from undertaking in-person interviews. Instead I chose to conduct personal interviews via Skype, phone, and email. Conducting interviews this way meant that often times interviewees cancelled interviews at the last minute or forgot altogether about a phone appointment. I suspect that this has to do, in part, with the age of my participants. As

young people in high school and college, many of my participants lead busy lives, attending school, participating in social activities, and working part-time jobs or volunteer positions. During the six-month research period several of my participants experienced life circumstances that disrupted their participation in the study, including the death of a parent and a move to college. In these cases I allowed participants to answer questions at their convenience via email, despite my original hope that I could conduct all interviews via Skype. I also discovered that some girls were not able to operate Skype on their computers due to older technology and/or slower Internet connections, and in these cases we conducted the interview via phone. Consequently, I've learned that it is important to be flexible with participants of this age group and to provide alternatives for unforeseen circumstances. And while there is little that can be done in these situations, it is necessary to acknowledge that they most likely shaped the data I was able to collect.

The time period allotted for this research also constrained my methodology. Ethnographic research is a time-consuming process and can require years of observation and interviews. As a doctoral candidate I am unable to commit several years to my dissertation research and, consequently, had to structure the project so that it could be completed within approximately thirteen months. I had been studying girl bloggers prior to beginning this dissertation and, thus, had an idea about where to focus my study. Nonetheless, given additional time I would have extended the data collection period in order to gain additional insights from my participants.

I also want to draw attention to the limitations of this study in terms of the diversity of my study sample. This study is, of course, not meant to generalize across a wide range of girls, but instead serves to present a deep glimpse into the experiences of a small group of American bloggers. Nonetheless, as I previously discussed, my sample

lacks a diversity of identities that must be recognized as shaping the data I collected and, consequently, my analysis of that data. I have outlined several possible reasons why the young feminist blogosphere may indeed be less diverse than its adult counterpart, including an uneven access to social and cultural capital, the history of racism in feminism, and a lack of resources, such as computers, high speed internet, and the leisure time needed to blog. As a result, the stories that I've represented here are partial and must be recognized as only the beginning of what I hope becomes a more robust area of inquiry for feminist scholars.

ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE OF GIRL FEMINIST BLOGGERS

This study raises several key issues that are worthy of future scholarly investigation, which I am characterizing as *looking back*, *looking beyond*, and *looking forward*. First, I was troubled by the lack of feminist research into girls' historical engagement with feminist politics that I found while researching this project. This gap in knowledge makes it easy to assume incorrectly that girls have not participated in feminist activism prior to the 1990s – an assumption that reproduces hegemonic discourses of girlhood. My purpose was not to conduct archival research for this project; however, the lack of existing scholarship is troubling and highlights the need for feminist scholars to look back and engage in this type of research. While archival research of this sort is necessary in order to construct more comprehensive feminist histories – a project that I argue girl feminist bloggers are engaging in - the histories of girls' feminisms will also help us better understand contemporary feminism through its relationship with the past. I have attempted to do this throughout this dissertation by primarily focusing on the continuities between girl feminist bloggers and riot grrrl zinesters, yet additional archival research is necessary in order to better theorize these historical continuities and ruptures.

Second, while this project focuses on American bloggers and their participation in feminist activism within national borders, this approach does not adequately represent the transnational nature of today's media culture. For example, Radha Hegde's (2011) argues that, "with the transnational circulation of media images, the hegemony of the West is reproduced in the global imaginary as the site of progressive sexual politics and cosmopolitan modernity" (3). Similarly, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (2011) advocate for feminist scholars to "think transnationally" in order to map how postfeminist and neoliberal discourses operate via transnational power relations (9-10). Consequently, it is imperative for girls' studies scholars to interrogate the ways in which global power is reinforced, negotiated, challenged, and circulated through online media. For example, how might feminist girls from non-Western countries engage with feminist blogging as an activist strategy? Is it possible to forge a transnational feminism through the young feminist blogosphere? While I limited this dissertation to American bloggers, I envision this project being extended by looking beyond American borders and asking questions about the transnational possibilities of girls' feminist blogging in order to better comprehend the connections between transnational feminisms, digital media, and girls.²

Finally, it is worthwhile to look forward and consider how girls' feminist blogs today may function as an archive of girls' feminism in the early twenty-first century. How might girl feminist bloggers be functioning as archivists in addition to historiographers? What might be the implications of this "living, public archive" of feminism in the Information Age for future feminist girls (Burgess and Green, 2009)? In addition to exploring the theoretical questions related to the archival quality of girls' feminist blogs, feminist scholars must also consider the practical questions this idea raises. For example, how can we ensure the survival of girls' feminist blogs for future research by both scholars and girls themselves? Feminists have long recognized the

importance of having a record of feminist activism, as evidenced by the numerous archival collections of women's and feminist history throughout the United States, including several collections dedicated to feminist zines. However, as Amy Benson and Kathryn Allamong Jacob (2012) note, we have yet to fully understand how the many feminist electronic documents, such as blogs will be stored, catalogued, and made accessible to future readers. This is an area of exciting potential, yet requires attention from feminist scholars to ensure that valuable stories do not get lost amidst rapid technological change.

Looking forward into the future seems a suitable place to conclude this dissertation. Indeed, speaking to the young bloggers that have participated in this project over the past year and reading their blogs regularly has been inspiring and humbling. I have no doubts that they will carry their feminist politics with them into the future, reminding us that as young feminists they are already here, "still alive and kicking."

Endnotes

¹ For example, neither of Sharon Mazzarella's (2005, 2010) two anthologies on girls' online practices contain any chapters addressing girls' use of digital technologies for political activism. The one exception may be a piece by Denise Sevick Bortree (2010), however, her analysis is focused on girls' discussions of environmental issues on message boards of commercial girls magazines' websites and therefore does not address girls' own media production as a form of activism.

² I have begun to examine these issues via a book chapter I recently published that addresses some of these concerns, although I'd like to expand on this project in the future. See Keller (2012a).

Appendix A: Participant Profiles

The following is a listing of bloggers who participated in this study. Each blogger wrote her own profile.

Focus Group and Interview Participants:

Amandine, 17, is a Harvard-bound feminist planning on concentrating in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality. She hopes to go to law school and make a career out of women's rights advocacy. Her writing has appeared in over 40 publications, including the *Jewish Week*, *Ms. Magazine* blog, *Jerusalem Post*, *Girl w/ Pen!*, *Jewish Press*, and *FBomb*. She created her feminist blog about three years ago, and has posted biweekly articles about various feminist-related topics ever since. As a member of the National Organization for Women (NOW)'s Young Feminist Task Force, she has been privileged to attend the annual NOW conference as well as various NOW-sponsored events, and happily wrote about them for her blog. When she manages to find spare time, she enjoys fuzzying with her rescue dog, eating (a lot), messing around in Photoshop, and procrastinating on the Internet. She credits Betty Friedan as her #1 feminist influence, as reading *The Feminine Mystique* turned her into an activist for equal rights.

Courtney, 21, recently graduated from a small liberal arts university. She grew up in the Midwest in your typical nuclear family and was the third out of four children. Courtney started blogging in college because many of her friends told her that she had enough to say, and they thought other people might enjoy reading the things she talked to

them about. Other than blogging, Courtney spends a ton of time reading, trying to keep physically active, and watching television. She's starting graduate school next year, and hopes that she can keep learning about feminism and try to integrate it into her future work. Courtney's biggest feminist influence is a friend she met at college who was the president of their Feminism: Equality Matters group. She credits her friend for being a go-getter that never let anything stand in her way, and Courtney believes it was really important for her to have such an inspirational woman in her life.

Kat, 18, grew up in a rural Midwestern town and now attends college in a larger suburban area of the state. Kat has been blogging since the summer before her Junior year of high school. She identifies religiously as a Unitarian Universalist, but is also as an atheist. Through her college education, she hopes to gain the credentials to enter the field of health education, specifically the area of sexual health education. Kat's number one feminist influence is her mentor, who operates several non-profits in her state. Kat admires her because she never let the fact that she grew up modestly or in a rural area that discouraged girls from attending college interfere with her dreams and she does all that she can to help the next generation of girls follow their dreams.

Madison, 19, is a college student studying Women's Studies and Sociology from the Midwest United States. She has been blogging now for about three years. She comes from a conservative background and grew up with three siblings and a disabled mom. Her mother's disability played a huge role in her interest in social justice, and eventually feminism. Marie is very active in student organizing and hopes to go into field organizing after college. Her biggest feminist influence is probably other feminist bloggers including Jessica Valenti and Jessica Luther.

Renee, 19, is a liberal agnostic feminist, lover of sitcoms, chronic doodler, native to Washington State, and all-around awkward teenager. She has always been on the shy side (and consequently hid behind labels such as The Smart/Artsy Kid all her life), but since discovering feminism she's committed the revolutionary act of learning to accept herself. She's still too uptight, too anxious, and too fat (by society's standards), but she is also insanely ambitious and has a burning passion to fight for the underdog. Renee started blogging in 2010 and ran a fairly successful site (a quarter of a million views!) for two years, until the stress of Senior Year made it too difficult to continue. She still collaborates with friends she met in the feminist blogging community, however, and they've had long-standing plans to pick up blogging once they've all adapted to the sleepless, caffeinated life of college students. Nowadays Renee spends her time waffling between majors (Social Work? Gender Studies? Human Rights?), drawing cartoons for her university's newspaper, and tending the shrine to Amy Poehler and Tina Fey she keeps in the back of her closet.

Focus Group Participants:

Abby, 16, lives in a picaresque suburb in the Northeast, a perfect location for a horror movie waiting to happen. She has one younger sister, and, despite pushing from her parents, is holding out on learning to drive. She's been blogging (sporadically) for three years, but her blog shifted more recently to focus specifically on feminist issues. Of particular interest to her is the incorporation of feminism into the legalities and practices of religious Judaism, and she is known around her school as "that crazy feminist." Her life goal is to entirely reform the Jewish marriage process, which, as it stands, consists

essentially of a man unilaterally purchasing a woman's sexual exclusivity. Her biggest feminist influence is Letty Cottin Pogrebin, and, at the moment, she is wondering why the spell-checking software doesn't recognize "Pogrebin."

Carrie, 16, lives in a large urban center on the East Coast. In addition to blogging, she is active in the local music scene and plays in a riot-grrrl influenced band.

Julie, 19, is the founder and editor of the *FBomb* and author of *A Little F'Ed Up: Why Feminism is Not a Dirty Word* (Seal Press, 2012). In addition to editing the *FBomb* Julie is an undergraduate at Columbia University and is involved in numerous feminist causes and organizations.

Appendix B: Advertisement for Participants

♀ Do you identify as a girl? Are you ♀
into feminism? And do you blog?

I'm looking for participants to participate in a research/book project about girlhood, feminism, and blogging. This research will form my PhD dissertation and will then be transformed into a book about girl feminist bloggers and contemporary feminisms.

Since I'm inviting you to share things about yourself with me, I thought I'd tell you a bit about myself. My name is Jessalynn Keller and I'm 29-years old. I grew up in the Canadian prairies and have lived in Vancouver, New York, and Toronto before landing in Austin, Texas to do my PhD in Media Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

Feminist politics have been an important part of my life since high school when I discovered riot grrrl music, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and how fun the third wave is! I consider myself a girl, a feminist, and a blogger... although my blogging has been on hiatus since starting my PhD. I also do yoga, love fashion, and am still obsessed with Courtney Love. Feel free to check out my webpage at:
www.jessalynnkeller.com.

In order to participate you must: (1) Identify as a girl and be between the ages of 15 and 21, (2) Participate in the feminist blogosphere (preferably as both a blogger and reader), (3) Be able to make a six month commitment to the project.

There are two ways to participate:

1. Online focus group!

I'm looking for between 8-10 girls to participate in an online focus group that will run continuously between approximately May 1, 2012 and November 1, 2012. The group will be set up on a private blog (on blogger) and will be structured as a discussion about girlhood, feminism, blogging, media, and other relevant topics. I will pose informal discussion questions and participants will respond to the question, each others comments, and ask their own questions to one another. I'm hoping that we can use this space to dialogue with one another in a casual environment about feminism today. It would be great if each participant posted regularly (about 2-3 times a month) over the duration of the research period in order for productive conversations to take

place. Postings do not have to be formally written and edited – think about them as part of a casual conversation you might have with a friend.

Anonymity: All participants will choose a pseudonym to post under, and thus, all participants will remain anonymous to others in the group.

Compensation: Participants who contribute to the focus group regularly throughout the duration of the 6 months will receive a **\$20.00** gift certificate to Amazon.com at the completion of the focus group.

2. Online focus group PLUS 5-6 phone interviews!

In addition to participating in the online focus group, I am looking for between 4-6 girls to also participate in a series of monthly phone interviews about their own blogging practices and thoughts on feminism. Interviews will be conducted once a month for the duration of the project (6 months) and will likely last between 30-60 minutes each time. I am looking to conduct a total of 5-6 interviews per person and am hoping to use these interviews to expand on some of the conversations happening in the focus group.

There may be an opportunity to do one interview in person, depending on my funding for the project. We can discuss this possibility later in the spring.

Anonymity: All participants will be anonymous in all published research.

Compensation: Participants who contribute to both the focus group and phone interviews throughout the duration of the 6 months will receive a **\$40.00** gift certificate to Amazon.com at the completion of the focus group.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at **girlfeministbloggers@gmail.com**. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have. I will provide more details on the project, as well as start dates and consent forms at that time.

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

The following is a list of initial questions that I posted to the focus group throughout my six-month research period. Often times these questions led to discussion of other topics and further questions posed by myself or by a participant.

Introductions and Feminist “Click” Moments

1. How did you decide you were a feminist?
2. Did a particular event, situation, or conversation lead you to take on the feminist label?
3. Was becoming a feminist a gradual process or something that happened quickly?
4. How has a feminist identity impacted your overall sense of self?
5. Who are your biggest feminist influences?
6. What is your definition of feminism?

Feeling Feminist

1. How does being a feminist make you feel?
2. Have these feelings changed over time?
3. How does your participation in the feminist blogosphere enhance/change/challenge these feelings?
4. Feminism as a conversation, a process

5. Tavi talks about feminism as a process and a conversation (video posted) – do you agree?
6. Do you see blogging as a strategy to “figure it out”?

From Feminist Selves to Feminist Community

1. How do you see the relationship between your feminist identity and your blogging?
2. How has blogging informed, changed, or developed your feminist identity and understanding of feminism?
3. For example, is there a specific feminist issue that you’ve learned more about while reading blogs by your fellow girl feminists?
4. Have you ever blogged about something and changed your stance based upon comments you received?
5. I see blogging as key in linking individual feminists to a larger feminist community and I’m curious what you think... do you agree or not?
6. Based upon your responses to the questions above, do you think the feminist blogosphere is a community?
7. What specific qualities of a community do you see in the feminist blogosphere?

Supporting Each Other Online

1. How do girl bloggers support each other on the feminist blogosphere?
2. How do you facilitate community on your blog?
3. What is one (or more) feminist issue that you think is important but is not talked about enough on the feminist blogosphere?

4. Does the lack of attention to this issue exclude anyone from fully participating in the blogosphere?

Making Waves...

1. What do you know about the “waves” of feminism?
2. Where did you learn about them?
3. Do you consider yourself part of any particular wave? If so, why?
4. Have you heard of the “fourth wave” of feminism? Do you identify with this wave?

Where is the History of Feminism Online?

1. Have you learned about any aspect of feminist history online or through blogs specifically?
2. If so, which blogs? What did you learn? How did you come across this particular blog(s)?

Rethinking Activism

1. When you hear the word “activist” what do you think of? In other words, what types of people are most often represented (in the media, in school textbooks, etc) as activists in your opinion?
2. What is your definition of an activist?
3. Do you consider yourself as activist? Why or why not?
4. If so, when did you take on this label?
5. And is this activist label important to you?

Some Final Questions About Activism

1. You've all mentioned that you identify as activists. How important is the activist identity to your life right now? Has this changed over time?
2. Do you think activism is gendered? In other words, are girls encouraged to be activists in ways different than boys?
3. What kind of activism do you most associate with girls?
4. In addition to blogging do you participate in other forms of cultural production that you consider activism?
5. Do you consider your feminist activism as part of a social movement? I'm specifically interested in the word movement here – is it a word you use? Why or why not?
6. Do you think it describes young feminist blogging? Why or why not?

Girls, Grrrls, Gurls...

1. What qualities do you imagine when you think of the word GIRL?
2. Does the girl identity have positive or negative connotations to you? Or both?
3. Do you identify as a girl? If so, why? If not, why not?
4. In your opinion, what is the relationship between girls and feminism? Are girls encouraged to be feminists? Is there a difference between a *young feminist* and a *girl feminist*?
5. Do you read Tavi Gevinson's *Rookie Magazine*? If so, what do you think about the ways that the publication presents girlhood?

Citizens and Citizenship

1. What do you think of when you hear the word “citizen”?
2. What practices does a “good citizen” engage in?
3. Do you consider yourself a citizen? If you are over age 18, did you consider yourself a citizen before you were legally recognized as such with the right to vote? Why?
4. Finally, do you see a relationship between feminism and citizenship? In other words, is being a feminist activist a way of being a citizen?

Blogging and Everyday Life

1. Do you view your feminist blogging as an important commitment in your life?
2. How does it rank in relation to other commitments?
3. Do you consider blogging a hobby – or would you describe it differently?
4. How long do you spend blogging each week?
5. Has your blogging practice changed since you began? If so, in what way?

Fall 2012 Feminist Issues and Media Representations

1. Over the past month, what kinds of feminist issues have you been most interested in? In other words, what have you been reading about? Reposting/reblogging about? Blogging about? Talking to your friends about?
2. What is your take on how teenage girls are represented in entertainment media? What about in news stories?
3. How has (or has it?) your experience with feminism influenced the ways you respond to these representations?

Feminist Politics into the Future

1. How do you see your feminist politics developing in the future? For example: Do you still see yourself blogging? What kinds of issues do you envision yourself participating in? Do you think you'll be employed in a "feminist profession"?

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