

## MAKING ACTIVISM ACCESSIBLE

Exploring Girls' Blogs as Sites  
of Contemporary Feminist Activism

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On Saturday, 10 November 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 twenty-year-old author and blogger Julie Zeilinger, the author’s prognosis for feminism is uncertain at best in her portrayal of a movement hampered by the resistance of too many young women to be truly revolutionary today.

This all-too-common narrative is often employed in mainstream media to suggest that feminism is no longer relevant to girls and young women—a dominant discourse of postfeminist media culture that has been documented and analyzed by several feminist researchers (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Negra 2009; Zaslow 2009; Gill and Scharff 2011; Scharff 2012). However, despite this excellent body of scholarship that critiques postfeminism, there has been little empirical research that disputes its claims and documents *how* girls are actually participating in feminist activism. I suspect that this may be because girls’ activism can be difficult to locate, because, in part, of the unique forms that it takes. Consequently, girls’ activism is too often made invisible to adult researchers looking for more traditional activist practices that feminists have used historically, such as public demonstrations, legal challenges, and commercial boycotts.

In this chapter I suggest that girls’ marginalization from traditional places of activism—the public street, the voting booth, or the town hall, for example—has resulted in the creation by some girls of alternative spaces where they can perform activist identities and engage in projects of social change. Here I focus specifically on blogs as a mediated space that girls are actively *producing* as a way to participate in contemporary feminism. Through my analysis of qualitative data from in-

depth interviews with US-based girl bloggers<sup>1</sup> and a discursive textual analysis of girl-produced feminist blogs, I argue that we need to take seriously the feminist activist strategies that girls are employing in the spaces of their blogs and understand these practices as *accessible* activist strategies based upon their social positioning as *girls*.<sup>2</sup> This ultimately requires girls' studies researchers to decenter our own conceptions of feminism and understand activism from the perspective of girls, whose lives are often situated within particular material, social, and political constraints.

### Mapping a History of (Girls') Activism

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an in-depth discussion of the history of academic scholarship on activism, it remains important to note how dominant academic and public conceptions of activism have reflected the experiences of *adults*, and often white, middle-class, male adults in particular (Inglehart and Norris 2003). For example, traditional activist practices like voting, lobbying politicians, and running for office privilege a public participation from which girls are excluded because of their minor status, and also maintain a public/private divide that equates activism with the public sphere. Even what Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris call "civic activism" (2003: 639) characterized by participation in voluntary organizations, community associations, and social movements and often including more women participants, privileges a model of public engagement informed by highly visible practices such as demonstrations, boycotts, and petitions. It is worth highlighting that even these more informal activist practices hinge on the assumption that politics happen in easily identifiable places that are often created and occupied by adults, such as the Occupy Wall Street camp set up in lower Manhattan's Zuccotti Park in September 2011.<sup>3</sup>

When what counts as political is framed around a narrow set of practices, it is little surprise that girls are often characterized as apolitical, reflecting larger traditional gendered binaries that position the public sphere of politics and activism as a masculine domain (Harris 2008a). Even within the realm of feminist politics, girls, as "'the other' of feminism's womanhood" (Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz 2009: 4), have been regarded as not sufficiently feminist. As Jessica Taft 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" (2011: 5).

This is especially true of girl-driven activist initiatives that do not involve adults. For example, both Anita Harris (2008b) and Jessica 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 (2008b: 484).

In order to understand girls' political engagements, we must then look beyond normative expressions of political participation as defined by adults. Cultural studies scholarship has provided a useful model with which to do so and has been central to understanding youth cultural practices, including the production and consumption of fashion, music, and zines as representing oppositional politics and activist potential (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979). As Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) maintains, it is within these subcultural spaces that we can see girls producing their own meanings of what it means to be feminist and activist. For example, Kearney argues that girls' participation in the 1970s punk subculture provided a space for girls to exercise feminist agency through cultural production, 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 that many girls found alienating because of their age, race, class, and sexuality. Thus, punk became a space for girls to resist both normative feminine and feminist identities, while often exercising political critiques that were, indeed, feminist.

Despite the clear influence of cultural studies on the formation of girls' studies as an academic field, I am suggesting that girlhood studies scholars have yet to fully interrogate the contemporary cultural practices of girls as political, and more specifically, feminist and activist (for exceptions see Kearney 2006; Caron 2011; Taft 2011; Keller 2012). Thus, I attempt to begin this process here by focusing the remainder of this

chapter on the ways in which girls engage in activism through the practice of feminist blogging. In doing so I hope to articulate the ways in which understanding girls' feminist blogging as a practice of politics and activism challenges established ideas about the places where politics happen and opens up the potential for multiple girlhood spaces to be politically generative.

## Blogging as Accessible Activism

The term blog is an abbreviation of weblog, which refers to a frequently updated website that is organized by reverse-chronological written entries, usually focused on a particular topic or issue. Over the past decade blogging has become an increasingly popular practice among Internet users—especially middle-class girls. According to a Pew Internet Research study from 2008, American teenage girls outnumber their male counterparts as bloggers, with 41 percent of girls ages fifteen to seventeen claiming to have a blog (Lenhardt et al. 2008). The popularity of blogging among girls must also be considered in relation to other writing practices historically prevalent in girls' culture, such as diary writing. Thus, while blogging appears to be a *new* kind of activism, I am advocating for contextualizing it historically in order to better understand how girls' feminist blogging may indeed incorporate feminist strategies from the past, despite being dismissed by some feminists (McRobbie 2009; Steiner 2012).

Based upon the popularity of blogging and the use of other web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in tandem with blogs, it is perhaps unsurprising that girls may choose blogging as a practice in which they can perform various identities, including what Butler (1990) thinks of as feminist and activist identities. Indeed, my conversations with the girl feminist bloggers I interviewed for this project revealed that many of them began adopting an activist identity only once they began to blog. Jacqueline, a nineteen-year-old college sophomore who lives in a large east coast city 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." In this sense the activist label was made intelligible for Jacque-

line through the practice of blogging about feminist issues, encouraging her to think about how activism could flexibly fit into her everyday life as a teenage girl rather than as merely a practice of policy change.

This point is key to understanding why blogging is a popular way for teenage girls to practice feminist activism, as my conversations with bloggers revealed that girls choose to engage in feminist blogging for very practical reasons. For example, several of my study 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. Rory, an eighteen-year-old from a small city on the west coast 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.” Like Jacqueline’s interest in “changing hearts and minds,” Rory’s comments reflect an understanding of feminist activism that allows her to participate through communicating with her peers online, an activity that she can do from her bedroom with the technology and skills she already possesses.

The idea that the bedroom functions as a place for creativity and cultural consumption for girls has been foundational to girls’ and cultural studies since it was articulated by Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1991) in their study of postwar girlhood in Britain. However, it is Kearney’s (2007) important critique of bedroom culture, which called for the recognition of the bedroom as a site for girls’ cultural *production* rather than just consumption, that is particularly pertinent to my own interest in feminist girl bloggers. I aim to extend Kearney’s logic in this chapter by suggesting that not only do girls’ bedrooms function as a place for media production but also as a place for *activism* that is facilitated through practices such as blogging.

Kristie, a high school senior from the Midwest, said, “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.” Kristie has wanted to volunteer at Planned Parenthood because of her interest in reproductive rights and sex education but the closest clinic to her family’s home in rural Indiana is a half hour’s drive away; this prevents her from volunteering because of her lack of transportation to and from the clinic. This has been frus-

trating to her because she wants to expand her feminist activism but is limited by her rural location and positioning as a young person who lacks financial resources: “I see all these protests happening all over the country and I’m like, ‘I wish I could go!’” She is excited about next fall, when she will move to a larger urban center to attend college, and plans to participate in feminist groups on campus.

Rory’s and Kristie’s comments highlight how important blogging is as an accessible way for girls with limited resources—often because of 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 do, allowing them to participate in a wider variety of activist practices that may not be accessible to girls still living with their 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 to expensive broadband or DSL Internet access. Girls must also have some disposable leisure time in which 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 may lack the leisure time and/or the computer/Internet access necessary to blogging. Consequently, while framing blogging as an accessible activist practice for girls, it is imperative to remember that some girls remain excluded from this practice.

Since I am suggesting that we must consider blogging as an accessible practice of feminist activism for some girls, it is necessary to better understand exactly how blogging *works* as activism so I will now turn to discuss the ways in which girls use the space of their blogs to engage in three key and interrelated activist practices I have identified: education, community building, and making feminism visible.

## A Feminist Education Online

One of the most important activist practices in which girl bloggers engage is educating their peers about feminist issues and feminism itself. “There’s a lot of kinds of activism that goes on online, like online pro-

tests, 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,” Mackenzie, a nineteen-year-old college student who has been blogging for four years tells me one day on the phone. Indeed, other participants echo Mackenzie’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 harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about feminism. Education, in this sense, is understood by bloggers as necessary for feminist social change and is best practiced through blogging and other online platforms.

Charlotte, at twenty-one, the oldest blogger I interviewed, was one of the more outspoken participants 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 on Facebook, as a significant part of her activism. While it is easy to assume that feminist bloggers are merely preaching to the converted, Charlotte 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 her status updates on their Facebook feeds. Charlotte explains that she believes that sharing feminist information online is activism: “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, Mackenzie 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, Mackenzie’s blog has recently been an excellent source of 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 list of feminist women throughout history. Mackenzie’s idea of teaching readers about feminism implies that many girl bloggers aim to educate other young people specifically, rather than educate adults. And indeed, most girl bloggers tell me that this is who they are speaking to when they blog. For example, Rory 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, Mackenzie 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 Mackenzie has the power to refuse to 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.

In her ethnographic research on girl anti-globalization activists, Taft found that education was also a significant part of girls' political practices—often because, in part, of girls' identities as students—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” (2011: 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 US presidential election in November 2012, Kristie 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. GOT-TAREGISTER.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 (see Figure 15.1).



**Figure 15.1.** Education as activism, author screen shot from author's Facebook account.



Not only does the image educate Kristie's Facebook friends about suffrage and the fact that women have had voting rights in the United States for a relatively short time, it 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 someone's Facebook wall may or may not lead her to actually act (in this case, vote) but 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; it reveals the gendered way in which we often still talk about activism (Taft 2011).

## The Activist Potential of Communities

Community building is another primary activist practice that girls perform through blogging. Indeed, 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, which are foundational to our neoliberal cultural context. Thus, while community building as an activist practice is not distinctive to feminist girl bloggers, it remains a significant practice to acknowledge and analyze, given the characterization of the web as a space that privileges the individual as entrepreneur and brand (Banet-Weiser 2012). For example, when I ask Rory why she thinks that it is 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 Rory, 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, Charlotte 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.” In this sense, community is less about bonds created through shared physical places and more about shared identities and political goals that coalesce through virtual spaces.

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. Interestingly, 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 have to do with 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 are related practices that mutually reinforce one another. Charlotte 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 would never have happened without the social media to connect women and girls all over the world.<sup>4</sup> 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 diverse girls and women (and their allies) to organize.

Furthermore, the communities built through SlutWalk function to circulate or spread the movement globally; in this case, from its inception in Toronto to cities such as Dallas, London, Berlin, Cape Town, and New Delhi (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). In this sense, blogging communities transform the concept of place-based activism (say, the initial SlutWalk march in Toronto in response to a local police officer’s comments) to a much more fluid practice that does not necessarily even require physically attending a SlutWalk event. Indeed, several of the bloggers I interviewed were unable to attend a SlutWalk because they did not live close to a scheduled march, yet they felt part of the movement because of their participation in the blogging communities that made SlutWalk possible. Many of these communities have continued long after the actual SlutWalk march (the most publicly visible part of the activism since we often do not see the organizing around such events), generating several other feminist campaigns in which girls have been a part, including #FBRape and Sexism Spotted.

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 describes how online feminist distros in the late 1990s "create[d] feminist pockets or zones in cyberspace" (2002: para.18) 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 an activist practice by challenging dominant capitalist logic and extending a gendered, racial, and class-based critique to economics. Consequently, I am advocating for understanding girl bloggers' community-building practices not as new because of digital culture, but instead as modifying a longstanding feminist activist practice by incorporating it into a changing media environment. As girls studies scholars, we must recognize these historical connections as significant in order to foster the intergenerational connections we are often told are absent from postfeminist media culture.

## Making Feminism Visible

I was surprised to discover how invested my participants are in making feminists and feminism visible online in order to challenge what Christina Scharff calls the "trope of the feminist" (2012: 5) as unfeminine, man-hating, and lesbian. 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, Rory 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 Rory's "Faces of Feminism" project in which she put out a call on her blog for invited self-identified feminists to send in pictures of themselves. Rory then posted the images she collected on her blog, the post functioning as a feminist coming out for a range of people representing different genders, ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, and nationalities. By making a diversity of feminists *literally* visible on her blog, Rory positions a feminist identity as something desirable and accessible to everyone, inviting others to identify with the movement in the hope of its growth (see Figure 15.2).



Figure 15.2. The faces of feminism, author screen shot from participant's blog.

In her 2012 book, *A Little F'd Up: Why Feminism Is Not a Dirty Word*, twenty-year-old Julie Zeilinger, founder and editor of the teenage blogging community 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 be-

cause 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 Zeilinger's book at length because I find the language she uses 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 because I believe that, potentially, it could frame feminism as a series of easily digestible images, dangerously close to the ways in which postfeminism privileges empowered feminine visibility, display, and a circulation of images (Harris 2004; McRobbie 2009). The language of neoliberalism risks emptying the politics out of Zeilinger's feminism in the hope 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. 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, a reality that we, as girls' studies scholars who may have come of age within different cultural contexts, must recognize as Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser (2012) point out. A key part of this neoliberal culture consists of 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 am certainly not suggesting that Zeilinger is advocating 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.

The strategy of making feminism visible that I have been discussing relies less on mobilizing for specific, tangible changes on particular issues as emblematic of the women's liberation movement, and more 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 (Harris 2008a; Zaslow 2009). Furthermore, it is worthwhile to remember, also, that young people

have a lengthy history of engaging with politics through culture, as demonstrated by foundational cultural studies scholarship (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979). As a result, it makes sense for teenage bloggers like Rory and Julie Zeilinger to be thinking about how feminism is perceived in popular culture and how they may intervene to change feminism's cultural status since the cultural arena is a significant space for their own performances of feminism as teenagers.

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 in 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 documents how *Ms. Magazine* was developed in the early 1970s with this mission in mind by promoting what she calls a "popular feminism" (1998: 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.*'s founders envisioned popular feminism as reaching a wide audience through the commercial women's magazine industry.

In part, feminists' 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 by expanding the acceptable places for feminist discourse. Additionally, Farrell emphasizes that many feminists envisioned a commercial feminist magazine as potentially "weaken[ing] women's resistance to feminism and [making] them rethink the stereotypical images they had previously known in mainstream media" (1998: 16). Interestingly, this goal is markedly similar to Zeilinger's investment in improving feminism's "PR problem" and Rory'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 on 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.

## **Conclusions: Toward a Girl-Centered Approach to Activism**

The girl-centered approach to activism that I have described here allows us to see how education, community building, and making feminism visible function as key activist practices that girls engage in through blogging. In describing this approach, 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. This emphasis on accessibility is particularly important to recognize as we embark on research projects with girls who often lack the material, social, and political resources that we take for granted as adults.

Furthermore, as digital media have become an increasingly significant part of daily life for many people globally, it is essential for girlhood studies scholars to recognize the spaces that girls are producing online as legitimate and valuable spaces for feminist activism—often one of the only places in which they can engage in such practices. Thus, I am suggesting that we avoid reproducing problematic binaries that pit online activism as less than real (presumably offline) activism and instead recognize the complexity of these spaces and the innovative ways in which girls are producing online media to make their own voices as activists heard in a particular space. This may require a rethinking of our own ideas about what constitutes both activism and feminism, as well as a reconsideration of the places, which exist beyond the physical, visible, and public and in which we may expect to see such political mobilization.

Additionally, I am suggesting that this project also necessitates a closer examination of feminist history in order to better theorize both continuities and ruptures between girls' feminist blogging and feminism's past activist strategies. I have shown here that there may be more similarities than are often acknowledged in both scholarship and public discourse. Since web 2.0 platforms are constantly in flux and online media production opportunities always expanding, this will remain a rich area for further scholarly inquiry and necessary intellectual

work if we are to challenge the postfeminist discourses that suggest that girls do not want to be feminist activists.

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## Notes

1. I specifically sought female study participants between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one years of age. I employ the term girl based upon my use of feminist poststructuralist theory, which theorizes girlhood as discursively produced through cultural, historical, and social contexts rather than a static and biological age-based category in which females *age out* after their eighteenth birthday (Driscoll 2002; Eisenhauer 2004; Pomerantz 2009).
2. Much of the analysis in this chapter is derived from my Ph.D. dissertation, "'Still Alive and Kicking': Girl Bloggers and Feminist Politics in a 'Postfeminist' Age," available as an unpublished manuscript online through the University of Texas at Austin library.
3. Occupy Wall Street activists used Zuccotti Park as a staging ground for their activism, with the camp becoming symbolic of the movement, which saw multiple Occupy camps erected in cities globally. I mention this example here since it reflects the ways in which activism is often still associated with



- identifiable, physical places. These places are often not accessible or safe for girls, as demonstrated by several reported sexual assaults in Occupy camps.
4. SlutWalk began after a Toronto police officer told a group of York University students that women should “avoid dressing like sluts” if they do not want to get assaulted. The comments inspired the first SlutWalk march in Toronto on 3 April 2011. Motivated by the events in Toronto, girls and women in cities across the world began organizing (often through their online networks) their own local SlutWalks to highlight the problem of rape culture and *slut shaming* that remains a significant problem globally.
  5. Zeilinger was nineteen when the book was published.

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