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## **New British Feminisms, UK Feminista and Young Women's Activism**

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In recent years there has been a resurgence of feminist activism in the UK with young women becoming increasingly interested in feminist ideas as a means of making sense of their lives. This is accompanied by claims from media commentators that we are witnessing a third or even fourth wave of feminism, and debates within feminist theory over the meaning of the wave metaphor and whether it is helpful in understanding the temporality of feminist activism. In this paper we engage with this debate, suggesting that our understanding of waves and how they are amplified could benefit from an analysis of feminist activism which draws on concepts borrowed from social movement theory. In order to do this we examine the renaissance of feminist activism through the example of one of the most active and publicly visible organisations in the UK, UK Feminista. Drawing on ethnographic research into young women's feminist activism we explore the role of UK Feminista in mobilising young women, focussing particularly on the role of the Internet in young women's engagement with feminism, the forms of activism in which they take part, and the importance of feminist cultural memory to the construction of a collective feminist identity. We begin with a consideration of the wave metaphor and its relation to the idea of cycles of protest.

### **Waves and cycles**

There are different accounts of how the wave metaphor developed and whether it relates to social movement theory's concept 'cycles of protest'. The concept of cycles of protest refers to collective action occurring in waves of intense 'interaction between challengers and authorities' (Tarrow, 1994: 153) punctuated by periods when movements are submerged (Melucci, 1989; Brand, 1990) or in 'abeyance' (Bagguley, 2002) with activities continuing but in a less spectacular, more institutionally-based form (Grey and Sawyer, 2008). Freeman and Johnson, for instance, argue that there were three main periods in the USA when there were waves of protest: 1) pre-civil war moral reform movements (mainly temperance and abolition); 2) populist/progressive movements 1890-1920 which sought to curb corruption in politics and large corporations; 3) 1960s new social movements and their progeny, including the Women's Liberation Movement (Freeman and Johnson, 1999). Cycles of protest subside when the collective mobilisation of resources falls short and it becomes difficult to sustain high levels of activity.

Although it is widely accepted within social movement theory that social movements occur in cycles or waves, within feminist theory the concept of waves is contentious and its meaning unclear. This is particularly evident in discussions of third wave feminism which has been criticised for pitting younger against older feminists, for not taking into account the different temporality of feminist activism around the world (Mackay, 2011; Woodhull, 2003) and for being inaccurate even as a descriptive term and therefore failing to reflect the diversity of feminism (Nicholson, 2013; Thompson, 2013). Furthermore, it is culturally specific: it originates in the US but outside the US and, to a lesser extent, the UK, it does not have much currency (Scharff, 2011) with many feminist activists in the UK rejecting the idea that they are part of a third wave (Evans and Chamberlain, 2015; Mackay, 2015; Kempson, 2015). Much of the

antagonism amongst activists to the idea of a third wave comes from their identification of it with post- or 'choice' feminism (Mackay, 2015; Kempson, 2015), an association that is also evident amongst academic feminists (see Aune and Holyoak, this issue). There is a multiplicity of meanings associated with third wave feminism which has led to claims that it is an 'empty', albeit politically useful, 'signifier' (Dean, 2010). This interpretation, while recognising that third wave feminism does indeed have many meanings, moves away entirely from any attempt to characterise the ebb and flow of political activism and to understand processes of mobilisation. It also points to a critical difference between the wave metaphor and the concept of cycles of protest. Cycles of protest refer to upsurges in political activism while the wave metaphor incorporates much more than this being used *inter alia* to refer to phases in the development of feminist theory and the emergence of a new 'type' of 'woman' as well as upsurges in feminist activism (Mann and Huffman, 2005; Evans and Chamberlain, 2015). In what follows we use third wave as Aune and Holyoake (this issue) do to refer to the recent upsurge in feminist activism in the UK which they distinguish from its earlier manifestation in the US and also from post-feminism. This move reinstates the wave narrative as describing the waxing and waning of feminist social movements albeit in a culturally specific context. We do this for two reasons: firstly, because we think it is helpful in understanding the recent upsurge in feminist activism and, secondly, it allows us to borrow concepts from social movement theory which are useful in understanding how UK Feminista facilitates processes of mobilisation.

### **A new wave?**

Whether or not the wave metaphor is used there is no doubt that there has been an upsurge in feminist activism in the last few years in the UK after a period during the 'post-feminist' 1990s when feminist activism was not very much in evidence (Banyard, 2010; Redfern and Aune, 2010; Dean, 2010). Julia Long, for instance, charts the 'new wave of anti-porn activism' which began to emerge during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2012: 5) while Kat Banyard, one of UK Feminista's founders, observes that in 2009 'the green shoots of a feminist movement were starting to emerge, if you looked carefully enough' but 'fast-forward twelve months, and we [were] witnessing a scale of feminist organising not seen in over a decade' (Banyard, 2010: 241). Arguably this intensification of feminist activism is taking place alongside an increase in social movement activity both in the UK and globally (Hazan and Kamo, 2015) and can be understood as a third wave of feminist activism, the first and second waves being the movement for women's suffrage in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

For some, different waves are defined by different strands of feminist theory with third wave feminism being characterised by intersectionality, post-structuralist and post-colonial feminist theory (Mann and Huffman, 2005). As a result, the politics of the third wave recognises difference rather than assuming a universal identity which women share and which crosses boundaries of class, race, age, dis/ability and nation. It is concerned with the development of a feminist politics that honours 'contradictory experiences and deconstruct[s] categorical thinking' (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 16). This means that, unlike second wave feminism, it starts from a position of 'multiple differences rather than from one that advocates equivalence' (Budgeon, 2011: 4) and that coalition or transversal politics is a central concern. It engages in a politics of 'dialogue and cooperation' which recognises that women have different identities but also that they can come together around specific issues (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 281; Cockburn, 2007) and

demonstrates a reflexive and self-critical concern with intersectionality (Davis, 2008). This characterisation of third wave feminism is, however, partial and, ironically, fails to recognise the diversity of contemporary feminist activism. For instance, many feminist activists in the UK identify with radical feminism which is not usually associated with third wave feminism (Mackay, 2015). Furthermore, many feminist activists do not identify as third wavers precisely because they disagree with its association with particular theoretical and political positions (Mackay, 2015; Kempson, 2015).

For others, different waves or cycles of protest give rise to distinct repertoires of action which both rely on existing resources and take advantage of new ones. This new wave of feminist activism is noted for its 'creative utilisation of new technologies' (Long, 2012: 200) which is seen by some as indicating a fourth rather than a third wave (Cochrane, 2013; Munro, 2013; Knappe and Lang, 2014). It is argued that each wave of feminism has a distinct mobilisation strategy and the fact that feminist campaigns are 'increasingly organised online' and that 'networking and outreach are facilitated by new technologies' (Knappe and Lang, 2014: 362) indicates the emergence of a fourth wave. There is no doubt that the Internet and social media are powerful means of communication which facilitate not only particular mobilisation strategies but also girls' and young women's engagement with politics (Harris, 2008; Keller, 2012). For instance, the F-word website 'reflects and has facilitated the growing emergence of forms of activism such as Reclaim the Night, Million Women Rise, Ladyfest, Feminist Fightback, Feminist Activist Forum, Object and several others' (Dean, 2010: 162). In our view, however, the use of new communication technologies by feminist activists is associated with the emergence of a third rather than a fourth wave in the UK and, while digital culture and the technological basis of contemporary social movements are constituting new repertoires of action (Funke and Wolfson, 2014), feminist activism also takes forms that are familiar from the second wave. Thus in 2004 Finn Mackay set up the London Feminist Network and re-established the Reclaim the Night marches (Mackay, 2011); the first of a series of national feminist conferences was organised by Kat Banyard in Sheffield (<http://www.femconferences.org.uk/>) and, in 2010, UK Feminista was established.

Also associated with different waves of feminism are different feminist subjects which serve to pit 'new against old generations of feminists' (Hemmings, 2011: 8). The most culturally pervasive stereotype is of a second wave feminist who is 'masculine, unattractive to men, prudish, humourless and badly dressed: in short, she is a lesbian' (Hemmings, 2011: 8). This cultural stereotype, according to Finn Mackay, is associated with radical feminists who are portrayed as 'man-hating, hairy-legged lesbians' (Mackay, 2015). Indeed, the 'collective cultural remembering' of second wave feminism (Hesford, 2005:228) arguably provides the figure of 'the feminist' against which young women construct a personal and collective identity (Scharff, 2010). Research on feminist activists indicates their rejection of these cultural stereotypes and construction of their own feminist cultural memories and identities in the light of a reconstructed feminist history (Kempson, 2015; Chidgey, 2012). This allows collective actors to 'perceive the continuity of [their] existence' (Della Porta and Diani, 2006:70), to 'contest hostile framings and... put forward counter-understandings of what feminism is, what feminism can do and who a feminist can be' (Chidgey, 2012: 87).

This construction of feminist subjectivities challenges neo-liberal feminine subject positions and is an important part of becoming an activist; it can be understood as a process of collective identity formation emerging from the ‘meaning work’ undertaken within social movements (Snow and Benford, 1992). Meaning work includes the way activists frame their understanding of the world, how they are collectively positioned within it and how it can be changed to improve their situation. Moreover, the ‘symbolic construction of the collective identity’ is part of building a social movement (Della Porta et al, 2006:62); it depends on a ‘moral and emotional connection’ (Poletta and Jasper, 2001:285) and takes place in spaces where networks and communities can flourish, both on and off line (Keller, 2012).

In what follows we explore UK Feminista’s repertoires of action and collective identity formation focussing particularly on the importance of the Internet to feminist mobilisation and the part played by feminist cultural memory in the creation of a feminist collective identity. This enables us to understand how UK Feminista enables ‘people to mobilise and engage in collective action’ (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996:3). First, however, we describe our study.

### **UK Feminista and feminist activism**

Our research into young women’s activism and UK Feminista, which is the basis for this paper, is part of a large-scale European study which explores how young people (aged 16 to 30) participate in social and political life in 14 European countries.<sup>1</sup> Ethnographic studies of young activists were carried out in all 14 countries with one cluster of studies focusing on gender and minorities, including issues of sex equality and sexual politics; it is in this cluster that our study of UK Feminista was located.

UK Feminista (<http://ukfeminista.org.uk/>) was selected as a case study organisation because it is a leading national feminist organisation and is unique in terms of its aims and how these are to be achieved. It was founded by Kat Banyard in 2010 and is a small (2-3 women employed), non-membership organisation aiming to bring about a ‘world where women and men are equal’ (<http://ukfeminista.org.uk/about/>). It is not a classic membership organisation which initiates and fights particular campaigns itself; instead it has adopted the social change model from movements such as People and Planet and provides support and resources to feminist activists. Its main form of activity was an annual summer school (until 2014) but it also organises one-off events, such as the 2012 suffragette lobby of parliament, to draw media attention to feminist activities. It mobilises activists by providing both resources and an environment for the generation of activist networks and catalyses the formation of new feminist groups.

Through the events and actions it supports, UK Feminista brings together established women’s NGOs and grassroots feminist activists, thereby creating connections and facilitating the formation of networks. Some of the women’s NGOs are social movement organisations originating in the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) of the 1970s, others (such as Object<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Myplace (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement) study was funded over four years (2011 - 2015) by the European Commission’s 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme. It explores young people’s civic and political participation in 14 European countries and how it is shaped by the shadows (past, present and future) of totalitarianism and populism in Europe. See <http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/index.php>.

<sup>2</sup> Object describes itself as a national human rights organisation which challenges the sexual objectification of women through lads’ mags, sexist advertising and the sex work industry.

and Imkaan<sup>3</sup>) were established more recently. Finally, it builds alliances around particular issues and, in 2013 it joined with Object to launch the Lose the Lads' Mags campaign (<http://www.losetheladsmags.org.uk/>). These alliances can be seen as a form of transversal politics and include a range of organisations and individuals from trade unionists to celebrities.

During 2012-3 we conducted 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with young feminist activists and observed and participated in 26 national and local events including feminist society meetings held in schools and local communities. These events were both mixed gender and women-only. In addition, documentary and visual material in electronic and print format was gathered through Internet searches and at events attended. This material was used to corroborate and enhance data from interviews and participant observation.

Three categories of interviewees were identified consistent with the potential activist constituencies targeted by UK Feminista. The first category included schoolgirl activists who had participated in UK Feminista training events and had received support from the latter to set up their own feminist societies. The second comprised university students almost all of whom were research postgraduates as well as activists. The third category were members of a grassroots feminist group based in the West Midlands who had participated both individually and as a group in UK Feminista events and had helped organise such events at local level. This was the most diverse category in terms of occupation and included university students (both undergraduates and postgraduates), a schoolgirl, employed and unemployed women. In addition, a fourth category of interviewees consisted of UK Feminista organisers at national and regional levels and close collaborators in other national feminist organisations such as Imkaan and Object.

Interviewees were aged between 15 and 36 years old with 13 being under 21, 14 between 21 and 30 and 3 between 31 and 36. The majority (17) identified themselves as white and three as 'British' while 6 self-identified as mixed. They were overwhelmingly middle class and well educated with high levels of social and cultural capital. Without exception they had all been to university, or were planning to go, and several had higher degrees or were working towards them. Only two of the interviewees had come from what they expressly referred to as working-class backgrounds. Although interviewees were not asked about their sexual orientation, several spontaneously spoke about their sexuality with 6 defining themselves as queer, trans, lesbian, gay or bisexual. None explicitly defined themselves as heterosexual.

### **Engaging with feminism**

The Internet and new social media are an important resource constituting a way into feminism and political participation for young women (Harris, 2008). According to a survey of 1,300 feminists carried out by Redfern and Aune, 70 per cent agreed that 'the Internet has been instrumental to today's feminist movement' (2010: 15). In addition, the Internet is used extensively for actions such as petitioning decision makers, taking opinion soundings and mobilising activists over particular issues. This has been done very effectively through online campaigns such as the 'The Everyday Sexism Project' (<http://everydaysexism.com/>; Bates, 2014); 'No More Page 3', <http://nomorepage3.org/>), 'Lose the Lads' Mags' and the campaign launched by Caroline Criado-Perez in 2013 in favour of retaining at least one female image on UK bank notes. These campaigns grew from just one woman setting up a website, opening a

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<sup>3</sup> Imkaan sees itself as a national black feminist organisation which fights against violence against women and girls.

Twitter account and launching an Internet petition – a strategy which is promoted by UK Feminista at its summer schools.

The Internet also enables young women with little previous experience of feminist activism to challenge sexism and misogyny from a safe place (Keller, 2012). Blogging and creating and writing for e-zines were some of the first activities in which our interviewees were involved, with most using online platforms such as Tumblr and Wordpress. Apart from using the Internet to challenge sexism, many interviewees also used it to meet like-minded people, to discuss feminist issues and find out about campaigns. One interviewee explained that she ‘came to it [feminism] through blogging’. She thought that without the Internet she ‘would have found it a lot harder to meet anybody because there wasn’t a group’ (Kristina).

Engaging with feminism through the Internet created an online community which enabled women to feel that they were not alone. One interviewee,

...started looking for people a bit like me on the Internet [because she felt] a bit lost because none of my friends were interested in feminism; //...// I wanted to find, I guess, people who understood what I was talking – who I didn’t have to explain things to. (Yolanda)

This involvement enabled them to move from indoor ‘keyboard activism’ to outdoor street politics and action in campaign groups. For example, one young woman met people online with whom she set up the campaign for consent (against poor sex education in schools which generally side-steps the issue of consent) and became involved in the ‘No More Page 3’ campaign. She explained:

And as I got more involved in online communities and things, they started, I started coming across feminist events. I went to like the ‘Women of the World’ festival, this past February. And obviously like UK Feminista summer school. So, by going to those places I’ve got to talk to people, which is really nice. (Yolanda)

The Internet was also seen as facilitating processes akin to those which took place in the consciousness raising groups of the 1970s WLM (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). It enabled young women to realise that their experiences were shared and that they were caused, not by individual failings but by the society of which they were part.

There’s kind of two sides of Internet access, Internet activism, one side is kind of almost like the old consciousness raising groups, when you’ve got all these people talking on forums, talking on social media, writing blogs and commenting on each other’s blogs, a lot of that is consciousness raising and the development of language to understand oppression, and like another side of it is going on other parts of the Internet and introducing these ideas to other people and I think that’s really important. (Reese)

The Internet is a resource for young women both as a source of information about feminism (its cognitive function) and as a space where friendships and feminist communities are formed and young women can negotiate for themselves a collective feminist identity (its identity function)

(Della Porta and Diani, 2006). Internet spaces enable these young women to find a voice and to challenge the injustices they experience and, rather than taking the place of face-to-face interactions, engaging with feminism in this way often led to a decision to set up or join an offline feminist group.

UK Feminista has actively intervened through its use of the Internet and social media to raise the profile of feminism, to challenge its negative stereotyping thereby making it more available as a political identity, and to mobilise young women (and men) into a range of political activities. We deal with each of these in what follows.

### **Mobilising young women and girls**

UK Feminista offers young women and girls the opportunity not only to share in a common vision of society but also to experience solidarity and personal growth and to develop knowledge, friendships and influence; in this sense it can be seen as a mobilising structure (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978). It uses the Internet and social media very effectively in its mobilising campaigns which are aimed at drawing young women and girls into feminist activism. Here we discuss two of these: the Schools against Sexism and Lose the Lads' Mags campaigns both of which engage in a feminist cultural politics. The Schools against Sexism campaign shows how important UK Feminista's provision of resources is to supporting feminist activism while Lose the Lads' Mags demonstrates its commitment to building alliances and its development of new repertoires of action.

#### *Mobilisation in schools and colleges*

The mobilisation of schoolgirls and young women in sixth form colleges is unique to the current feminist movement and, since 2010, UK Feminista has spearheaded a schools' campaign aimed at making the school a space which is free of sexual harassment and sexist bullying. Two methods of achieving this aim are deployed. One is encouraging pupils (girls and boys) to set up feminist societies in schools and providing them with resources through free workshops in schools, web-based toolkits and campaign material to enable them to become key players in making the school sexism-free and learn to take action for gender equality more generally. Since 2012 there has been a significant increase in the number of feminist societies both in schools and at local level with numbers doubling to 150 between spring 2012 and spring 2013; this suggests that UK Feminista's interventions may be having an effect (Baily, 2015).

Among our interviewees, five had set up feminist societies at their school or university with a further six organising conferences or setting up feminist networks and organisations. They had found the resources provided by UK Feminista and the networks facilitated by UK Feminista events invaluable in encouraging their activism. One who had set up a feminist society at her school said:

I went to the UK Feminista thing [summer school] because obviously they, there's more there about actual activism and what sort of issues you can get involved with and what kind of organisations there are, which isn't so accessible if you're just sort of, cos you don't know where to start if you're just on your own. (Sabrina)

The other method used in the Schools against Sexism campaign was getting head teachers to sign a pledge which commits them to taking a lead on safety and gender equality, teaching the

prevention of violence against girls and women, and supporting schoolgirls who are experiencing violence. School feminist societies were also taught to play an important role in lobbying head teachers to sign the pledge.

### *Mobilising around the Lose the Lads' Mags campaign*

The Lose the Lads' Mags campaign is an example of UK Feminista engaging in transversal politics through building alliances, the innovative use of the Internet and a repertoire of action which combines new with established forms of activism. It was coordinated by UK Feminista and Object and was launched in Spring 2013 with support from teachers' unions, MPs, legal experts and a range of feminist and women's organisations including Imkaan, the Eaves Project, Rape Crisis, Women's Aid and Equality Now. The campaign's aim was to get high street shops to drop lads' mags which were accused of contributing to the normalisation of sexist culture and the routine degrading of women.<sup>4</sup> The campaign took three forms: mass online mobilisation (including a petition), legal advice which argued that exposing staff and customers to these magazines could constitute sexual harassment and sex discrimination under the 2010 Equality Act, and a national day of action urging protests outside Tesco high street stores in August 2013.

The campaign was very effective in mobilising young women who had not previously engaged in protest and who became involved in both online and street action. Part of this mobilisation took place at the 2013 UK Feminista summer school where Kat Banyard led a workshop on the campaign. The workshop involved participants forming groups according to where they lived and planning protests for the day of action later in August (fieldwork diary, 18 August 2013). Subsequently they took part in the day of action and there were protests up and down the country which attracted considerable media attention (see <http://www.losetheladsmags.org.uk/take-action/dayofaction/>). Prior to the launch of this campaign, one of the school feminist societies whose meetings we observed had forced the Tesco shop opposite their school into withdrawing lads' mags from its shelves; this provided a powerful example of the campaign's potential for success.

As a result of this campaign the Co-op group stopped selling lads' mags in September 2013 and Tesco, which was specifically targeted as a 'family store' by the campaign, began operating an age restriction on the sale of lads' mags and put pressure on lads' mags publishers to make their covers 'more modest'. The closure of *Nuts* was announced in a UK Feminista press release on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2014 (UK Feminista, 2014) and more titles followed in later that year (Cashmore 2014).

These two examples show how UK Feminista operates as a mobilising structure, providing resources and facilitating the formation of groups and networks within which young women can come together to talk about and to take action on issues that are important to them. The focus of these actions tends to be cultural politics reflecting the issues that were important to the young activists to whom we spoke. The other critical aspect for young women's engagement in feminist

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<sup>4</sup> These, now defunct magazines (e.g. *Nuts*, *Zoo*, *FHM*, *Loaded*) were aimed at or appealing to men in their 20s, 30s and 40s and focused on fashion, gadgets and scantily dressed or naked women. They reflected 'lad culture' which emerged in the 1990s as a reaction against the 'new man' figure who was seen as subjugated to the needs of women.

activism and which is associated with UK Feminista is the formation of a collective feminist identity.

### **Feminist cultural memory and feminist identity**

Feminist cultural memory is important both to the negotiation of a feminist collective identity and in facilitating political activism (Chidgey, 2012). We found that remembering feminist history was important to our interviewees' sense of themselves as feminist activists and was used symbolically by UK Feminista in the actions it organised and in the strategic framing of a positive feminist identity. One of its first goals was to raise the profile of feminism in the media and draw attention to feminist activism. One way of doing this was the feminist lobby of parliament it organised in 2012 which was led by Sylvia Pankhurst's grand-daughter and other women in suffragette dress. The name 'UK Feminista' was adopted in order to challenge the stigmatisation attached to 'feminism' and the adoption of a feminist identity is promoted as conscious, deliberate and, as suggested by the UK Feminista logo which contains a megaphone, to be shouted out loud. Thus the very name is part of a campaign to reclaim a stigmatised identity and can be seen as a process of collective identity formation (Melucci, 1995).

Apart from a steady discursive affirmation of feminism, UK Feminista also promotes a positive feminist identity through awareness raising campaigns such as 'who needs feminism UK' (WNF) aimed at schoolgirls and young women anxious about identifying themselves as feminist. Its web site provides a step-by-step guide on how to launch a WNF campaign.<sup>5</sup> WNF started in the USA, caught on in the UK and since then has seen thousands of young women create online photo galleries of themselves and their friends saying why they need feminism and in so doing asserting a feminist identity.

UK Feminista's meaning work and their symbolic construction of a feminist identity was engaged with by the young women we interviewed. They are proud to claim a feminist identity which they partly construct in relation to negative stereotypes of feminism and to the history of the feminist movement, both of which are forms of collective memory. Feminist history is a means of constructing both individual and collective identities with feminist colours (green and purple) being prominent in web pages, leaflets, slogans, and dress while images of the suffragettes themselves have been variously used, e.g. in the lobby of parliament which took place in October 2012. Through these actions feminist history is being reclaimed and remembered differently and the predominant understandings, particularly of second wave feminism as strident and angry, are being challenged.

The language used to talk about being a feminist and undertaking feminist action reflects this and often young women inspired by UK Feminista talk of 'coming out' and being 'proud' of being a feminist. One interviewee told us:

I felt like everybody would hate me, and I over-estimated I think the amount that people would react negatively, because actually when I came out and I was openly feminist it wasn't that bad. (Yolanda)

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<sup>5</sup> The WNF UK campaign, promoted by UK Feminista and other feminist groups, has run since early 2013. See <http://ukfeminista.org.uk/take-action/generation-f/whoneedsfeminismuk/>.

This quote reveals the negative affect associated with a feminist identity (Scharff, 2010) and how young women decide to ‘come out’ as feminist in spite of this. The stereotype of a feminist that emerged from these young women’s accounts is that of the angry, hairy, humourless, bra-burning, dungaree-wearing lesbian who is bitter and twisted because she is envious of women who are able to get their pictures in lads’ mags. This image is culturally familiar (Hesford, 2005); it echoes the figure of ‘the feminist’ identified by Scharff and against which the young women she interviewed identified themselves as non-feminist because they did not want to be seen as unfeminine, unattractive and man-hating (Scharff, 2012:13). Like Scharff’s interviewees, the young women we spoke to wanted to distance themselves from that sort of feminist but, in contrast to them, constructed a feminist identity that they were proud to claim.

This figure of ‘the (second wave) feminist’ relates to a collective cultural memory (Hesford, 2005) which, while present in our interviewees’ accounts, also troubled their efforts to value a feminist history of which they were part. It created an ambivalence in their thinking about second wave feminism which they valued for its achievements while at the same time distancing themselves from the figure of ‘the feminist’ they associated with it (see also Kempson, 2015). Unlike first wave feminism, second wave feminism does not feature on the school curriculum, it is not part of the cultural memory transmitted through the formal school system. As a result, although they had positive images of the suffragettes, most of our younger interviewees did not know very much about the WLM and thought that it had been an angry and quite extreme, man-hating movement. At the same time, they recognised that this was a stereotype and probably a media creation bearing little relation to reality (Hinds and Stacey, 2001).

Despite this ambivalence, most of them felt that feminism was an extremely important form of political engagement that had a long history of which they were proud to be part. They spoke about how it was disrespectful to the feminists who had gone before them to refuse the identity of feminist and were proud to claim this identity. In addition, they constructed a feminist identity by using the language that feminists used in the 1960s and 1970s; they talk about sexism, patriarchy, women’s oppression and so on.

### *Intersectionality in practice*

This work of reclaiming feminist history and identity can be understood in terms of the formation of a collective identity which is generated within feminist activist networks both on and offline. As with the formation of any identity, however, there are exclusions which were evident amongst interviewees and which UK Feminista attempts to counter with a theoretical and practical commitment to inclusivity and a concern with intersectionality. At the summer schools, for instance, the composition of panels of invited speakers reflect this concern and workshops are held which explore issues such as employment conditions, disability activism and black feminism. UK Feminista attempted to frame a feminist identity that was inclusive – of men as well as women – and a range of feminist identities was claimed amongst the activists we spoke to. In line with other research (Mackay, 2015; Kempson, 2015), we found that young women did not identify as third wavers; instead they defined themselves as radical feminists, Marxist or socialist feminists, black feminists, trans-feminists and queer.

Despite UK Feminista's practical commitment to intersectionality, a few of our interviewees experienced UK Feminista events as being excessively white and middle class, echoing third wave critiques of second wave feminism. One interviewee defined herself as 'queer':

So when I call myself queer I'm not just talking about my sexuality, it's also my race as a mixed race person. So yeah and so I don't really think that I belong to a community. (Deanna)

There was also disagreement about UK Feminista's inclusion of men, their inclusion of transgender women, and their position on prostitution.

Thus, while the discovery of feminism helps the activists we spoke to make sense of their lives and gives them an identity and a sense of belonging to a feminist community, some of them contest the particular identities they see reflected in the contemporary feminist movement. This points to the processes of re/negotiation that are part of collective identity formation and suggests that, despite the best efforts of UK Feminista to be inclusive and to accommodate difference, the collective identities that are re/negotiated within activist networks may not always reflect UK Feminista's framing of intersectionality as central to feminism. It also resonates with the argument that third wave feminism, at least in the UK, is diverse and that attempts to characterise it as embodying a particular form of feminist theory and politics do not accurately portray the different forms it takes.

Thus far we have explored how young women engage with feminism both on and off-line and in so doing create networks within which they can explore the meaning of feminism and its place in their lives. Adopting a feminist identity is an important part of becoming an activist and can be seen as an outcome of the symbolic work that is undertaken within movement networks including the activist networks associated with UK Feminista.

## **Discussion**

In this concluding section we return to the central concern of our paper, drawing together the empirical evidence of contemporary feminist activism with a consideration of whether upsurges in activism can be understood in terms of waves and how this metaphor can be more closely specified by engaging with concepts derived from social movement theory. We have argued that an understanding of waves, in the sense of upsurges of feminist activism, and how they are amplified can benefit from an analysis which draws on concepts borrowed from social movement theory. This has enabled us to explore the mechanisms through which a small, feminist organisation has contributed to the resurgence of feminist activism in the UK. We have argued that UK Feminista can be understood as a mobilising structure and a network. It provides resources, catalyses events, supports the formation of groups, creates spaces where activists come together and provides training in the skills needed for activism. The two campaigns we have discussed exemplify this: the schools campaign provides support to young women who want to set up 'femsocs' and gives them the confidence to do so; the Lose the Lads' Mags campaign mobilised protest both on and off the Internet and brought women's organisations and grass roots activists together. In both instances young women who had never before been involved in protest were mobilised.

The Internet is important to this mobilisation. UK Feminista uses it not only to mobilise activists but, more than this, it uses social media both as a mobilising device and to create a new repertoire of action which distinguishes it from second wave feminism. Thus mass emailing, Tweeting and signing of petitions were central to the Lose the Lads' mags campaign as well as street protests and lobbies of parliament. At the same time these new forms of action co-exist with those that are associated with both the first and second wave and provide a sense of continuity. This sense of continuity was important for the negotiation of feminist collective identities and we have shown how UK Feminista engages in the meaning work associated with the negotiation of feminist collective identities by creating spaces where friendship can flourish and new networks and communities can emerge. Feminist cultural memory is an important part of this process for both our interviewees and for UK Feminista – witness the 2012 lobby of parliament where suffragette colours were very much in evidence and the way our interviewees linked their own activism to a history of feminist activism. Our focus on the negotiation of feminist collective identity moves us away from a focus on the individualised, neo-liberal subject and, like our informants, re-asserts the importance of the collective – in political as well as theoretical terms.

In our analysis of UK Feminista and the activism which it supports we have found particularly useful the ideas that activism ebbs and flows in cycles of protest, that cycles of protest are distinguished by their repertoires of action and that the negotiation of collective identities and resources are an essential part of feminist activism. The wave metaphor is a much broader concept than cycles of protest and refers to much more than the temporality of feminist activism. It is used not only to explore phases and forms of activism but also to demarcate different theoretical positions and cultural practices; furthermore, in some accounts it becomes tangled up with post-feminism (Braithwaite, 2002). Taking the third wave to refer to the recent upsurge in feminist activism and incorporating concepts from social movement as well as feminist theory has enabled us to explore how a small organisation such as UK Feminista has been able to amplify this activist wave. We have been able to pinpoint how resources such as the Internet and social media are used as mobilisation tools, how cultural resources are used by young women to construct a collective feminist identity and how affect connects young feminist activists to each other in the networks supported by UK Feminista. We have used these concepts to investigate the forms of activism emerging in the contemporary period and their relation to other social movements, both contemporary and historical, and to explore how the legacy of previous waves of feminism is important in shaping young activists' identities and aspirations. Such an investigation reveals the significant part played by a small mobilising structure, UK Feminista, in the resurgence of feminist activism in the UK.

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