

SURFING THE THIRD WAVE
THE THIRD WAVE FEMINIST MOVEMENT ONLINE

by

Nena Sechler Craven

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Approved:

Jennifer Earl, Ph.D.
Chair of the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice

Approved:

Debra Hess Norris
Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved:

Louis F. Rossi, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education and
Dean of the Graduate College

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Susan L. Miller, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of dissertation

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Anne Bowler, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Benjamin Fleury-Steiner, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Antonia Randolph, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the role of the internet and virtual community organization of the feminist movement of the late 2000s and early 2010s. The third wave of feminism is an internetworked social movement—it exists on and in conjunction with the internet and world wide web. Internetworked social movements can be more accessible to marginalized groups than other forms of social movement, but can also involve unique challenges and disadvantages. This dissertation examines how third wave feminists participated in the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s, what participants in the feminist blogosphere did to engage with the feminist movement, and how inclusive a space the online feminist blogosphere was. Using original survey data collected in 2010 and 2011, this project analyzes the social characteristics and feminist identity of participants in the feminist blogosphere of that time period, as well as an exploration of challenge incidents in which social boundaries of the space are tested and negotiated.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This project explores the role of the internet and virtual community organization of the feminist movement of the late 2000s and early 2010s. The third wave of feminism is an internetworked social movement- it exists on and in conjunction with the internet and world wide web. The feminist movement that has existed for many generations and has gone through many waves, but the third wave of feminism was the first to qualify as an internetworked social movement due to its historical situation—the technology involved did not exist during previous waves of the feminist movement (Clark-Parsons, 2022). Internetworked social movements have certain unique qualities when compared to more traditional types of social movements. They can be more accessible to marginalized groups, because the internet allows for a wide distribution of information across great geographical spaces for very little money. Internetworked social movements are also less tied down to one particular format than traditional social movements: they may be information clearinghouses, sites of resistance, tools for communication, or even “virtual public spheres” for discussing the goals and values of a movement and creating informal theoretical discourse (Langman, 2005).

Being internetworked can also create challenges and disadvantages for a social movement. There is a serious “digital divide,” meaning that those who are able to regularly access the internet in order to participate are measurably different from those who are not in terms of social class and, often, race and ethnicity (Hoffman et. Al,

2000). Marginalized groups can also be excluded from participation in internetworked social movements in more subtle ways: for example, a website dedicated to feminist news coverage might systematically fail to report news items related to people of color and/or transgender individuals. For anyone who does have access to the internet, starting one's own site is essentially as easy as participating in someone else's—this makes the internetworked movement prone to spinoffs and splinter groups, so that problems between groups within the movement often lead to self-segregation rather than cooperative solutions and idea exchange. The wide variety of things one can do on the internet also means that it can be hard to pin an internetworked social movement down to one goal or one identity, both of which are traditional foundations of social movements.

With all of this in mind, the purpose of this project is to explore the meaning of the internetworked third wave of feminism to those who organize it and those who participate in it. More specifically, this project asks:

- How did third wave feminists participate in the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s?
- What did participants in the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s do to engage with the feminist movement?
- How inclusive a space was the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s?

The following chapters explore internetworked third wave feminism and the activities and identities of its participants. In Chapter 1, I review the history of the U.S. feminist movement and the common practice of organizing this history into

“waves” or generations of social action. I highlight how the internetworked third wave differed from its predecessors, as well as some of the ways it presages future iterations (or waves) of the movement. In Chapter 2, I discuss my methodology for gathering data on the internetworked third wave of the U.S. feminist movement, using an electronically distributed survey and telephone interviews. I present a detailed analysis of how I conceptualized the feminist blogosphere as a research space, how I chose which sites to use as distribution hubs for the survey, and how I applied grounded theory to analyze the results. In this chapter I also reflect on my position as a researcher and how it affected the project as a whole.

In Chapter 3, I begin my analysis of the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s and early 2010s. This first analysis chapter describes the social characteristics of my respondent pool including factors such as age, race, gender, sexuality, occupation, and household income. I then describe how respondents engaged with the feminist blogosphere—what kinds of websites they used, what kinds of services they used, and which sites and services seemed to be on the decline. In Chapter 4, I analyze respondents’ engagement with the blogosphere through their responses to a series of questions about online interactions. Specifically, I analyze their experiences with being challenged to change their behaviors, thought patterns, or word choices. I give particular attention to whether respondents perceived these challenges to be welcoming and constructive, or attacking and divisive.

In Chapter 5, my analysis of the feminist blogosphere continues into the area of feminist thought and identity. I examine respondents’ choices about whether or not to identify as feminists, as well as their reasoning behind those choices. In addition, I analyze respondents’ personal definitions of feminism and how those definitions

construct gender. I also examine how respondents use their personal definitions of feminism to decide who is included in the feminist blogosphere and who excluded. In my concluding chapter, I discuss the overall findings of the dissertation and how it contributes to our understanding of third wave feminism as an internetworked social movement.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The “Waves” of the Feminist Movement

Before addressing the internetworked nature of the 3rd Wave, it is first necessary to understand the basics of the history of U.S. feminism. Although various actions and movements by and for women are present in virtually every year of American history, it is common practice to speak of periods of strong and visible feminist activities as “waves.” The first recognizable wave of feminist movement in the U.S. began with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, and was primarily concerned with securing women’s legal rights such as suffrage and the ownership of property. The second wave, in the 1960s, arose when women were exposed to the combination of the civil rights movement and the publications of several key texts such as Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1962). The second wave of the U.S. feminist movement sought to gain additional rights for women, such as equal employment opportunity and victims’ rights, as well as to change ideas about gender, for example by critiquing the idea that gender differences are biological or natural (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003).

Roughly a decade later, groups such as queer women and women of color began to critique the second wave movement for its assumption that gender is the most important status in any woman’s life. Instead, these “U.S. third world feminists” argued that gender must be studied while also looking at the intersections of other statuses, such as race, class, and sexuality. From this critique of the second wave, and from the intervening period of anti-feminist backlash, came the third wave of U.S. feminism, in which diversity and intersecting identities are central concerns rather

than being marginalized or, at best, parallel to the white mainstream (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 2006). It is generally accepted that third wave of U.S. feminism was in full swing by the early 2000s (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003).

Third wave feminism differs from previous waves not just in its attention to intersectionality, but also in its historical situation. This may seem self-evident, but there is more going on here than the simple passage of time: “We no longer live in the world that feminists of the second wave faced” (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003, p. 10). The economy has globalized since the second wave, and information technology and the mass media have worked to shrink the world even further. In addition, coming of age after the heavily activist second wave of U.S. feminism has made activism difficult for third wave feminists. A cultural backlash against feminism worked to convince the world that feminist activism was obsolete and redundant—that feminism’s goals had been accomplished. The very real gains of the second wave have become more difficult to recognize as rights that were fought for and won—it seems as though feminism is “simply in the water” (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003).

It is important to note that not all U.S. feminism fits neatly into the metaphors of wave and backlash. Feminist sociologist Nancy Whittier argues instead for a generational approach to studying social movements, emphasizing the relationships between micro-cohorts. Micro-cohorts can be defined as “Groups of women who entered radical feminist organizations together, every year or two, [who] shared similar experiences inside and outside the movement” (Whittier, 1995, p. 17). According to Whittier, the shared experiences of these micro-cohorts bonded individuals together and had greater lasting impacts on coalitions and rivalries within the feminist movement than did more traditional age cohort groupings. When

characteristics both internal and external to a movement create a sharp transition in the movement's history, several micro-cohorts seem to merge and create "waves" (Whittier, 1995).

Jennifer L. Pierce's (2003) contention that there is a wave "2.5" supports Whittier's idea of the importance of the micro-cohort. Pierce argues that feminists who came of age in the late 1970s and early 1980s had experiences that differentiate them significantly from both second wave and third wave feminists. The experiences of wave 2.5 feminists are largely marked by two contrasting social conditions: a solid foundation of second wave feminist activism and literature, and an environment of a cultural and political shift to the right (Pierce, 2003). So, thanks to the work of second wave feminists, wave 2.5 academic feminists found themselves with other women in their cohorts, an increasing number of female and feminist faculty members, and a rich body of literature from which to pull inspiration (Pierce, 2003). On the other hand, these wave 2.5 feminists were also operating within a larger culture of backlash that was not receptive to their work, nor to the idea that feminism was still necessary and useful. This tension and unique cultural and historical situation differentiates between wave 2.5 feminism from second wave feminism, but because attention to multiculturalism, intersectionality, and new media was still yet to come, Pierce argues that wave 2.5 also cannot be lumped together with the third wave, but is its own micro-cohort (Pierce, 2003).

Whittier's conception of micro-cohorts as essential to the conceptualization of the feminist movement allows us to add the missing troughs to waves of activity that might otherwise seem only to crest and then disappear. She argues that the troughs, or

periods of low feminist activity, are often critical times of transition in which reins are passed from one cohort to the next. In other words:

Movements for social change are not reborn anew each time they resurge, and they do not necessarily die when they decline. Rather, social movements are continuous and move from periods of peak mobilization into decline, abeyance, transition, and back to peak mobilization again...During transitions, movements are passed from one political generation to the next (Whittier, 1995, p. 258).

Even periods of “abeyance” are not devoid of activity. According to Whittier “transitions are especially visible when mobilization grows, but their roots are often in the period preceding a phase of extensive activism” (Whittier, 1995, p. 257).

Whether it is considered a generation, micro-cohort, or the trough of a wave, the 1980s and early 1990s had a profound impact on present-day feminism. During this period of backlash, women were sent two conflicting messages: 1. You are truly, finally free and equal to men and 2. You are miserable, burnt out, overworked, and unfulfilled (Faludi, 1991). This message came from several places at once, including the popular media, the U.S. political system, and the religious New Right (Faludi, 1991). For example, films like *Fatal Attraction* (1987) portrayed single, employed women as vicious, conniving villains while married women who stayed home with children were shown as wholesome, good, even angelic (Faludi, 1991).

Print advertisements also changed their portrayals of men and women during this period. Messner and Montez de Oca (2005) found that beer advertisements shown during large media sports events such as the Super Bowl closely followed dominant social tropes of masculinity, selling not just a product but also a lifestyle (Messner &

Montez de Oca, 2005). Advertisements from the 1950s and 1960s, for example, showed White suburban heterosexual couples drinking together at social events. During the backlash years of the 1970s and 1980s, however, women were largely absent and men were shown drinking with other men in public spaces (Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005). In the backlash-era advertisements, men seem to be resolving a crisis of masculinity by drinking. The absence of women in these advertisements mirrored their newly increased absence from home, as paid work outside the home became more common and socially accepted. In the 1950s and 1960s when sole earner status gave many men a sure route to acceptable masculinity, women's appearance in advertisements was seen as non-threatening. With women moving into the workforce, men in these advertisements seemed to be trying to carve out a space of their own in which to create a new masculine identity (Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005).

It was not just boyfriends and husbands who were seen to suffer from women's wage earning. According to the stories popular in the news media during the backlash, women who put career before family could be unwittingly subjecting their children to physical and sexual abuse at the hands of daycare providers (Faludi, 1991). Still more sensationalist media stories lamented that career women may never be able to have children because they miss their window of fertility, or because they grow too old and undesirable to find a suitable husband (Faludi, 1991). The idea that a woman might feel satisfied with a career and no family or with a non-traditional family arrangement was almost completely absent from the public eye during the backlash period.

In the midst of all this backlash activity, several key events helped to bring feminism back into the public eye. One such event was the televised Senate confirmation hearings in the fall of 1991 regarding Clarence Thomas' sexual harassment of Anita Hill. Also in 1991, Faludi's *Backlash* and Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* were published; both would become best-sellers. In 1992, Bill Clinton was elected to office—the first Democratic president in twelve years (with a strong feminist wife who later was Secretary of State and the first woman nominated by a major party for the Presidency)—along with a record number of women elected to various public offices. Popular culture also began to portray feminist themes. The movie *Thelma and Louise* was released in 1991, and shows like *Murphy Brown* and *Roseanne*, which featured strong women from different socio-economic classes, steadily gained popularity (Henry, 2004). In addition, *Ms. Magazine* returned to the shelves in a new format in 1990 and boldly declared that feminism was alive and well (Henry, 2004).

Rebecca Walker wrote an essay for this revamped *Ms.* in response to the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings in which the term “third wave” feminism was first featured prominently (Walker, 1992). Walker expressed anger at both the process of the hearings (a black woman's integrity harshly and publicly questioned by mostly white men) and at the outcome (Thomas' confirmation to the Senate). She called young women to action, citing the Thomas hearings and other recent events as evidence that feminism and feminist action were still needed and not obsolete. The end of her essay contained the bold declaration “I am not a post-feminist feminist. I am the Third Wave” (Walker, 1992, p. 41). Walker went on to write numerous articles and books on the topic of third wave feminism, continuing to call for

action. Walker also paired with Amy Richards to create the Third Wave Foundation, a feminist organization dedicated to political action around women's rights issues (Henry, 2004).

As the third wave grew over the following years, feminist publications became more prolific and often took the form of anthologies and edited volumes about intersectional identities. Walker's own *To Be Real* (1995) falls into this category, as does Findlen's *Listen Up* (1995). Both volumes contain loosely connected personal narrative essays contributed by various known and unknown feminist writers, often in their teens or twenties. Rather than discuss women as a collectivity, these writers mull over multiple aspects of their identities; they are black, Asian, queer, fat, disabled, Jewish, anorexic, pregnant, and so on. Most authors identify themselves as a combination of identities, existing at a unique intersection that may only apply to a handful of people (Walker, 1995; Findlen, 1995). This kind of feminist writing has been lauded for its attention to those intersections and their very real consequences for individuals. On the other hand, it has also been criticized as lacking any broad application: "The Asian bisexual can only speak for herself, not for other Asians nor other bisexuals. For the third wave, identity politics is limited to the expression of individual identity" (Henry, 2004, p. 44).¹

¹ It is important to note that not all feminist books published in this time period followed this narrative essay format. Baumgardner and Richards' *Manifesta* (2000), for example, was more overtly political and can be read as a how-to manual for grassroots feminist activism.

Identity and Goals: Being the Third Wave

Third wave feminism's attention to identity politics did not arise spontaneously; rather, it is a reaction to both historical situation and to the complicated relationship third wave feminism shares with previous feminisms. Because the time gap between the second and third "waves" of feminism is roughly equivalent to the time gap between biological family generations—around 30 years—it is easy to fall into familial metaphors when describing periods of strongly visible feminist activity (Henry, 2004). (Some second and third wave feminists are, in fact, biological mothers and daughters—like Alice and Rebecca Walker). A similar comparison does not work when examining first and second wave feminists, because the time gap was significantly greater. Second wave feminists, therefore, were able to see first wave feminists as idealized foremothers—ancestors, almost—inspiring, but not physically present, not actively contributing either support or criticism (Henry, 2004). Third wave feminists tend to experience second wave feminists more immediately, as mothers, physically and intellectually present. Second wave feminist "mothers" seem to overshadow the third wave feminists' accomplishments with their own amazing and revolutionary feats (Henry, 2004).

Third wave feminists seem to have actively disidentified with second wave feminists: to have built their feminist identity in opposition to the identity of second wave feminists in a process that parallels adolescent rebellion and disidentification of a teenage woman with her mother. This can have the effect of making third wave feminism seem trivial, or even childish. Third wave feminism can also seem tainted with childishness because many third wave feminists did, in fact, begin to think about and adopt feminist ideals in childhood (Henry, 2004). Since childhood is a time one spends in large part with one's mother, the disparate threads of childishness,

motherliness, and feminism often become tangled in the minds of would-be third wave feminists, discouraging them from continuing to actively self-identify with feminism as they move into adulthood.

In many ways, paradoxically, the identity of third wave feminists is defined by both connection to and separation from the second wave. Both wave and generational metaphors seem to imply connection: waves are connected by troughs and continue indefinitely, and generations share genetic traits and inherited social traditions. On the other hand, both metaphors also imply separation. The “waves” of feminism are numbered, which obscures feminist activity during “trough” periods and creates the illusion of breaks between discrete peaks. In the generational metaphor, ideological separation mirrors adolescent rebellion and the disidentification of a teenage woman with her biological mother (Henry, 2004). Second wave “mothers,” in turn, often feel that third wavers are ungrateful “daughters” who do not appreciate their accomplishments or the abilities and wisdom they can still offer to the movement (Henry, 2004).

Lesbian and queer feminists seem to create a parallel mother-daughter pairing of generations in their writings as well (Henry, 2004). There is also a thread in second wave lesbian feminist writings that does seem to hold up second wave lesbians as jilted lovers, left by third wave queer daughters who betray them by pursuing relationships with men (Henry, 2004). Similar to the idea in mainstream feminism that the second wave is restricting, queer feminists often perceive the second wave as sexually draining while the third wave is sexually empowering and liberating. A lot of third wave queer writing describes feminism as “a repressive and intrusive force, dictating how lesbians should dress, act, and have sex” (Henry, 2004, p. 123). The

central theme of these writings is that penetrative sex is harmful to women, therefore lesbian sex is the most feminist kind of sex you can have. This makes it a traitorous act for lesbians to wander around in the continuum and have sex with a man, or use a dildo for penetrative sex. Overall, although there are some differences in how it plays out, a very similar generational conflict, awkwardly forced into a mother-daughter format, affects lesbians/queer women the same way it affects straight feminists: it serves to artificially distinguish the waves more than may be ideologically true, pisses off people in both waves, makes 2nd wave lesbians look like dowdy past-prime mother figures while third wave queer women look like rebellious, ungrateful daughters.

Although generational metaphors are common and easy to use and understand, they are also deeply problematic. First of all, they are a vast oversimplification of the overall feminist movement. Assuming that every living feminist is either a “mother” or a “daughter” renders invisible those feminists who came into their feminism during the 1980s—the feminists Pierce (2003) refers to as wave 2.5. In addition, the mother/daughter metaphor also dovetails neatly with dominant understandings of cultural generations; namely the Baby Boomers and the Generation X-ers (Henry, 2004). This means that anyone studying the feminist movement or attempting to find their own place in it using a generational metaphor carries with them the mental baggage associated with these cultural generations. For example, someone who has been told over and over that Generation X is politically apathetic and disengaged (a common cultural stereotype) may have a tendency to assume that a third wave feminist will be less politically active than a second wave feminist.

The idea that third wave feminism is less politically involved than second wave feminism does not solely come from the third wave’s association with

Generation X. Because feminism seems to be “in the water” (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003), many women have grown up not feeling any urgency around actively identifying as feminist. It is seen as a birthright, something that is handed to us rather than something we need to work to claim (Henry, 2004). Second wave feminists, by contrast, had to choose feminism, and to actively define it. For the second wave, feminism often represented an entrance into freedom, whereas for third wave feminists, feminism can seem like a pre-existing structure that creates restrictions. The most striking example of this comes from Katie Roiphe, whose book *The Morning After* (1993) characterized feminism as restricting women’s sexuality.

Also characteristic of third wave feminism is the ideology of individualism. Whereas second wave feminism sought to come together and to form coalitions, third wave feminists focused more on finding individual voices. Many third wave feminists seem to view coalition and group identification as an overwhelming force that swallows and obscures identity, rather than adding to it. It is telling that Rebecca Walker declared “I am the Third Wave,” not “we are the third wave” or “I belong to the third wave” (Walker, 1992, p. 41). While this attention to individualism can give voice to those who might not otherwise have it, some contend that it also dissipates feminism as a social movement and slows political action (Henry, 2004).

Because of this the individualistic nature of third wave feminism (as well as lingering effects of the 1980s backlash period), not all contemporary young women who believe in essentially feminist values identify themselves overtly as feminists. Instead, they are “living feminism”: semi-consciously acting out its principles throughout their daily lives (Aronson, 2008, p. 77). Aronson (2003) found

that when interviewed, young women in the late 1990s fell along a continuum of feminist beliefs and identities. Some women did self-identify as feminists, but many women felt the need to qualify their position due to the perceived negative connotations of feminism, saying “I’m a feminist, but...” (Aronson, 2003, p. 915). In addition, more than half of the women were vaguely supportive of things like equality between the sexes, but were not willing to label themselves feminists. Negativity and backlash played a role in these women’s rejection of feminism, but it was not the only factor. Some women expressed a belief that feminism was not relevant to them because they had not experienced direct discrimination, and others believed that they could not be considered feminists because they did not participate in daily political activism (Aronson, 2003).

Young women such as these are accustomed to some of the major ideas of the feminist movement, such as women’s independence, self-reliance, and self-development. Aronson found that “living feminism” had influenced present-day young women to value financial independence as a life goal that should precede marriage and other romantic relationships.

Young women make sense of their lives through perspectives absorbed from the women’s movement: They expect to have fulfilling jobs, support themselves economically, develop their own identities, raise children alone if necessary, and pursue their own goals even when they are in relationships with men (Aronson, 2008, pp. 77-78).

Young women at that time were also likely to see marriage as optional, whether or not children were involved, whereas this would have been unthinkable in their parents’ and grandparents’ generations.

It can be considered a measure of the success of the feminist movement that young women could, by the early 2000s, assume this level of independence and decision-making power. On the other hand, it can also lull potential activists into a false sense of security about the status of women in society. Aronson notes that “...although supportive of feminist goals, very few interviewees recognized the need for political critique or worked for social change... Thus, these women are ‘borrowing feminist principles’... for their own purposes rather than explicitly embracing politicized feminist ideologies and goals” (Aronson, 2008, p. 78). This disconnect between lived feminism and political feminism can lead to the misconception that there is no need for further activism, and can cause women who benefit daily from feminism to be ignorant of or hostile toward the very kind of activist feminism that made those benefits possible.

It is within this supposedly postfeminist environment that things like “raunch culture” are able to arise and to be considered empowering. Raunch culture encourages women to embrace sexuality under the guise of female empowerment, but some contend it does so without a great deal of critical thought:

There is a widespread assumption that simply because my generation of women has had the good fortune to live in a world touched by the feminist movement, that means everything we do is magically imbued with its agenda. It doesn’t work that way. “Raunchy” and “liberated” are not synonyms (Levy, 2005, p. 5).

Examples of raunch culture include the prolific *Girls Gone Wild* videos, exercise classes that teach pole-dancing and stripping techniques, and widespread acceptance of borderline pornographic magazines such as *Maxim* (Levy, 2005). These elements

of raunch culture are touted as feminist (or as a logical extension of a post-feminist society) because they do not seek to obscure female sexuality. Feminist theorists, however, argue that raunch culture simply resurrects old stereotypes about female sexuality without interrogating their meaning. “A tawdry, tarty, cartoonlike version of female sexuality has become so ubiquitous, it no longer seems particular. What we once regarded as a *kind* of sexual expression we now view *as* sexuality” (Levy 2005, p. 5, emphasis in original).

Sexual expression, feminism, and feminist identity are further problematized in the third wave by the unique experiences of women of color. In the second wave, for example, black women who worked against sexism and racism were often barred from participation in mainstream feminist organizations, or were invited to participate but not given equal status and voice within those organizations. For these women, to have their activism labeled “feminist” was to experience a form of colonialism or imperialism, a forced alliance and cooptation of their work by white feminists (Springer, 2005). Women of color have therefore created separate organizations and identities, such as the race-centered “womanism” coined by Alice Walker (1984). Other women of color have modified rather than rejected feminism. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) summarizes the unique feminism lived and acted on by black women and calls it Black Feminist Thought. Women like Vidal (1972), Garcia (1989), Elenes (2000), and Moya (2001) have discussed the unique experiences of Latina and Chicana feminists within the La Raza movement. Other women, including Sonia Shah (1999) have explored feminism from the perspective of Asian-Americans.

These and other non-mainstream identities and movements are a critical element of the overall environment of the third wave of U.S. feminism and feminist identity. Adrienne Rich (1980) criticized feminism for its heteronormativity and insisted on theoretical attention to a spectrum of possible sexual identities. Some, like Jenny Morris (1995) have explored gender and feminism as they are experienced by the disabled. Barbara MacDonald and Cynthia Rich (2001) discussed the process of aging and its effects on women and feminism.

Feminism as an Internetnetworked Social Movement

Some scholars have argued that an unprecedented degree of theoretical and practical flexibility is essential to the success of third wave feminism. Dicker & Piepmeier (2003), for example, claim that:

We need...a feminism that utilizes the new technologies of the internet, the playful world of fashion, and the more clear-cut activism of protest marches, a feminism that can engage with issues as diverse as women's sweatshop labor in global factories and violence against women expressed in popular music (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003, p. 5).

Similarly, Ferree and Yancey Martin (1995) argue that third wave feminism has developed into a new form that exists in multiple locations and organizations at once. Activists wander back and forth between organizational expressions of feminism: They attend a women's studies class in the morning, volunteer in a clinic defense group in the afternoon, attend a women's music concert in the evening (Ferree and Yancey Martin, 1995). Increasingly, feminist activists also turn to the internet and the online world as a tool and as a location for activism.

As the internet has become woven into our daily lives, so did it become one of the many spaces in which third wave feminism moves. This is important because of the internet's potential to be subversive to existing regimes of gender, race, and class—and thereby to further feminist goals of social inequality. “Freed from our burdensome material selves, [social scientists and philosophers] claim, we become fluid entities, overcoming those societal stigmas inscribed on the body—race, gender, age, size, beauty, what have you” (Campbell, 2004, p. 5). This is the key concept of what Campbell calls the “online disembodiment thesis.” According to the online disembodiment thesis, the online and offline worlds are binary opposites:

In other words, either/or thinking is at hand: if the physical world is real, then cyberspace must be virtual and therefore something other than real; if the body is present in the physical world, then the body must be absent in the virtual world; if oppressive social constructs such as race, gender, and sexuality are based on the body, then when the body is absent these constructs must also be absent (Campbell, 2004, pp. 11-12).

Haraway (1985) posited the idea of a subversive actor known as a “cyborg”: part human, part machine. Because interaction online is achieved primarily through text, it is possible to obscure the identifying characteristics that help to create gender and other human categories. This allows the cyborg to play with his/her/their gender, create nonbinary genders, or deny gender altogether. Similar claims have been made about race, class, age, and a host of other human characteristics. The internet, according to this argument, makes physical cues invisible and therefore irrelevant.

In practice, however, physical embodiment is far from absent online. Personal web pages and social networking profiles routinely include both posed and candid

photographs and even video clips, bringing a representation of the user's body online. Photos can display a user's gender and race through visible physical cues (Weber & Mitchell, 2008). Social class can also be evident in photos from cues such as clothing, accessories, and location. Adolescent users of the internet have been found to use photographs to display their detailed knowledge of social and popular culture trends; for example, a young girl may pose in the same manner and dress as a teen idol such as Hillary Duff (Weber & Mitchell, 2008).

In order to learn more about online embodiment, Kendall (1998) conducted participant observation in an online, text-only community known as BlueSky. She found that although subversive performances online are very possible and do happen, these performances become compartmentalized and do not directly affect offline interactions. For example, the participants on BlueSky treated information gained about other people online as suspect, while information gained about them face-to-face was considered somehow more "real." In this way, a genderqueer or trans person might be able to "pass" as the gender of their choice online but not in person, because observers privilege physical cues such as facial structure and body posture. Therefore, the genderqueer or trans person might consider their online persona to be more real than their physical one, while observers and even friends believe the opposite to be true (Kendall, 1998).

Because internet users believe that there is, somewhere, a "real" version of the person with whom they are interacting via text, online gender bending does not lead them to believe that gender itself is fluid or malleable. In fact, online gender bending performances must often rely on essentialist stereotypes of gender in order to be successful:

With the limitations inherent in text-based online interactions, and the absence of cues we typically use to interpret the gender identity of others, [a male internet user enacting a female persona]’s caricature of femininity becomes potentially more real—more female—than my less stereotypical enactment [as a female internet user enacting a female persona, herself] (Kendall, 1998, p. 138).

The privileging of physical, face-to-face gender cues and a reliance on stereotypical feminine attributes in order to enact gender online give the internet the potential to reify, rather than subvert, existing gender regimes.

In addition, although direct discussions of race and class were avoided online, it was often possible to discover this information about other participants indirectly. For example, in Kendall’s study of BlueSky described above, class could be inferred through discussions of salary, job category, and education. Social class could also become apparent due to a particular kind of middle-class-based performance of masculinity—“the competent, competitive male breadwinner” (Kendall, 1998, p. 144). Kendall found that race was sometimes discussed as it pertained to current events in the news, but was typically avoided as a topic in discussions of identity. When asked directly by Kendall, most users of the online community BlueSky confessed that race was something they did not often think about. Kendall notes that not thinking about race is a facet of white privilege: “Whiteness as an unmarked, empty category allows white people the luxury of not thinking about the effects of race” (Kendall, 1998, p. 145). Assuming that the internet is a non-raced space often equates to assuming that the internet is a white space, negating the voices of internet users who are people of color.

The simple fact of having access to the internet, and the time to participate in its communities, can also divulge information about a user's offline self. Not all countries have widespread internet access, and even in the U.S. there are still plenty of homes that do not contain a computer and cannot afford monthly payments for internet access. Social class and income, employment, and leisure time, all of which are closely tied to race and ethnicity, are therefore a big factor in determining who can access the internet. Some researchers (Booth and Flanagan, 2002; Gajjala, 2003) even argue that the physical production of microchips and other computer components that make up the internet, done primarily by low-skilled, underpaid women from developing countries, is itself a reproduction of gender oppression. "If cyberspace is produced at the expense of millions of men and women all over the world who are not even able to enjoy its conveniences, how can we make claims that [these technologies] are changing the world for the better?" (Gajjala, 2003, p. 49).

Still, it is also true that some people have found subversive, empowering uses for the internet. One potential function of the internet is to give access to feminism to those who might not otherwise have access. Young feminists, for example, may be restricted from some traditional types of feminist activism by the fact that they still live with their parents. Gordon (2008) found that teenagers, especially teenage girls, were often blocked by nervous parents from participating in direct political action such as town meetings and protest marches. "Girls' struggles with parental power can contribute to their relative social invisibility as agents of political change, both within their peer networks and to a broader adult network of community activists" (Gordon, 2008, p. 51). In addition, missing out on opportunities for activism in youth may

restrict girls' ability gain the skills and visibility necessary to become adult activists (Gordon, 2008).

According to Gordon, alliances with older activists within the same movement greatly affected teenaged girls' ability to overcome familial restrictions and remain involved in activism. Gordon contrasts two youth organizations: "...strong intergenerational relationships within [one youth organization] facilitated girls' sustained movement participation, and muted the gender divides that eventually destabilized [the other youth organization] and led to the withdrawal of...girls from community activism" (Gordon, 2008, p. 37). Older activist allies had the ability to calm parental fears about girls' physical distance from home during political action as well as to teach youth activists to see struggles with parents and each other within the frameworks of sexism and ageism. For young feminists, especially girls, internet spaces such as feminist websites and blogs might provide access to activism within parental boundaries, as well as to feminist mentors from older age cohorts.

The internet has been used for other feminist goals as well. HollaBackNYC (<http://www.hollabacknyc.com>) and its clones provide a place for women to post pictures and descriptions of people who have harassed them sexually in public places. Blogs such as Feministing (<http://www.feministing.com>) provide a place for people who identify themselves as feminists to find news items, information about activism, and all kinds of social support. Other internet services such as electronic mail and online petitions have been used to coordinate real-world political activism. BlogHer (<http://blogher.com>) provides resources and support for women bloggers engaging in these activities. In one case study, the internet was used as a tool

for Black women to publicly challenge how the legal system dealt with cases of violence against women of color (Fleury-Steiner & Rapp, 2010).

The internet can be a space in which to develop and nurture an identity. A personal blog (web log) can be a place to lay out one's beliefs and values, center your feelings and solve problems, plan and hope for the future, track personal progress in a number of areas, and be proud of accomplishments (Buckingham, 2008). In addition, interacting through text gives one more time to think before you speak than face-to-face communication allows. Because of this, online selves can be "touched up" versions of the self—not an outright fabrication so much as impression management and choosing which sides of oneself to highlight (Buckingham, 2008). For example, a young woman participating in a social networking site may deliberately choose to discuss certain bands and trends in order to express a counterculture taste in music, perhaps leaving out a few examples of bands she enjoys that do not quite fit that mold (Buckingham, 2008).

Some people use the internet to express and/or develop aspects of the self that are repressed in other spaces. For example, Steele (2021) claimed that Black women used blogs as a virtual safe space akin to a beauty shop where they could use technology to develop a sense of self away from Eurocentric ideals of theory and beauty, where Black women's experiences were strongly centered. Boys can talk about liking music or pastimes that are generally considered "girly", and youth of any gender can discuss "taboo or unsavory personal topics such as depression, self-mutilation, and lesbian sexual desire" (Buckingham, 2008, p. 107). Bringing up these topics in their face-to-face lives could incur punishments or social sanctions such as the loss of friends or loss of parental approval, but online one's identifying

information can be obscured and the topics can be explored in relative safety. Both impression management and exploring taboo topics can be considered a kind of identity experimentation in which youth broadcast certain versions of themselves to see what kind of response and reception they receive (Buckingham, 2008). For example, queer youth sometimes consider the internet “a space and time to safely rehearse the coming-out process.” (Buckingham, 2008, p. 107). It is possible that the internet provides safe spaces for nascent feminists as well.

In all of these ways, third wave feminism has gradually become an internetnetworked social movement: a social movement that exists on and in conjunction with the internet and world wide web. Internetnetworked social movements in general seem particularly well suited to meet the third wave’s need for flexibility. “Some [internetnetworked social movements] provide alternative information, others initiate various kinds of actions that might contest, resist, and even transform adversities and injustices through pressures on states and/or economic actors to change policies or, in some cases, change governments. These might include lobbying, consumer boycotts, demonstrations, and even direct forms of ‘netwar’ such as ‘hactivism’” (Langman, 2005).

Being internetnetworked can be very useful and beneficial to a social movement. For one thing, the flexibility involved can allow for multiple voices to be heard at once—one of the core concerns of the third wave. The internet makes frequent long-distance communication easier and less costly than travel for face-to-face meetings or even telephone interactions; this can allow for coalitions to form among people who might otherwise never meet one another, and can be a great boon to grassroots activists with scarce resources (Marmura, 2008). The ease of long-

distance communication online can also promote democratic participation in movements, as opposed to restrictive hierarchies (Langman, 2005).

Of course, being internetworked can also create unique problems. Although mass communication on the internet is relatively cheap, personal computers and monthly subscriptions to internet service providers are still financially out of reach for a large number of American households. This makes the idea that the internet gives everyone an equal voice extremely problematic, as it excludes marginalized populations such as the urban poor. Cyber-diffusion—“the rapid, computer-generated dissemination of information around the world, without concern for geographic location”—is another mixed blessing of internetworked social movements (Ayres, 1999, p. 133). Diffusion allows wider access to information, but does a poor job of controlling the quality of that information. This can create fads and panics in the place of coordinated political and social action (Ayres, 1999). It can also create new venues for old forms of hatred. For example, Bailey (2021) traces the use of the internet to spread misogynoir—hatred of Black women expressed in negative media depictions. The internet clearly has both limitations and potential; it can be an ally to feminism, a tool for feminism, or merely a new realm in which to reenact the same social disparities that affect women and other marginalized groups offline.

After the Third Wave

Some time in the mid-2010s, another cultural shift occurred. The introduction of the internet as a space and a tool changed feminism, and some argued that this change was broad and significant enough to launch the world into a Fourth Wave of the feminist movement (Munro, 2013). The “call-out culture” that began in spaces like HollaBackNYC expanded to a multitude of ways for average women to publicly

challenge everyday sexism and misogyny. A form of activism known as “hashtag” feminism utilized social media tools like Twitter (renamed “X” in 2023) to promote awareness about feminist topics, build solidarity among women with common experiences, and spark social change.

Probably the most well known feminist hashtag campaign is the #MeToo movement (<https://metoomvmt.org/>), started by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 on MySpace and repopularized in 2017 by actor Alyssa Milano (Ohlheiser, 2017). The purpose of this hashtag campaign was to encourage survivors of rape and sexual assault to post “#MeToo” somewhere on social media, indicating their identity as a survivor and forming a show of solidarity with other survivors. Other hashtag campaigns included #YesAllWomen (misogyny and violence), #WhyIStayed (intimate partner violence), and #NotBuyingIt (sexist commercials, particularly during the SuperBowl) (Clark-Parsons, 2022). These campaigns were widely adopted and very publicly visible, but their effects on the world are unclear.

Hashtag campaigns and other online activism have certainly led to public discussion of feminist concerns, but have they created any real and lasting change? A common critique of online activism is that it does not translate to social change in the “real” offline world. The term “slacktivism”, a portmanteau of “slacker” and “activism,” derisively attacks things like hashtag campaigns as useless and performative (Munro, 2013). Posting a hashtag, adding your name to an online petition, or temporarily changing an online profile picture may lead to solidarity and spur on social change. This is difficult to trace, however, and all of those forms of “slacktivism” may wind up being the full extent of a person’s involvement in the feminist movement.

Concerns like this have prompted some to argue that, rather than a constructive Fourth Wave of feminism, the later 2010s should instead be characterized as a time of “popular feminism” (Clark-Parsons, 2022). Popular feminism is very public and accessible: a new series of Wonder Woman movies, a new televised version of Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Beyoncé and Lady Gaga embracing the label “feminist,” (Clark-Parsons, 2022). Publicity and accessibility are very desirable characteristics in a social movement, but critics argue that these have been bought at the expense of depth of content. Hashtags do not allow for nuanced discussion of what feminism is, they are simply searchable keywords.

Whatever era, wave, or generation of feminism we may now be in, it is certainly internetnetworked in some way. The internetnetworked feminist movement in 2023 centers around hashtags and social media like Twitter/X, Snapchat, and TikTok. But in the 2000s and early 2010s, the feminist blogosphere was the beating heart of the social movement:

By the early 2000s, the feminist blogosphere was a thriving network composed of countless nodes and growing every day, as the work of pioneering sites like TheFBomb.org, Feministing.com, Feministe.us, CrunkFeministCollective.com, Scarleteen.com, and Shakesville.com, among others, inspired readers to take part (Clark-Parsons, 2022, p. 17).

This project collected the thoughts and ideas of average users as well as organizing members of the blogosphere at the height of its popularity and power. Their responses can offer insight into a snapshot of the feminist movement at a critical time, and shed light on the directions it was to take as it crested the top of the third wave and surfed into the future. In the next chapter, I will outline the methodology I

used to collect data on the participants of the feminist blogosphere during this critical time period.

Chapter 3

METHODS

This study consisted of two levels of data collection: an electronically distributed survey and in-depth telephone interviews. The target population of the electronically distributed survey was cyberfeminists, defined both as those who coordinate feminist action on the internet and those who participate in feminism online in some fashion without a leadership role. The target population of the in-depth telephone interviews was cyberfeminists who hold some sort of leadership role in feminism and/or feminist action online; for example, the editors or moderators of a website. I reached respondents by placing requests for participation on feminist websites, with the permissions of the site coordinators.

Garcia et. al. (2009) recommend a blending of on- and offline methods for researchers studying internet communities of any kind in order to address issues of authenticity and validity. From the responses to the initial survey, I selected a small sample of online feminists with leadership roles for in-depth interviews via telephone. These interviews were semi-structured to allow subjects to talk more freely about how and why they use the internet as a tool for their feminism, and about what the internet means for their feminism.

Respondents on both levels of data collection were drawn from both mainstream and splinter groups, as defined by the respondents themselves and by the groups to which they belong. I began at Feministing.com, the most popular website relating to feminist issues according to its traffic ranking—the number of visitors it receives daily—as compiled by the ranking service at Alexa.com. From there, I purposively selected a sample of websites using a combination of Alexa.com's

popularity rankings and the websites' own links to other feminist websites. I attempted to oversample websites pertaining to intersectional issues within feminism such as queer feminism, Black feminism/womanism, and transgender issues in order to ensure that respondents will be from a variety of feminist groups, belief sets, and backgrounds.

The initial survey, as indicated above, was conducted electronically (online). This type of survey is a form of standardized interviewing which is self-completed by respondents. Surveys had a standardized set of questions with a limited number of responses (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Using Qualtrics software, I created an online survey tool with the questions I had chosen. These questions broadly covered feminist identity and participation in feminist activism and organization on the internet. This survey had a stable online address when it was launched and throughout its availability window, which I distributed to my sample on the selected blogs in the form of a link. Respondents then visited the survey's website and completed the survey online. I was then able to collect their answers with the Qualtrics software and conduct analysis using a mixture of Excel spreadsheets and hand-coding.

There are drawbacks to this type of survey method, as there are to all methods. An electronic survey may seem dry or impersonal compared to other methods, due to the use of computer-mediated communication (Mann & Stewart, 2000). The survey may appear unattractive or confusing due to programming glitches if the respondent uses an operating system different from the one on which the survey was created (Mann & Stewart, 2000). The anonymity provided by online surveys can also present problems; some have found this medium to be more subject to authenticity problems, running the gamut from quick, dashed-off responses to

deliberate fabrication of information (Mann & Stewart, 2000). It is possible to minimize these types of problems with internet surveys. Operating system glitches can be avoided in most cases by using up-to-date software to create the survey and by testing the survey website on a variety of operating systems. Authenticity problems are present in any type of data collection, and can be addressed by means such as a large initial sample size. In addition, comparing the data collected online with that collected during telephone interviews is useful in determining the authenticity of the study. Although the surveys may appear dry and impersonal compared to other methods, it is highly likely that the intended population—as users of the internet—are accustomed to interacting online in this manner and therefore will not be disturbed by the format of the survey.

Internet methods such as an online survey also carry many potential benefits. The very anonymity that can create authenticity problems can also lead to *more* authentic responses on a survey, if respondents are uncomfortable sharing intimate information face-to-face (Mann & Stewart, 2000). In addition, this anonymity will protect the identity and privacy of respondents by making it impossible to connect completed surveys to a name, address, phone number, and other identifiers of this type. Because this method eliminates the use of paper and surface mail, an online survey is also extremely cost-effective. Contacting potential in-depth interview respondents by email to ask them to participate in the study and to remind and thank them later carries no cost whatsoever, because as an enrolled graduate student I have access to a University of Delaware electronic mail account. For the same reason, Qualtrics survey software was also available to me at no cost. Geographical reach is also extended by the use of electronic methods, because there is

no difference in cost or energy expended to send an email to someone nearby versus someone physically distant.

The second round of data collection involved telephone interviews. Because the respondents were chosen purposively as organizers of online communities, problems of random sampling (such as determining an appropriate member of the household before administering the survey) do not apply. Some difficulties that may occur with telephone interviews include the impersonal nature of the contact, the lack of visual aids, and the potential for distractions (Schutt, 2004). These difficulties can be mitigated with planning. For example, scheduling telephone interviews for a time when respondents will be relatively free of distractions will ensure a greater degree of their attention. Opening up the interviews for personal reflection, rather than asking for short, multiple-choice responses, should also aid in keeping the respondent's interest (Schutt, 2004). With the respondents' permission, phone calls were recorded so that transcripts could be analyzed after the fact, which increased the interviewer's ability to respond naturally to the conversation and decreased impersonality. In general, the telephone interviews went smoothly. Although some distractions were present, they did not seem to derail any of the interviews and respondents appeared to be relaxed and very forthcoming.

To address human subjects concerns and ensure the protection of respondents, each level of data collection included a letter of informed consent that was prepared according to the guidelines of University of Delaware's Institutional Review Board. In the online surveys, this letter appeared as the first page of the secure website, before any questions were presented. Respondents were presented with the option of confirming that they understand the purposes and potential risks of the study

and wish to continue, or declining to continue. Each additional page presented the option of continuing or declining to continue, in order to confirm that the respondent has the right to discontinue their participation in the study at any time. Respondents who agree to be interviewed by telephone were read a similar letter by the interviewer, and asked to give verbal consent. Telephone interviewees were offered the option of receiving a hard copy of the informed consent letter by surface mail or fax, but all respondents declined this offer.

Data Collection

Defining the boundaries of an online population is a complicated task. The internet and world wide web are in constant flux, with new websites being added daily and older ones falling into disuse. Some websites publicly declare their feminism, while others focus on a single political issue or an individual's personal beliefs—and these may happen to align with feminism. It would be impossible to create a definitive list of every website of every kind that deals with feminism or feminism-related topics in any way, even if the list was restricted to a single moment in time.

Several steps were used to determine appropriate websites for use in this study. In the first step, Alexa traffic rankings were consulted. Although in 2023 Alexa is an Amazon affiliate best known for its virtual assistant properties, it began as a “web information company” that calculated the popularity of websites and made this information available to website owners and to members of the public. This traffic ranking service was retired in 2021. Although some Alexa services must be paid for, the traffic rankings used by this study were free of charge and available to anyone. An Alexa traffic rating was calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and the number of page views over the past three months. Because one website may

contain dozens of individual “pages,” this combined ranking system helps to correct the potential inflation of popularity caused by one individual browsing through several pages during a single visit to a website. Alexa rankings are presented so that the more popular the website the higher the ranking number, with the most popular website being ranked #1.

Although social networking sites such as Facebook and Blogger were consistently ranked in the top ten most popular websites, specifically feminist networking websites were more difficult to find. A simple keyword search of the Alexa rankings revealed that the highest rated website listing related to the keyword “feminism” is Feministing.com, coming in at 36,840 (Alexa.com, 5/11/10). All results of the search for the keyword “feminism” were considered for inclusion in this study. Websites were rejected for use in the study if any of the following were found to be true upon investigation:

- The website did not include a blog or message board component.
- The website included “feminism” as a keyword because it represented a group directly opposed to feminism, such as ladiesagainstfeminism.org.
- The website was written in a language other than English.
- The website was unavailable, shut down, or inactive (defined as not having been updated in at least one year).
- The Alexa traffic ranking was higher than 10,000,000, because at this point the search results became warehouse websites that had mentioned feminism once or twice in passing, rather than websites involved with any sort of social or political cause.

- The website was specifically dedicated to feminism in a country other than the U.S.A.

This initial search produced the following websites to be included in the study (All Alexa traffic rankings are from 5/11/10):

Table 1 Alexa Traffic Rankings of Feminist Blogs

Blog Name	Alexa Traffic Rank
Feminist.com	310,389
Feminist.org (Feminist Majority Foundation)	682,821
Feministing.com	36,840
Bitchmagazine.org	81,935
Now.org	221,925
Finallyfeminism101.wordpress.com	1,471,781
The-f-word.org	433,983
Feministreview.blogspot.com	513,930
Feministblogs.org	477,697
Feministmormonhousewives.org	564,129

In order to be inclusive of women's rights groups that did not explicitly identify as feminist, the next search of Alexa's rankings was done using the keyword "womanist." Unfortunately, this keyword search did not return any websites that included a blog or message board component. Those websites that did result from the search were primarily women's studies departments at colleges and universities, the personal websites of individuals who identify as womanists (but who do not run blogs), and dictionary websites explaining the definition of womanism. None of the results returned fit the criteria for this study.

In addition, websites were chosen for the study by searching those websites listed above for links to related sites. Feminist.com, for example, included a list of “recommended” blogs. These were vetted using the same criteria as that listed above. This additional search yielded the following results:

- <http://www.fem2pt0.com/>
- <http://girlwpen.com/>
- <http://jezebel.com/>
- <http://pandagon.blogspot.com/>
- <http://www.wimnonline.org/WIMNsVoicesBlog/>
- <http://www.racialicious.com/>

Of these results, Racialicious was the only website specifically dedicated to issues of racial equality. In order that those issues might be more fairly represented in this study, Racialicious’s blogroll (a list of links to recommended websites) was mined for additional potential websites fitting the criteria of the study. This strategy, after the vetting process, yielded the following websites:

- <http://www.womanist-musings.com/>
- <http://deeplyproblematic.blogspot.com/>
- <http://angryblackbitch.blogspot.com/>

Additional websites were researched and vetted using the blogrolls of the above three sites, in snowball fashion. In total, 35 websites were chosen and contacted with a request to participate by putting the survey link on their site.

Requests to were sent to:

- <http://www.feministing.com/>
- <http://www.feminist.com/>

- <http://majorityspeaks.wordpress.com/>
- <http://bitchmagazine.org/>
- <http://www.now.org/>
- <http://finallyfeminism101.wordpress.com/>
- <http://the-f-word.org/blog/>
- <http://feministreview.blogspot.com/>
- <http://feministblogs.org/>
- <http://www.feministmormonhousewives.org/>
- <http://www.racialicious.com/>
- <http://www.womanist-musings.com/>
- <http://angryblackbitch.blogspot.com/>
- <http://www.fem2pt0.com/>
- <http://www.salon.com/>
- <http://www.blogger.com/groups/feminism>
- <http://girlwpen.com/>
- <http://jezebel.com/>
- <http://pandagon.net/>
- <http://www.wimnonline.org/index.php>
- <http://www.racialicious.com/>
- <http://actsoffaithblog.com/>
- <http://www.deeplyproblematic.com/>
- <http://www.awid.org/>
- <http://blog.iwhc.org/>

- <http://flipfloppingjoy.com/>
- <http://msmagazine.com/blog/>
- <http://www.questioningtransphobia.com/>
- <http://transgriot.blogspot.com/>
- <http://reconciliate.wordpress.com/>
- <http://disabledfeminists.com/>
- <http://www.pamshouseblend.com/>
- <http://crunkfeministcollective.wordpress.com/>
- <http://coloronline.blogspot.com/>
- <http://www.theurbanpolitico.com/>

The following blogs agreed to participate, and posted the link:

- <http://www.feministing.com/>
- <http://feministreview.blogspot.com/>
- <http://www.fem2pt0.com/>
- <http://actsoffaithblog.com/>
- <http://www.questioningtransphobia.com/>
- <http://disabledfeminists.com/>

These blogs replied but declined to participate:

- <http://bitchmagazine.org/>
- <http://www.now.org/>

The remaining blogs did not respond to the request, nor to the second request sent a few weeks later.

A total of 660 respondents began the survey, and 344 respondents (52%) completed the entire survey. A total of 316 respondents (48%) dropped out of the

survey before completing it, and two of those were later dropped from the data pool because they completed the survey after the response window had closed. The final count of 342 respondents served as the data pool for the remainder of this study. Of those respondents who dropped out, the biggest single loss came when the demographics questions ended and more substantive questions began. It can be reasonably assumed that respondents were daunted by the time investment or simply lost interest, as evidenced by a few comments respondents made in answer fields to various survey questions. The second biggest loss was on the gender question, which I explain below in “Reflexivity and Research”. I believe this was a protest dropout on the part of transgender respondents and their allies. It is my hope that some of the completed responses may be those who appreciated my goodwill outreach and came back to re-start the survey, but there is no way to measure this.

The remaining dropout percentages are small enough that they are not likely to be substantively connected to the questions at hand and may simply be as far as the respondent reached before losing interest or running out of time. It may be important that there was a 7% spike at the question about whether the respondents identify as a feminist- but the fact that the survey was about feminism was clearly indicated from the start and should not have come as a surprise.

In-depth interview respondents were chosen purposively from survey respondents who identified themselves as someone who created, led, or moderated a feminist blog. A total of 26 potential interview respondents were contacted and invited to participate; 14 never responded or declined, 12 interviews took place via telephone but one recorded file was corrupted and could not be retrieved. The remaining eleven interviews were used for analysis in this study.

Table 2 Point at Which Respondents Dropped Out of the Survey

% of 316	Number dropped	% of 660	question they dropped on	new total respondents
5%	17	3%	Are you over 18 years of age?	643
11%	36	5%	(informed consent form)	607
20%	64	9.6%	Which of the following describes your gender?	543
1%	3	<1%	What is your age? (put less than 18, were routed out of survey)	540
47%	147	22%	How often do you use a search engine to do...?	393
7%	23	3%	Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?	370
1%	4	<1%	Do you consider yourself to be a womanist etc?	366
3%	8	1%	Which is important to you, connection or independence?	358
1%	5	<1%	What is your goal when you visit feminist sites online?	353
2%	5	<1%	Have you ever challenged anyone...?	348
1%	3	<1%	Have you ever reported someone to the mods?	345
1%	1	<1%	Do you reveal personal information online?	344
		52%	Completed the entire survey:	344
			Included in analysis:	342

Data Analysis

Analysis of data was conducted using induction and grounded theory.

Induction allows the researcher to take individual observations (responses to the survey) and sort and build them into general statements about a phenomena (Kozinets, 2010). Specifically, selective coding was used to organize long-form survey responses into categories. Responses were read and re-read until themes and sub-themes emerged, then labels were affixed to responses reflecting the perceived codes using a

mixture of handwritten notes on printed copies (memoing), typed notes in document files (abstracting and comparing), and typed codes added to an Excel spreadsheet (coding) (Kozinets, 2010). Respondent identity is protected by the use of an identifying number. Legal names were never requested in the survey, although some identifying information may be present because respondents were offered the option of providing an e-mail address. The data pool generated by the online survey for this project was rather larger than expected, which presented some challenges for analysis. Initial coding included all 342 survey responses to determine grand themes, then key sub-themes were selected for additional coding and analysis as they emerged from close reading of the data. In-depth telephone interviews were analyzed similarly using induction and grounded theory. Hand-coding, memoing, and Excel spreadsheets were used to find and compare themes in these responses as well.

Reflexivity and research

As a feminist scholar, it is important for me to acknowledge the role of my own position and identities in this research. I came to the feminist blogosphere as an adult graduate student with a white, middle-class, straight, and cisgender background and no disabilities. I speak American English as a first language, and was raised by a family of teachers who put a strong emphasis on education and literacy throughout my life (and were able to do so thanks to a host of social privileges). The classroom has always been a comfortable and welcoming space for me, and my initial personal response to the feminist blogosphere was one of joy. Finally! More space for the thinking, learning, and discussions that I longed to have but had previously been bound to the classroom. The feminist blogosphere felt like an exciting opportunity for growth that did not require me to pay tuition, set a morning alarm, or find street

parking on a crowded campus. It could be a challenging space at times, but it never felt unsafe and was often very fun. I felt that I belonged.

As time went on and I continued to participate in the feminist blogosphere, I began to notice that not everyone was experiencing the space in the same way. The idea to conduct this research study came from this realization—I hoped to gain insight, in a systematic way, into whether taking the feminist movement online was a move that did or could correct some of the ways that white and middle-class feminists had historically failed at equity and inclusion. I have worked to continuously reflect on my own role in this movement and my own characteristics and history as I prepared for this project, collected data, and conducted my analysis. I am aware that in approaching this topic as a white, middle-class, straight, cisgender feminist I have had misunderstandings and have made mis-steps.

I am truly grateful to the denizens of the feminist blogosphere who took the time to educate me on some of the ways my methods caused them distress. In particular, I owe a debt of gratitude to those who reached out to me to critique my survey questions about gender. Although I believed I was following best practices and being inclusive, my survey question operationalized gender in a way that was both inaccurate and offensive to many transgender respondents. After some discussion on the blogs where the survey was posted, I added the following note to my survey:

A note about gender: it has been brought to my attention that the placement of "trans person" as part of the third option in the following question about gender may be offensive. Although I can not change the structure of the survey at this time, I want to apologize for any offense. Please answer the question about gender in whatever way is most appropriate to your own identity and

safety. Any questions or comments about this matter can be directed to the principle investigator, Nena Craven, at ncraven@udel.edu.

Since this incident I have learned a great deal about the effects of this incorrect operationalization of gender in surveys and am deeply saddened to know that I participated in one of the very kinds of exclusive practices that I hoped to measure and bring to light. Moving forward in my analysis of the data from this study and in the rest of my career, I have made a particular effort to educate myself on allyship to the transgender community.

The next chapter explores the first set of themes that emerged from the data collected in both the online surveys and the telephone interviews. Who was active (and who was lurking) in the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s and early 2010s? In what ways did they engage in that space? Chapter 3 describes the social characteristics of this group, their typical online activities, and the online activities that were on the decline.

Chapter 4

I AM A FEMINIST AND I LIVE ON THE INTERNET

The feminist blogosphere of the 2000s-2010s was central to the movement itself at that moment in time. Feminists with key roles in the blogosphere, such as Jessica Valenti, went on to publish articles and books about feminism and to become key movers and shakers in the offline branch of the movement. While the demographic characteristics of leadership in the blogosphere were typically public information, it is much more difficult to know about the average user. With this in mind, this survey collected demographic information to discover who was using the feminist internet. How inclusive a space was the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s? This chapter explores how participants in the feminist blogosphere spent their time online and reveals some of the complex answers to this question.

Who uses the (feminist) internet?

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents, 261 (81%) identified as “female or woman.” An additional 27 (8%) identified as “male or man,” while the remaining 39 (11%) identified as trans person, intersexed person, genderqueer person, or other nonbinary gender. As discussed in the methods chapter, these categories were based on the best practices I was aware of at the time and were intended to be inclusive but are not fully discrete and may have obscured some respondents’ full identity. Answers to the optional write-in field associated with the third category included many variations on genderqueer such as genderqueer person, genderqueer trans man, womanly genderqueer, and transgenderqueer femme. Other answers included Butch, womon, neutrois, questioning, androgynous, and a note that the respondent would have preferred an opt-out category.

The sexual orientation of respondents was more diverse than gender. The largest single category was heterosexual or straight, at 152 respondents (44%). The next largest group identified as bisexual, 84 respondents (25%). A smaller group identified as homosexual, gay, or lesbian at 38 (11%), and the remaining 68 respondents (20%) selected other sexual orientation, with an optional write-in field. Write-in responses were grouped according to theme and can be seen in the frequency table. The most common write-in response, at 26, was “queer.”

Table 3 Frequency Table: Sexuality Write-In Responses

Identity category	Frequency	Percent
Queer	26	38.2%
Pansexual	17	25%
Asexual	11	16.2%
Modified bisexual	4	5.9%
Open/Flexible/Not Sure	4	5.9%
Decline to specify	6	8.8%
Total (N)	68	100%

In terms of racial identity, respondents were overwhelmingly White- 286 (84%). All other racial categories comprised less than 10% each of the respondent population. Sixteen respondents (5%) were Black or African-American, while thirty respondents (9%) were Biracial or Other Race. Two respondents each (1% each) identified as Asian Indian, Chinese, or Other Asian while one respondent each (less than 1% each) identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Korean, Vietnamese, or Other Pacific Islander. In addition, only 14 (4%) of respondents identified as

having Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino/a origin while the remaining 329 respondents (96%) did not.

Combined annual household income of respondents was low overall, with the median answer to this question at less than \$30,000 per year (143 respondents, or 42%).

Table 4 Frequency Table: Combined Annual Household Income

	Frequency	Percent
Less than \$30K	143	42%
\$30,000-39,999	38	11%
\$40,000-49,999	38	11%
\$50,000-59,999	29	8%
\$60,000-69,999	22	6%
\$70,000-79,999	14	4%
\$80,000-89,999	12	4%
\$90,000-99,999	11	3%
\$100K or more	35	10%
Total (N)	342	100%

At the same time, the average highest level of education completed was relatively high with the median answer at a completed 4-year college degree (144 respondents, or 42%). An additional 87 respondents (25%) had completed some college at the time survey data was collected.

Table 5 Frequency Table: Highest Level of Education Completed

	Frequency	Percent
Less than High School	5	1%
High School/GED	12	4%
Some College	87	25%
2-year College Degree	7	2%
4-year College Degree	144	42%
Master's Degree	67	20%
Doctoral Degree	12	4%
Professional Degree (JD, MD)	8	2%
Total (N)	342	100%

If a large proportion of respondents were enrolled in college and living on their own for the first time when taking the survey, some socio-economic status privilege may have been obscured by this measure. In other words, these respondents may have been raised in homes with higher household incomes than they reported when completing the survey. It is likely that both their current income levels and their family-of-origin income levels would contribute to their social class, their development as feminists, and their experiences of the world.

Indeed, respondents' occupational categories seem to bear out this idea. The largest single group of respondents—114 (33%)—identified themselves as students. The second largest group identified themselves as not currently employed (52, or 15%) which may include students or those on an academic gap or break. In addition, 41 respondents (12%) identified themselves as part of education, training, and library occupations. In short, it is possible that the grand majority of respondents to this study were associated with academia in one capacity or another.

Table 6 Frequency Table: Occupation

	Frequency	Percent
Student	114	33%
Not currently employed	52	15%
Education, training, and library occupations	41	12%
Office and administrative support occupations	24	7%
Computer and mathematical occupations	24	7%
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations	21	4%
Management, financial, engineering, science, legal, health, food, personal care, sales, stay at home parent		<4% each

Table 7 Frequency Table: Age (U.S. Census 19 Categories)

	Frequency	Percent
Under 18 years	2	1%
19-24 years	133	39%
25-29 years	99	29%
30-34 years	50	15%
34-39 years	22	6%
40-44 years	10	3%
45-49 years	7	2%
50-54 years	10	3%
55-59 years	6	2%
60-64 years	2	1%
65-69 years	1	0%
Total (N)	342	100%

Respondents tended to be young, with the highest number of 133 (39%) between 19 and 24 years old. Respondents under 18 years were not permitted to continue the survey past this point. An additional 99 respondents (29%) were between 25 and 29 years old, with a further 50 (15%) between 30 and 34 years old. It is clear

that the respondent population skewed young and dropped off smoothly, with only 6% at or above 55 years old.

Websites used to recruit respondents for this study were accessible from anywhere, globally, but were primarily based in the United States of America and only in the English language. It is therefore unsurprising that 243 respondents (71%) listed the U.S.A. as their country of residence. An additional 32 respondents (9%) resided in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 23 (7%) from Canada, and 18 (5%) from Australia. The remaining respondents hailed from Argentina, Cambodia, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania, Sweden, Thailand, and Uganda (less than 1% of respondents from each).

The demographic characteristics of the in-depth interview respondents, who held leadership positions in the feminist blogosphere, mirrored those of the survey respondents in most ways. All eleven identified as women in their 20s and 30s. Seven respondents identified as heterosexual/straight while two identified as “queer” and two as bisexual. The majority of respondents (9) identified as White; ethnically two of these were Latina/Hispanic, one Jewish, and one “White but not American.” One respondent was Korean-American, and one Asian Indian. Their household incomes ranged from less than \$30,000/year to greater than \$350,000/year, with a median of \$50,000/year. All respondents had at least a bachelor’s degree, and nearly half (5) had at least one master’s degree. All but one resided in the USA- one respondent was born in the USA but lived in Denmark at the time of the interview, and another lived in the USA but did not identify as American. In occupational category, two respondents were students and two worked in higher education. An additional

four respondents were professional writers, two worked in social services, and one was a financial analyst.

From these data, a picture of the average respondent emerges. Most identified themselves as women (although it is important to keep in mind that, due to the categories laid out in the survey, this measurement may have obscured a proportion of transgender and genderqueer respondents). There were more straight respondents than any other category, but other sexualities such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual were also strongly represented. The grand majority of respondents were White, with biracial as the second largest category. The average household income was low, which may in part be explained by the fact that the largest occupational category was that of student. Most respondents were from the U.S.A., with additional representation from the U.K. and Canada. In terms of age, the average respondent was in their 20s or 30s. Overall, the greatest diversity in this respondent pool was in the area of sexuality. While there was some racial and ethnic diversity present, it certainly not proportional to the overall population of the U.S.A. In the areas of the feminist blogosphere that were willing to distribute this survey, at least, the population clearly skewed White.

How did they use the (feminist) internet?

The internet is a vast system comprised of a wide variety of tools, spaces, and modalities. In the midst of this, how did third wave feminists participate in the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s? To gain a sense of how it was being used by the third-wave feminists of the time period, respondents were asked to self-report on the frequency and importance of a number of online activities. These included search engine use, email and Listserv update systems, websites, blogs, and social media.

Search Engine Use

Search engine use among respondents for explicitly feminist purposes was relatively infrequent, as evidenced by the fact that the modal answer for all of these questions was “less than once a month.” However, the majority of respondents (nearly 90%) did use search engines to seek out news (both feminist and general) at least some of the time. Respondents were somewhat more likely to use search engines to seek out general news than feminist news. More than half of respondents--57.9%--searched for general (not feminism-specific) online-only news sites at least once a month, while an even greater proportion of respondents--60.8%--searched for old-media-affiliate general news online at least once a month. So, it appears that at this point in time existing forms of media such as newspapers, magazines, and television news outlets were respondents’ go-to sources for news even while they searched for news online. For example, this would include the website affiliated with the *New York Times* or with CNN. It would have been rare at that time for a respondent to use an online-only source as their primary source of news, both general and feminist.

Meanwhile, 52.9% of respondents used search engines at least once a month to search for online information related to an online-only feminist organization. By contrast, only 33.2% of respondents searched at least once a month for related to an offline feminist organization. For example, this would mean it was more likely for respondents to use a search engine to find a feminist blog like Feministing.com, an organization that began as an online presence and continued to operate primarily

Table 8 Frequency Use of Internet Search Engines for Tasks

	Never	< 1x Mo.	1x Mo.	2-3 x Mo.	1x Wk.	2-3 x Wk.	Daily	Total (N)
Find websites with information about feminism?	37	100	54	58	25	34	32	340
Find a website associated with an offline feminist club, group, or organization?	81	146	43	34	13	13	10	340
Find a website about feminism that is independent of any offline feminist club, group, or organization?	61	99	65	44	21	25	25	340
Find a website associated with an offline media outlet such as television news, newspapers, or magazines?	48	85	52	54	29	36	36	340
Find a general news site created exclusively for the internet	57	86	47	41	33	39	37	340

online, than to find a local chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), a longstanding and well-respected organization that hosts in-person conferences and

rallies. The stark difference in search frequency between online-only and offline-affiliated feminist websites indicates a strong separation, at least in the minds of respondents, between the two realms. Taking both kinds of feminist organizations together, 59.7% of respondents used a search engine to find websites with information about feminism at least once a month.

Search engine use specifically related to feminism does not seem to have been a repeated, routine part of the respondents' internet use. It is likely that respondents used search engines to find websites (including news sources, blogs, and others) that they liked, then bookmarked those for later use, making it unnecessary to search for them again in the future. Once an individual has found some news sources that they like and trust, then it may be that the only reason to use search engines related to one's online feminism is to search out specific terms or news items, which would fit the pattern seen in this chart ("specific terms" are most closely related to part 1 of this question—Find websites with information about feminism--while "information about feminism" and news items are most closely related to parts 4 and 5). However, respondents were about equally likely to seek out online branches of traditional media as they were to seek out purely online media when their goal was to find general news not necessarily related to feminism.

Email and Listserv Use

Signing up to receive regular updates—whether through email, listserv, RSS feed, or any other means—was not a particularly common activity among respondents. For example, the majority of respondents (67.9%) had never engaged with a listserv (an electronic mailing list) at all.

Table 9 Frequency Use of Internet for E-mail and LISTSERV Tasks

	Never	1-2 x in life	< 1x Mo.	1x Mo.	2-3 x Mo.	1x Wk.	2-3x Wk.	Daily	Total (N)
Sign up for a feminist LISTSERV?	231	57	33	11	4	1	0	3	340
Post a message to a feminist LISTSERV?	267	24	29	7	6	5	2	0	340
Create, edit, or moderate a feminist LISTSERV	313	12	11	0	0	2	1	1	340

Message Boards and Blogs

A message board is a kind of online discussion site that developed in the early days of the internet. Message boards began as an electronic version of the physical, cork bulletin boards displayed in public places where users could post advertisements, details about upcoming events, or requests. At the time of this study, message boards were still in use but had begun to give way to blogs and social media. Most respondents did not interact with any message boards on a regular basis- the modal answer for most questions was “never.” Some did post messages to message boards regularly, but even for this activity the modal answer was “less than once a month.”

Websites

Excluding blogs, website usage as a feminist activity was low to moderate for the majority of respondents. The most common activity reported was using a general knowledge website such as Wikipedia to find information about feminism. The modal response for this activity was “less than once a month” (110 respondents, 32.4%).

Creating and editing websites was the least common activity—260 respondents (76.5%) reported never doing this activity at all.

Table 10 Frequency Use of Internet for E-mail and LISTSERV Tasks

	Never	1-2 x in life	< 1x Mo.	1x Mo.	2-3 x Mo.	1x Wk.	2-3x Wk.	Daily	Total (N)
Visit a MESSAGE BOARD tied to an offline organization with feminist goals.	161	55	60	14	14	14	11	11	340
Visit a MESSAGE BOARD about feminism but not tied to any offline organization.	103	36	57	18	25	26	29	46	340
Post a message to any MESSAGE BOARD.	74	39	78	22	37	23	27	40	340
Serve as a moderator of administrator to a MESSAGE BOARD.	265	35	13	5	3	1	3	15	340
Create or edit a feminist MESSAGE BOARD	296	23	13	1	1	1	1	4	340

Table 11 Frequency Use of Internet for Website Tasks

	Never	1-2 x in life	< 1x Mo.	1x Mo.	2-3 x Mo.	1x Wk.	2-3x Wk.	Daily	Total (N)
Use a general knowledge WEBSITE such as Wikipedia to find information about feminism.	21	59	110	42	61	19	19	9	340
Visit the WEBSITE of a feminist organization to which you already belong	120	16	43	24	25	25	23	64	340
Create or edit a WEBSITE for a feminist organization to which you already belong.	260	30	14	9	6	7	4	10	340
Visit the WEBSITE of a feminist organization that you heard about from an offline source	44	56	87	52	33	25	22	21	340

Blogs

Blog use was high among respondents, which is to be expected given that recruitment for the survey was done through blogs and the target population for this study was members of the feminist blogosphere. The most common activity reported was visiting a blog about feminism but *not* tied to any offline organization—224

respondents (65.9%) did this activity daily. Visiting blogs that *were* tied to offline organizations was far less common—only 56 respondents (16.5%) did this activity daily, and the modal answer was less than once a month. This mirrors the findings around search engine use, which also showed a strong divide between online and offline feminist organizations. Although online branches of offline feminist organizations did exist, the majority of online activity was related instead to online-only organizations.

When asked in an additional survey question to list their favorite places to go on the internet that have some connection with feminism, feminist goals, and feminist values respondents offered some additional insight into their online activities.

Respondents mentioned 193 unique websites, in addition to making references to various unspecified websites with phrases like “various autism blogs” or “religious feminist sites.” The most commonly mentioned websites were:

- Feminists with Disabilities (mentioned 58 times)
- Feministe (34)
- Feministing (24)
- Jezebel (22)
- Shakesville (37)

These are all blogs that existed as purely internet-based sites, with no corresponding offline component. This reinforces the finding that respondents were strongly involved with blogs and that there was a separation between online and offline feminist activity.

Table 12 Frequency Use of Internet for BLOG Tasks

	Never	1-2 x in life	< 1x Mo.	1x Mo.	2-3 x Mo.	1x Wk.	2-3x Wk.	Daily	Total (N)
Visit a BLOG tied to an offline organization with feminist goals.	39	18	75	41	50	16	45	56	340
Visit BLOG about feminism but not tied to any offline organization.	10	5	9	10	17	10	55	224	340
Write for or post a message to a BLOG.	53	29	54	31	42	27	68	36	340
Sign up to receive regular email updates from a BLOG?	173	46	40	27	21	12	2	19	340
Sign up for an RSS feed to receive updates from a feminist BLOG	142	24	46	37	38	12	16	25	340
Serve as a creator, regular contributor, administrator, editor, or moderator of a feminist BLOG	224	24	14	13	12	11	17	25	340

Social Networking Sites

The grand majority of respondents (94%) had created a personal page or profile in a social networking site such as Facebook or MySpace (the two most popular sites at the time the survey was launched). For many respondents (but certainly not an overwhelming majority), feminism was a part of their online presence on these sites. Roughly two thirds of the respondents listed feminism, feminist organizations, feminist events or the like as an interest of theirs on their social media sites. More than two thirds displayed links to feminist websites, articles about feminism, or to feminist events. Only one third of respondents displayed badges, “bumper stickers,” icons, or other images related to feminism and a similar number displayed photographs of themselves participating in feminist activism.

Within the context of social networking, it appears that passive participation was more common than active participation. Listing something as an interest within a social networking site was and remains fairly easy to do. Most social media sites prompt you to do this while you are originally creating your profile and continue to prompt you frequently to update and keep it going. The sites then use this information to tailor group membership suggestions and advertisements. It is unclear why it is less common to list visual markers of feminism than to list links and interests- perhaps this is a more technically complex task, or perhaps it brings more literal and figurative “visibility” to what is sometimes a controversial topic. Because more passive involvement is much more common than active involvement, it is unsurprising that the majority of respondents did not display photographs of feminist activism. It takes quite a few steps to participate in an activity, get the photos taken, and post the photos (there were differing levels of difficulty at that time depending on what kind of

technology you used to take photos in the first place, but smartphones with cameras were still somewhat less ubiquitous).

Table 13 Feminism on Social Networking Sites

Question	Yes	No	Responses	Mean
List feminism, feminist organizations, feminist events, etc. as an interest or as something you like?	210	108	318	1.34
Display links to feminist websites, articles about feminism, or feminist events?	239	79	318	1.25
Display badges, “bumper stickers,” icons, or other images related to feminism, feminist causes, or feminist events?	95	223	318	1.70
Display photographs of yourself participating in any kind of feminist activism?	105	213	318	1.67

Other Online Activities

To capture any activities that the survey had thus far missed, an additional item requested “If there are any online activities or ways that you use the internet that relate to feminism or feminist goals and values that do NOT appear in the questions you have answered so far, please describe them here.” Of the 111 unique responses, half a dozen or so were about things like basic information gathering, like using library websites to access feminist articles, and 10-15 responses were rehashing of themes already covered in the survey such as basic usage of social networking sites and email. The most striking trends, however, were in the ways respondents described the relationship between online and offline feminism.

The most commonly mentioned activities were around fully online feminism, noted in approximately 90% of responses. Some of this was, again, overlapping with the themes already covered: writing in a blog as a form of ongoing informal feminist scholarship, for example. “The feminist blogosphere is where the action is” commented one respondent. Other activities respondents mentioned would happen online, but not necessarily be captured by a review of specifically feminist spaces online. Three respondents mentioned writing original fiction and fan fiction from explicitly feminist points of view. A handful described working to bring feminism to other online spaces—for example, representing feminist viewpoints in the comments section of blog entries about the game of chess. Approximately 10% of respondents described using any online channel available (blog comments, instant messaging services, emails, etc.) to have comments about feminist themes with their friends.

About half of these respondents seemed to be using online spaces in ways that were more corollary to offline, person-to-person feminist work. They would share support and encouragement with each other, organize offline feminist events such as protests or rallies, or to promote feminist events and actions. They would use email or websites with contact information as a route through which to send feminist feedback to newspapers, organizations, or politicians. They also used online routes to create and sign feminist petitions, donate to feminist causes, or purchase goods from feminist businesses. One respondent actively refused to incorporate the online realm into their feminism:

I use email to keep in touch with feminist friends and plan feminist activities...

I try to keep my life, including feminism, as ‘face to face’ as possible. I want

to use the Internet to bring activists together face to face and don't want to fall into the 'slactivism' habit.

No other respondents shared this concern, but it's possible that there are more who share it who simply would not have been likely to complete this survey. There was also a theme of bridging the gaps between online and offline feminism. For example, some respondents were heavily involved with the feminist blogosphere but knew that their friends, family, or colleagues were not—so they worked to curate a selection of blog posts and articles and sent those directly to those people. One respondent notes that they spent time “forwarding feminist articles/blog posts to friends and family who do not usually read blogs.”

Summary

How did third wave feminists participate in the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s? Passive involvement was more common than active, which is not surprising because it involves a much smaller investment of time and energy. Respondents were more likely to have merely visited a website than to have acted as a creator, editor, moderator, or any other form of involvement that is effort and energy-intensive. Also notable is that by far the most common activity respondents noted was visiting any blog (the only one for which the mode was “Daily”). There exists some bias here in the way the respondents were recruited, because I asked blogs to post announcements asking for people to respond, so of course the people who responded were people who frequent blogs.

However, it is still very interesting to note that this population who was using long-form blogs regularly was not, at that time, equally invested in social media. They also were not, for the most part, using message boards, non-blog websites, or listservs

at the same rate as blogs. Message boards and listservs were going out of fashion at that moment in web history, and social media/microblogging was still on the horizon and wasn't necessarily where this group was spending its time. In 2023, the blogosphere is largely defunct, and the bulk of online feminist activity is happening in social media and microblogging sites such as Twitter/X and Instagram. It is possible that this cohort of feminists has moved en masse to social media simply because that is the place to be and reaches the most audience. Perhaps there is a sort of symbiotic relationship between the technology and feminism as a social movement, so that the movement evolves into what works for the technology while the technology evolves based on what social movements (and society in general) ask of it. It will be fascinating to see where the online feminist movement goes next.

In this chapter, I demonstrated internetnetworked feminists' focus on the blogosphere as opposed to message boards, listservs, and other older online spaces. The next chapter will expand on this analysis of feminist activities within the blogosphere. How did participants in the blogosphere interact with and challenge one another? How did they respond to challenges, and how did those challenges create a welcoming or exclusive space? The next chapter examines these themes and how they shaped the online feminist movement of the late 2000s and early 2010s.

Chapter 5

ONLINE FEMINISM AND INCLUSION

The inclusion of diverse identities and experiences is one of the defining characteristics of third wave feminism. Did participants in the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s experience it as an inclusive space for diverse voices? As discussed in previous chapters, users interacted with online feminist spaces in a variety of ways. What did participants in the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s do to engage with the feminist movement? This chapter will examine a form of interaction that is common in many feminist spaces both online and in person—informal challenges over points of contention. What sorts of challenges arose for users, and how were they perceived? Did the challenges lead to clarification and education or to offense and exclusion? Did the users change their behavior and participation in the blogosphere as a result of these challenges and if so, how? In addition, how did this affect respondents' perceptions of how inclusive of a space was the feminist blogosphere of the time?

In this chapter, I will first describe the types of challenges experienced by respondents during their participation in the feminist blogosphere. Next, I will examine the various ways they responded to the challenges—positively, negatively, maintaining involvement level, increasing involvement level, or decreasing involvement level. Finally, I will discuss the respondents' perceptions of fairness with regards to the challenge incidents.

Challenge Incidents

These challenge incidents often included discussions of word choice and tone. When asked “Have you ever been challenged to change your grammar, vocabulary, or some other aspect of how you discuss topics on a feminist or women’s rights website?,” 120 respondents (35%) in this study answered “yes.” The remaining 220 (65%) answered “no” (there were no other options given). Respondents who answered “yes” cited vocabulary, tone, inclusivity, and argument structure as common points of contention leading to these challenge incidents. Most of these respondents seem to agree that the challenge incidents are common but disagree about the role and effectiveness of the interactions. Some respondents welcomed or even sought out these challenges as an educational experience, while others experienced them as shaming, derailing, or gatekeeping.

Word Choice

Word choice appears to be a major source of conflict in online feminist spaces. Asked to describe incidents in which they were challenged, many respondents reported being called out for using terminology that may be considered derogatory terms for people with disabilities, such as “retarded,” “lame,” and “crazy.” “I have stopped using the word ‘lame’ because it is ableist,” said one respondent. “I used the word ‘retarded,’” said another respondent. “If I had stopped to think about it, it would have been obvious to me that the word wasn’t appropriate, but I didn’t think about it.” Terms like these are commonly used as insults in informal speech in the U.S. and can be heard in popular media such as television and music. Although there are educational campaigns—like the Spread the Word: Inclusion campaign—working to

reduce the use of these terms, it is entirely possible that younger people or people who are less involved in academia may not have had access to that information.

Several respondents mentioned challenges to word choice when it came to transgender identity and issues. Some presumably cisgender respondents were asked to use more care in creating gender-inclusive statements:

Once, I used, "her/him/it" in a comment on a feminist blog, to refer to a theoretical third party. For instance, "The reader may often find her-/him-/itself blah blah." A commenter told me that "it" was a degrading and offensive term to refer to trans people.

Notably, only three respondents mentioned being challenged on their usage of gendered personal pronouns. Although debate about personal pronouns has existed for hundreds of years, it has become a cultural flashpoint in the early 2020s in a way that was simply not yet true at the time this survey was distributed (Baron, 2021). Other respondents, who identified themselves as transgender in their responses, were challenged on transgender terminology as well. "I used the term 'passing' with regards to my experience as a trans man, and was challenged on whether I thought the term passing was a useful one or inherently cissexist" said one respondent. "[I was] challenged on my use of certain words (like 'cis' for example)," reported another.

Some challenges around word choice were more specific to the situation of an online feminist space. While it is generally desirable to avoid derogatory terms in all areas of life, some respondents experienced challenges to change their word choices just in the feminist blogosphere, or even just within one specific feminist blog. "The Fatshionista community at Livejournal is very sensitive about word choice--fat isn't

considered to be a bad word but body hate, body critique are harsh,” reported one respondent. Some respondents frequented blogs and other spaces dedicated to discussions of feminism within the context of Christianity or other religions. For example, a respondent stated that “I have slipped up by using ‘oh god’ in the comments space of a website that didn’t want that kind of framing.” Other respondents were asked to avoid academic jargon or avoid using the term “girls” to refer to adult women.

Word choice challenges could be uncomfortable but were typically clear and characterized by a strong consensus within the feminist blogosphere. All mentions of the word “lame,” for example, mentioned it as a negative and ableist word that should be avoided. Some respondents reported being confused or taken aback at first, but none claimed to disagree with the challenge in the end. “[L]earning the power of language was something [I] had to absorb when first entering the internet feminist communities and [I] now frequent,” one respondent commented, “... and to learn to be completely inclusive in my discussions while also fighting the hegemonic power of words was an important shift for me.”

Tone

More broadly than word choice alone, some challenge incidents centered on users’ tone in a discussion. “Oh lord” one respondent wrote, “I don’t remember exactly, but there are arguments about ‘tone’ all the time on feminist blogs, as though you can discern such a thing from written communication and as though tone isn’t subjective.” Respondents were challenged on a variety of tones:

“[I]’ve been taken to task for bringing up too delicate an issue on a kind of nicey-nicey website.”

“I have been told not to use self-deprecating humor which involves mentioning my gender.”

“I was told I was too angry by a moderator on a message board.”

“I had a comment edited to remove criticism of another commenter. I guess the moderator for that particular thread doesn't like sarcasm.”

Any of these tone-related challenges has the potential to be completely acceptable in other areas of life; indeed, even in other corners of the feminist blogosphere of the time period. Feminist theory and practice have always included issues such as sexual assault and reproductive rights that may be seen as “too delicate” for public discourse. It is difficult to imagine the riot grrrl feminism of the 1990s without anger and sarcasm. Indeed, some respondents reported almost the direct opposite of the above—being challenged to *stop* challenging others over their tone. “I have been told not to use ‘tone arguments’ when suggesting that we keep the conversation on a positive, constructive track,” reported one respondent. “I have ... learned a lot from reading dissections of common (and fallacious) counter-arguments, such as tone arguments,” mentioned another.

Some tone-related challenges seem to have been experienced by respondents as thinly veiled personal attacks rather than genuine attempts to navigate difficult conversations.

On a particular feminist website (radical feminist), I used a phrase “to be honest” to say something, and one of the other commenters suggested that everyone who uses “to be honest” was preparing to tell a lie simply to discredit me and focus entirely on how I phrased what I said instead of responding to what I said.

Some respondents reported being challenged to frame posts and responses exclusively in the first person, while others were challenged to avoid first person language. “There were many rants on IBTP [I Blame the Patriarchy] about starting posts with ‘I’, and a lot of the more educated women started discussing all their pet peeves with posting,” a respondent noted. By describing “rants” about “pet peeves,” this respondent displays some frustration and negativity around their experiences with tone-related challenges. While word choice challenges tended to be straightforward, tone challenges were often contradictory or very space-specific and left respondents without a clear understanding of how to proceed.

Privilege Checking

The most substantial challenge incidents went beyond tone and word choice, and centered around privilege and position.

There was an incident when I was much much younger when I answered a question as a white young feminist, and my answer indicated that I somehow thought that clearly everyone saw the world as I would - as a young, white woman, from my socioeconomic setting, circumstance, etc. Someone called me on it - perhaps more strongly than they should have but they did have a point. Their words stung but I still remember it to this day, so I clearly learned something.

As this respondent illustrates, characteristics and experiences of users on these blogs sometimes led to misunderstandings or overgeneralizations. This typically manifested as a person with privilege in some area—race, social class, age—missing some aspect of the experiences of people from marginalized groups. “An overseas poster took issue with the use of the term ‘American’ to refer to citizens of the United States,”

noted one respondent. “I posted a personal request in the comments of a blog, asking that another commenter reconsider a metaphor that I found classist,” another explained. “I was challenged by women of color on displays of white privilege, and by trans women of color on my white and cis privilege,” mentioned a third respondent.

Conflict over the role of transgender people in the feminist movement was evident in approximately 10-15% of privilege checking challenge incidents. “In comments on my own blog, a commenter once challenged me to pay more attention to trans issues,” a respondent stated. On the other hand, some respondents expressed views that align with trans-exclusionary radical feminism (sometimes euphemistically known as “gender critical” feminism):

One set of dustups involve[d] my unwillingness to include transwomen [sic] in a radical feminist women-only space. I just don't think transwomen [sic] are the same thing as born women, and this offends a lot of people. I no longer say it out loud, except, apparently, in anonymous surveys. I suppose the most recent incident happened because I also think men in drag are offensively mocking the practice of femininity, which I find incredibly oppressive, and got in a lot of trouble for saying drag was a lot like blackface.

This respondent’s thoughts about trans women fit into a tradition of exclusion that spans from the Michigan Womyn’s Folk Festival through recent comments made by “Harry Potter” author J.K. Rowling. Other respondents described being on the receiving end of this exclusion: “[I was] treated as less-than-knowledgeable on or invested in feminist issues as a trans person.” One presumably cisgender respondent reported being challenged by a trans woman to discuss this issue with more care:

I made comments about finding some radical feminists' virulent transphobia shocking and surprising and was reminded by a trans woman that my shock and surprise is a form of privilege since I haven't had radical feminists' hatred and violence directed at me.

Clearly these spaces in the feminist blogosphere were not universally experienced as inclusive by transgender users, and their exclusion was in some cases deliberate and calculated.

Witnessing Challenges

While 75-80% of respondents wrote about challenge incidents in which they had taken part personally, others described a different form of participation in the blogosphere: lurking. While the term “lurking” can sound negative, it is a common form of internet participation in which the user reads and observes an online community without contributing posts or comments of their own (Edelmann, 2013). Several respondents described witnessing challenge incidents while lurking, and then applying what they learned to their own behavior in other spaces:

I have never been challenged directly- since I tend to lurk far more than I comment, most, if not all of my decisions to alter my vocabulary or rhetoric have been prompted by observing incidents and discussions involving other people.

I've never written something and then had someone challenge me directly--I don't usually comment or write things online. However, from reading feminist material online, I've felt challenged to change how I discuss certain things

offline--as one example, after reading about it online, I felt emboldened to deliberately stop using "crazy" or "insane" as pejoratives.

I don't usually comment on websites, but I have changed my RL [real life] vocabulary to remove ableist and sexist words, in response to reading these incidents online.

These respondents seemed to experience lurking in a constructive and educational way by gaining knowledge without risking any of the discomfort of challenges. As the next section will show, others lurked for less positive reasons.

Responding to Challenges

Being challenged to change your behavior can be an uncomfortable experience, but it may also be a rewarding one. Many respondents appear to view the challenges they received over word choice, tone, privilege checking, or any other topic as part of a learning process.

Being challenged is just part and parcel of feminist discourse...If you open your mouth and speak from the heart, you're going to be challenged; and that's good, because otherwise we'd just be patting each other on the backs all day and no work would get done.

To be honest, my primary reason for participating in discussion groups is to learn and grow; much of the terminology I use, including nearly all of my

transgender-related terminology, first came to me because of my participation in online groups.

For these respondents, being challenged on their word choice is a positive outcome of participation. It fulfills their expectations for the online space—to learn and grow—and it validates their decision to participate.

When these respondents write about their challenge incidents they appear to agree with the reasoning behind the challenge, to accept the judgment of their challengers, and to frame their own actions as mistakes from which they have learned something valuable. One respondent, for example, indicates that they were ignorant of the offensive nature of their vocabulary and have changed their views and behavior to accommodate new information gained during a challenge incident: “I’ve occasionally used language that I didn’t realize was offensive—ableist or transphobic, for example, and been called on it.” For respondents like this one, being “called on it” may be unpleasant in the short term but is ultimately a worthwhile experience. As another respondent put it, “I got defensive and had hurt feelings for a while, but eventually I was able to learn from the experience and change my language and ideas.”

Incidents like these seem to have been important, formative experiences for some respondents because they described them almost like a character arc in a story:

At first I was defensive, and apologized in the non-apology way: “Sorry if you were offended...” etc. And then after a moment I realized I was no better than those people who engage in racism and say, well sorry you were offended. So

I apologized again, that time taking responsibility for my ableism, not putting it on those I upset.

This was a time in my life when I was just beginning to realize not just academically but also to **know** that not everyone speaks from where I speak; stands from where I stand. The oft-cited "sociological imagination" is hard-won. I took a few hours, and crafted a genuine response, which was in the end well-received. I certainly was not going to get in a flame war, and when I said I meant no harm and had much to learn, I did mean it. I said something about needing to be chided when I made such errors as these, and that I did genuinely thank someone for pointing out such insensitivity in my statements.

Well, it was quite painful - surprisingly so. I sat with it for a day or two, then wrote a couple of short responses to particular points that were made. I tried hard to not be defensive, and to simply not engage with some of the more elaborate interpretations of what I had said. I talked to online and offline friends and allies, to get some perspective. I had a lot of other feelings - anger, shame, hurt, resentment. But I just sort of rode it out.

All of these responses have a beginning, a middle, and an end. They note resistance and unpleasant emotions to start with ("at first I was defensive"), a period of contemplation ("I sat with it for a day or two"), and finally a change in perspective ("I apologized again, that time taking responsibility"). For these respondents, challenge incidents were a rough journey that ended in a positive way.

Other respondents perceived these challenge incidents to be far more negative. Some seemed to feel that the stringent requirements for vocabulary and tone made it difficult or impossible to participate in online feminist spaces at all:

I find it challenging to discuss anything on websites because of the exact tone I have to present in order to not offend anyone with what is already sensitive subject matter. I had to learn this the hard way, with people responding to my comments with things like, ‘are you saying slut shaming is good?’ when I’m not saying that at all.

Some people will pick on grammar or spelling in an argument as a way of discrediting their opponent and derailing the argument. I can’t recall specific details, but I recall that it angered me since the valid content of my arguments was being ignored.

For these respondents, challenge incidents were not mild rebukes with an educational aim. They were instead barriers to participation and methods of gate-keeping. Indeed, many respondents noted that experiencing or even witnessing challenge incidents stopped them from future participation in one or more online feminist spaces. When asked how they responded to a challenge incident, one respondent said “I kept a lower profile...Arguing on the internet rarely makes things better”. Another stated “I just deleted my comment after trying to better explain my position. I was tired of fighting.” A third respondent indicated that after the challenge incident “I’m wary of discussing certain identity issues, even if I consider myself to be

an ally to marginalized people, because I fear the very public ramifications of even one incorrect word, phrase, or... well, anything.”

Often, the respondents cited social class and/or educational attainment as major factors in this type of gate-keeping. “When I’ve used informal grammar and vocabulary, other comments will say that I’m uneducated and ignorant...” one respondent noted. Another reported “I have been mocked for typographical errors and told to ‘come back when I have learned better.’” Users of the blogosphere do not typically have access to the educational credentials of other users, so it seems that grammar and spelling were used as a rough proxy. Then, at least in some cases, that information was used to create divisions within the online community rather than to foster diversity:

It added to the feeling that it wasn’t a welcoming space to people who didn’t have the privilege of education, and education in women’s studies. Like ‘You have to meet certain criteria on grammar, not what you believe, to be a part of this group.’

Levels of involvement

When asked how they responded to a challenge incident in the feminist blogosphere, many respondents reported on whether their level of engagement was affected. Some reduced their involvement by leaving the specific conversation in which they received the challenge or by leaving the blog entirely. “[I] left the conversation, there was no point in fighting it wouldn’t have been listened to anyway,” stated one respondent. Some were banned from future participation by moderators, while others left voluntarily. Some did not leave but became less active, switching to lurking or commenting less often as a self-protective measure in order to avoid the

discomfort of being corrected. A few respondents mentioned taking precautions to avoid this kind of discomfort before even beginning to interact on a blog: “I often 'lurk' heavily before I get involved with any community, so no real incident has occurred,” one respondent reported. Another stated “I do not generally say anything to avoid [challenge incidents].” If some are unwilling to participate at all in order to avoid them, challenge incidents must at least have the potential to be very unpleasant.

Others, though, maintained their level of involvement by merely acknowledging the correction and moving on, ignoring the correction, or “doing nothing.” One respondent said, “Lots of the time I just go with it, especially if it's a small thing like language.” Another said “[I] explained where I was at [sic] and kept on truckin'.” “I'll roll with it,” stated a third, “...it's [the moderator's] area and hers to moderate and I can see why she did it.” These respondents did not seem to see any personal threat in the challenge incident, nor did they see a significant opportunity for growth.

I know that whatever statements I make are grounded in sympathy and encouragement toward women, minorities, and marginalized individuals, and it is simply a matter of restating something I may have said and being more careful and more specific about the choice of words. I do not take offense when someone corrects me about this sort of thing.

These respondents seem confident in their knowledge and in their right to exist in the feminist blogosphere. They do not view the challenge incidents they described as a form of rejection, an attempt at gatekeeping, or anything else particularly

negative. Challenge incidents are a part of participation, and not particularly noteworthy.

Finally, some respondents actually increased their level of involvement in the feminist blogosphere in the wake of challenge incidents. They often returned to the conversation multiple times to explain themselves and/or clarify their point, sometimes even thanking their correctors:

I wrote an apology email to the administrator in question and, once I'd figured out how, edited my comment to add a footnote explaining that I was sorry for using careless language. I did not change the language in question, because the discussion thread had since been closed so I thought it best to leave what I'd said so the thread made sense and remained educational for the future.

It seems that those respondents who perceived challenge incidents to be a positive outcome of participation in the feminist blogosphere were those who tended to increase their involvement in the blogs after a challenge. They were getting something they expected and hoped for out of participation, it was educational rather than upsetting, and so increased participation was only logical.

Emotions

The last theme that became evident in the survey responses about challenge incidents was that of emotions. Not all respondents mentioned emotions, which may mean they did not associate strong emotions with challenge incidents or that they did not wish to disclose them. Many did report emotions, however, and they ran the gamut from positive to negative and everything in between. Some respondents showed evidence of shame or embarrassment, saying things like “I should have known better,” and “[I] probably acquiesced with embarrassment.” Others showed anger: “I

felt frustrated. Women are too often told they are too angry,” stated one respondent. Similarly, another noted:

I was mad. I didn't really get a high school education (truancy, dropped out and got a GED at 17) and explained that to them. I expressed fear about saying anything when how proper a sentence is becomes more important than the intended meaning. I made it clear that I had something to say and was going to say it even if other people thought it could be better written.

Some mentioned some self-judgments about how they responded (“poorly,” or “unprintably.”) Some mentioned some contentedness or low-level happiness at the chance to learn and grow, often mentioning that this is the reason they wanted to engage with the space in the first place. “I was happy to have the criticism and to change my behavior as a result,” one respondent stated.

Fair or unfair?

Challenge incidents took many forms, provoked many different responses, and inspired a variety of emotions. Considering all that range, it is interesting to note that 60% of those who answered this set of questions (54 out of 90) believed they were treated fairly. “I believe I was treated fairly- people made an effort to understand my point of view, and agreed with me on some points, and the discussion was courteous,” one respondent claimed. “Yes,” said another, “I have usually been provided with a link or an explanation that made it clear how I screwed up, or sometimes I have realized myself after posting.” A third responded “Yes because to me the idea of feminism is to include minority and oppressed groups and language is a HUGE part of that.” These respondents, and many others who simply replied “Yes,” felt that their treatment during challenge incidents was fair. It led to growth, it was in line with their

idea of what feminism meant, and the discussion occurred at a level of politeness with which they were comfortable.

Others were less clear in their evaluations of fairness. Twenty-three percent of the respondents (21 out of 90) gave an answer that was not a clear yes or no. Several gave quick replies of “sometimes,” “maybe,” or “it depends.” Others described detailed incidents that they struggled to categorize as fully “fair” or “unfair”:

Mostly. The people who called me out treated me fairly. Every now and again, somebody new appears on that thread and calls me out again, either because they haven't bothered to continue reading, or because it's quick and easy Feminist Points to win, and it's easy to get haughty and overly-aggressive when you already know you're on the winning side. I don't know if I'd say it's "unfair," but I would call it obnoxious and self-righteous.

Responses like these can be difficult to parse, with no way to access information from anyone else involved in the conflict. This respondent's interpretation is that they were fairly challenged, responded to the challenge, and then were less fairly challenged again by users who failed to fully grasp that the situation had already been resolved. It is also possible, however, that the secondary challengers would disagree and argue that the situation had not been resolved. Another respondent makes a similar claim that initial challenges are appropriate but characterizes any subsequent challenges as “lynch mob mentality”:

Tough call. I may have been out of line and was certainly incorrect in language I've used, but there also tends to be a lynch mob mentality by certain marginalized groups of people online who go after anyone who has offended

them in large numbers and create a lot of drama rather than having an effective dialogue.

This respondent's perception that "marginalized groups" tend to "create drama" leads them to characterize some of the challenge incidents they experienced as unfair. As with the previous respondent, it is entirely possible that members of those marginalized groups would describe their actions as necessary and justified.

Finally, some respondents firmly believed that they were not treated fairly at all. Sixteen percent of respondents (15 out of 90) clearly answered in the negative when asked about the fairness of the challenge incidents they had described. "No," one respondent stated, "I was banned from the entire website and yet the [discussion] thread continued on, with people bashing me and my comments, and I was unable to defend or explain myself." Another respondent mused "Perhaps my point wasn't lost on everyone reading, but it was missed by the active commenters speaking against my "tone" rather than what I was saying." A third respondent said:

No. I think some women's anger was acceptable while others did not have the same rights. I ended up leaving the board and stopped participating in the discussions on the associated blog. I even read posts there far less frequently.

Although these respondents describe their experiences differently, all three describe examples of gatekeeping. One was very literally removed from the website and unable to participate at all. Another was shut down due to a disagreement over tone, while the third felt marginalized and voluntarily withdrew participation over time. Perhaps these gatekeeping results of challenge incidents were viewed as appropriate or even applauded by other users, but the respondents experienced them as unjust.

Summary

Challenge incidents are an important form of interaction that happened in the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s. For this study's respondents, those challenges were most commonly about word choice, tone, and privilege checking. Some people did not participate directly in challenges but observed others experiencing challenge incidents and used what they learned to seek education and to change their behavior. When faced with a challenge incident, respondents reacted in a variety of different ways. Some reactions were largely positive, when respondents perceived the challenge to be an opportunity for education or self-improvement. Other reactions followed an arc from negative to positive as respondents experienced sometimes painful personal growth.

Faced with challenges, some respondents increased their involvement in the blogosphere and continued to engage with the community. Others, whose experiences were less positive, maintained or decreased their involvement levels. Decreased involvement tended to correlate with more negative experiences. Challenge incidents also provoked a large variety of emotions in respondents including contentment, annoyance, shame, and anger. Regardless of the emotions involved, the majority of respondents believed that they had been treated fairly during the challenge incidents. The second-largest proportion of respondents had mixed feelings about the fairness of their experiences, and the smallest group believed they were treated in a clearly unfair way.

This correlation between emotions and involvement levels demonstrates one of the ways that challenge incidents affect inclusion and exclusion in the feminist blogosphere. The next chapter will examine another facet of inclusion and exclusion by analyzing participants' definitions of feminism. Further, analysis of respondents'

choices around whether or not to identify as feminists will illuminate why some respondents felt more comfortable in the online feminist movement than did others.

Chapter 6

DEFINING FEMINISM AND IDENTIFYING AS A FEMINIST ONLINE

How inclusive a space was the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s/early 2010s? I have already examined some of the ways that feminists participated in the blogosphere, and the ways this could be inclusive and welcoming or exclusive and replicating offline patterns of inequality. How did participants in the feminist blogosphere conceptualize feminism—both as an identity and as a social movement? Aronson (2008) noted that in the late 1990s, young women fell along a continuum of beliefs and identities around feminism, identifying with some principles while rejecting others and feeling a need to qualify their identity with statements like “I’m a feminist, but...” In the later stage of third wave feminism that existed in the blogosphere, how did users identify? Were they feminists, and if so, what did that mean to them?

In this chapter, I will examine respondents’ responses to questions about their definitions of feminism and their own feminist identity. I will explore positive, negative, and mixed reactions to the term as respondents described it. I will describe the beliefs, values and ideals that respondents use when talking about feminism, as well as their ideas about the role of feminist work or activism and connections to other waves or generations of feminism. Finally, I will discuss respondents’ definitions of feminism and how they construct these definitions using a variety of conceptualizations of gender.

A total of 340 respondents answered the question “do you currently consider yourself to be a feminist?” 281 (83%) said yes, 15 (4%) said no, and 44 (13%) said “not sure.” The recruitment for this survey was done through feminist blogs, making

it unsurprising that this is higher than the national average of 61% of U.S. women. Even in the explicitly feminist environment of the blogosphere, however, 13% of respondents were “not sure” if they currently considered themselves feminists. This lack of certainty was reflected in their subsequent responses explaining why respondents did or did not identify as feminists.

Positive responses to feminism

A total of 305 respondents gave unique answers to the question “why or why not?” as a follow-up to “do you identify as a feminist.” The grand majority of respondents, 285 (93.4%), had at least some positive things to say about feminism and why they identified as such. Of these, 242 (79.3%) had *exclusively* positive things to say about feminism. They said things like:

- Feminism is a way of life for me. (R65, White bisexual woman early 30s)
- Because it's necessary. (R84, White bisexual woman late 20s)
- 1. Because I espouse the ideals of radical feminism. 2. Because I am female and alive and not stupid. (R87, White lesbian woman late 40s)
- Feminism is a freedom song for everyone. (R112, Biracial queer woman early 20s)

While some respondents went into great detail about their reasonings, others like those quoted above were very matter-of-fact about their feminist identity. Claiming to be a feminist seemed to be self-evident, and the respondents seemed to anticipate that any reader would agree with them without further explanation.

Feminist Ideals

By far and away the greatest majority of respondents—249 or 81%—talked about calling themselves a feminist because it fit in with their personal beliefs and ideals. These ideals were about equality, justice, morality, and even religious beliefs. “I believe that men and women should be treated equally in education, work, and life opportunities” stated one respondent (R3 White straight woman early 30s). Another explained “I am a firm supporter of social justice and human rights, and particularly such rights as they are systemically denied to people who are not cisgender men (usually, women)” (R56 White straight woman late 20s). “As a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker),” said a third, “I equate Feminism with the Quaker Testimony of Equality” (R114 White bisexual person unspecified gender late 20s). For these respondents, belief was typically a sufficient reason for feminist self-identity. They appeared to have considered their own belief systems, considered the ideals and goals of feminism, and decided that the two were a matched set. Having come to that conclusion, they therefore identified as feminists. For this group, a feminist is a person who believes in a set of ideals.

Feminist Work

A subset of respondents—51 or 15%—seemed to feel that belief and ideals were necessary but insufficient reasons to identify as a feminist. These respondents included something about feminism helping them to fight inequality and oppression in their explanations of whether or not they identified with the term. Words like “fight,” “battle,” “struggle,” came up repeatedly in these responses, and both mentions of fighting *against* oppression and fighting *for* liberation and equality were present. For example, when asked why they identify as a feminist, one respondent said, “Because I

am actively working towards female liberation” (R106, White bisexual woman late 20s). In contrast to the identification with ideals discussed above, this form of feminist identification is very active and requires that one work toward specific goals, rather than just passively believe in a set of ideals. “I am a feminist because it conveys a lifestyle of struggle against oppression” another respondent said (R112, Biracial queer woman early 20s). “I strive for everyone to be treated equally, regardless of sex, gender, race, dis/ability etc” stated a third. “I have to openly fight for this if I want it to ever be achieved, and I do so under the banner of feminism” (R77 White bisexual woman late 20s). For this group, a feminist is a person who works toward feminist goals.

A few respondents (12) mentioned specifically that feminism gives them tools that help them navigate their world and do feminist work. They said that feminism gave them language to talk about their experiences, space to confront oppression, the ability to see inequality, and the ability to address and correct inequality. “Feminism gives me the tools (language, philosophy, safe space) I need to confront interpersonal and institutional oppression” said one respondent (R7 Straight white woman late 20s). Another respondent explained “I believe feminism to be a powerful tool for the analysis of the inequities in our society, as well as an equally powerful method for changing these inequities” (R73 Straight white woman early 20s). A third respondent noted that “feminism gives me critical tools and strategies to deconstruct and denaturalize this status quo, and gives me a community with (more or less) shared goals” (R289 White queer woman early 30s). For these respondents, not only is a feminist a person who works toward feminist goals, but they need feminism as a tool to achieve those goals.

Feminist Connections

A notable minority of 18 respondents mentioned that feminist identity as a way to connect with others, echoing the idea of feminism as a series of generations with possible mother-daughter type relationships between them. These respondents mentioned being members of activist organizations along with other feminists and mentioned “working together” as an important aspect of their feminism. They talked about being proud of and feeling connected to other past feminists (some even named names), and about previous generations of their families being feminist and taking part in feminist work: “I’ve been a NOW member since 1974, I support feminist activities of various sorts” (R10, straight white man late 60s). Another respondent noted:

I believe in equality for people of all genders, and that activism to achieve this is still necessary. I also feel that calling myself a feminist is a way for me to recognise and be connected to the first and second wave feminists who have come before me. (R59, White bisexual woman early 20s)

Some respondents within this group admitted to some ambiguity of feeling around their connections to previous feminist generations.

I consider myself a feminist because there isn't yet a better word for what I believe. I don't like many aspects of the (mainstream and radical) feminist movement, such as proscriptiveness, sex-negativity, paternalism, misandry, transphobia and demanding “examination” of oneself... I am grateful for what feminists have achieved in the past, and I acknowledge that my life is enriched by those achievements. However, I align myself more with feminists such as Carol Queen, Madison Young and Annie Sprinkle than with earlier or more conservative feminists like Germaine Greer, Audre Lorde or Mary Daly. (R64, White pansexual woman early 20s)

For this respondent, the connection across generations of feminists is a complicated issue. She acknowledges and honors the contributions of earlier waves but not without critique. Another respondent held very similar views:

Difficult question! My mom was fairly active in the 2nd wave (ERA marches, etc.), so I think I've sort of always considered myself to be a feminist, a self-definition I've come to increasingly question in graduate school. Certainly I advocate feminism and feminist movement. Yet mainstream feminism, in its too-frequent ignorance of the co-constitutive natures of identities, power and oppressions, is really troubling to me a lot of the time. (R72, Straight white woman late 20s)

Finally, one respondent approached the issue from another direction. This respondent cited a *lack* of connection to other feminists as the reason they *do not* identify as a feminist:

[I] agree with most of the feminist goals, but some points are not clear for me and [I] don['t know personally any feminists or anybody with whom [I] could talk or ask for explanation about feminist issues. (R110, Straight white woman early 20s)

So for some respondents, the question of whether or not to identify as a feminist was based on connections and relationships with other feminists. Some sought to ally themselves with family members like mothers, others with specific feminist activists or writers. Others honored the work of their predecessors while maintaining a clear separation in the kind of feminist identity they wished to embody. And at least one distanced herself from a feminist identity because of a lack of connection to other feminists, who may have missed an opportunity to call her in.

Negative and Mixed Responses to Feminism

By contrast with the strong positive responses above, only a few respondents (20 of 305, or 6.5%) had overwhelmingly negative or critical things to say about feminism. “I feel excluded from feminism,” noted one respondent. “Some of what is advocated is contrary to my group (R319, Straight Black woman early 30s).” Another respondent stated that “many people and organizations identified as ‘feminist’ are transphobic (R189, White lesbian woman late 20s).” A third explained “I am transsexual and feminism has historically been hostile to trans people, not to mention people of color and people with disabilities” (R176 White person late 40s who described their gender as “intergendered, leaning female” and their sexuality as “confusing-to-others”). The themes among this group of respondents were clear: feminism did not match their own ideals and beliefs, feminism did not include them due to some aspect of their identity, or both.

The 43 respondents (14.1%) who characterized feminism in a mixture of positive and negative ways typically wrote longer explanations with rich details, as if anticipating resistance or a lack of understanding from the reader or researcher.

I believe in gender equity even though I'm not as obsessed with the term "feminist" as many women in my circles online seem to be. I don't know that we have a better word to use, but in choosing to self-identify as "feminist," I think people should be more aware of the oppressive nature of the movement and term, the ways it has further marginalized poor women, women of color, immigrant women, and trans women, among others. (R2, White straight woman late 20s)

Many respondents in this group expressed similar ideas about embracing some of the ideals of feminism, like gender equity, while having serious concerns about the

practice of feminism. “The term carries heavy weight (history of transphobia, for one) - but the general principles, absolutely” (R205 White gay trans person early 20s). Respondents critiqued feminism for historically favoring the voices of women with privilege in areas such as race, social class, and sexuality. “I support equal rights and treatment for all women,” said one respondent, “but I’m not comfortable with mainstream feminism’s whiteness-centric attitudes and goals, and it would be appropriate to call myself a womanist” (R35 White asexual woman late 20s). Concerns about ableism and transphobia were also mentioned frequently: “I’m a feminist because while I do not agree with everything I see in the movement (such as racism and ableism), I believe firmly in the basics” (R91 White lesbian woman early 20s).

Intersectional Identities

Considering the fully negative and ambivalent responses, the theme that came up most often (64 times) was something to do with feminism failing to account for multilayered, intersectional identities and experiences. Respondents called out the feminist movement for alienating poor and working-class women, women of color, immigrant women, trans women, and disabled women. Some respondents did not name specific marginalized groups but made vague mentions of feminism having “baggage” or “negative connotations” or a “messed up past.” One respondent explained it this way: “All people obviously deserve equal opportunities regardless of gender, but feminism has a remarkably poor track record with respect to things like disability and race. Many feminists are also enormously and horrifyingly transphobic” (R24 White woman pan/poly early 20s). Another respondent expressed similar concerns:

I am strongly sympathetic to feminist and anti-oppressive goals, but am troubled by feminism's reluctance to examine issues of racism, classism, ableism, &c within the movement. I've seen a lot of people I know hurt by mainstream feminist voices, and I have difficulty reconciling that. (R26 Biracial métis man queer/attracted to men early 20s)

In spite of these concerns, this set of respondents were not ready to fully give up on feminism as an idea or as a self-identification label.

I consider myself a feminist because I care about equality for all people, with a focus on gender and sexuality marginalization, particularly of female-bodied/identified (at any time) people. This means wanting everyone to have as much opportunity as possible to do what they want in life, with as few cultural, social, religious, etc., barriers as possible. I use the word feminist, despite the messed up past (and present) and negative connotations, because I think it gives people a basic idea of what I think (equality btwn men and women) and, to be honest, because some people have that negative knee-jerk reaction. (R66 White queer woman early 20s)

For this respondent, choosing to use the word “feminist” as a part of their self-identity functioned as a shorthand to communicate important ideals about equality to others. This was true in spite of the possible negative connotations related to race, trans identity, and others.

Who is allowed to be a feminist?

Five respondents made mentions of feeling like they are not allowed to identify as feminist for one reason or another. This was a small number but is an interesting phenomenon—it was not that they personally rejected the label of

“feminist,” but that they were doing a sort of pre-emptive gatekeeping to exclude themselves. One was concerned that the label of “feminist” was incompatible with their conservative political views: “[the label of feminism] may be limiting in terms of how people view me as I am somewhat conservative and Feminism is associated with more liberal radical views” (R5, Biracial bisexual woman early 40s).

Another rejected the label because they do not invest much time and energy into feminist activism, showing a belief that activism and time investment is the thing you have to do to count as a feminist.

In that I support feminist values, I suppose it wouldn't be an inaccurate description, but I don't feel comfortable identifying as "a feminist" rather than "someone who believes in feminism" because it honestly isn't something I devote much time to. I have a limited amount of mental/physical resources, and fighting ableism has a higher priority on my metaphorical "spoons" than sexism. Additionally, some circles within the feminist movement are less than welcoming to trans/genderqueer people, and many are somewhat alienating for me as a disabled person. (R40, white bisexual woman early 30s)

Mirroring the respondents who stated that they identify as feminists because they do feminist work, this respondent stated that she *does not* identify as a feminist because she *does not* do feminist work. She does go on to state other concerns: the history of exclusion within the feminist movement, and a stronger commitment of her time and energy to other kinds of activist work.

Another two respondents disqualified themselves from feminism by virtue of being a man, which is not a universally accepted truth. Many feminists actively

encourage men to identify as feminist although others would agree with their take on the subject:

I consider myself to be supportive of the general equality-based aims of feminism. I don't feel it is appropriate for me as a man to define myself as a feminist (though I have no problem with other people considering any particular action or opinion of mine feminist) (R61, straight white man early 30s)

I would not be so arrogant as to claim the label for myself, but if someone else were to call me a feminist I would take it as a compliment (even if they meant it as an insult). (R71, Straight white man late 20s)

For these two respondents, the title of feminist could not be self-applied but would be welcome if applied by others who they perceived to be more qualified (i.e. women). This aspect of feminist identity was not mentioned by any respondents who identified as women—no one explicitly said “a feminist is a woman who...”—but this may have been something they assumed did not need explanation.

Finally, one respondent made the complicated statement that they hadn't experienced any discrimination personally, so they do not identify as feminist:

I believe that men and women are equal - though different - and should have equal opportunities, and I know that discrimination still occurs. However, having not experienced any active discrimination against myself as a woman or seen it occur, it is difficult for me to regard discrimination as a real threat (I'm

not saying this is right, just that it's hard for me). The word "feminist" also carries such baggage that I would hesitate to apply it to myself. (R75, Straight white woman early 20s)

This respondent offers a competing theory to the one above about the time/energy output required for self-identification as feminist. In this case, however, the tipping point is personal experience. If a person has not experienced clear gender discrimination, they may not have sufficient reason or justification for making feminism a part of their identity.

Waves and Generations

As an additional facet of feminist identity, additional survey questions explored whether respondents identified with a particular wave or generation of feminism. As the table shows, the overwhelming majority of respondents (230 or 71% of those who responded to this question) did not identify with a particular wave of feminism. A further 66 (20%) identified with the third wave, and 12 respondents (4%) identified with the second wave. Seventeen respondents (5%) specified a write-in answer such as “is there a fourth?” and “I’m torn between 2nd and 3rd.”

Table 14 Frequency Table: Belonging to a “Wave” of Feminism

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, Second Wave	12	4%
Yes, Third Wave	66	20%
Yes, some other Wave	17	5%
No, no “wave”	230	71%
Total (N)	325	100%

Respondents' thoughts about identifying with a feminist generation followed the same pattern. The grand majority (274 or 84%) did not identify with any generation. This was followed by 41 (13%) who identified with the "daughter" generation, and only 3 (1%) identifying with the "mother" generation. Write-in answers suggested the possibility of a grandchild generation or an internet generation, but no strong themes emerged.

Table 15 Frequency Table: Belonging to a "Generation" of Feminism

	Frequency	Percent
Yes, mother generation	3	1%
Yes, daughter generation	41	13%
Yes, some other generation	7	2%
No, no generation	274	84%
Total (N)	325	100%

As leaders of the feminist blogosphere, in-depth interviewees also felt that they did not fit easily into either the Second Wave or the Third Wave of the feminist movement. One interviewee noted that "According to other people's labels, I'm probably part of the third wave. If I were going to practically take a wave, I would say that my politics tend to identify in many ways with all of those principles" (I4, Straight white women late 20s). Another explained:

Not precisely. I... my education has mostly been very piecemeal. I've done a lot of reading on internet blogs, and I've done a lot of reading in some of the stories, you know, sort of the classic, Gloria Steinem and Judith Butler and all of them, but it's all very haphazard and so I've never thought of myself as belonging to any particular wave. And I think that attempts to describe or

define second versus third wave feminism are often used to divide women and that these categories are too vague. (I6, Queer Korean-American woman late 20s)

As with the survey population, these interviewees simply were not particularly invested in the wave framework for understanding their work. They were aware of the concepts but saw them as something imposed on them from outside, something too vague to be useful, or even possibly something inappropriate and divisive.

In general, the organization of feminist identity into waves and/or generations did not seem to be something that really held the interest or imagination of respondents in this study. There are certainly books and articles identifying things like third wave, fourth wave, and popular feminism with a cohort that must have significant overlap with this study's respondents. Perhaps this way of looking at feminism is more salient to those in leadership positions or in academic tomes or is something that is more likely to be embraced as an identity in retrospect rather than during the height of one's activism.

Defining Feminism

After discussing whether they identify as feminists and why, respondents were given the opportunity to provide a personal definition of feminism (even if they do not consider themselves feminists). Their answers included strong themes of equality, human rights and social issues, understanding, and the importance of a social movement that one would expect to be present in definitions of feminism from any background or textbook. Equality, writ large, was by far the most common response (given by 294 respondents, or 86.1%). Within the theme of equality, however, some interesting differences emerged. Equality for whom, exactly?

Equality for Women

A total of 112 respondents (32.7%) defined feminism around equality for women. Feminism means “believing that women deserve equal rights and status, and that they don't yet have them” stated one respondent (R17, white lesbian woman late 20s). Another specified that feminism is “The belief that women are human beings, fully capable and deserving of whatever it is that human beings are capable and deserving of” (R93, straight white woman late 20s). A third respondent defined feminism as “Promoting equality for persons perceived to be female in the gender-binary system. This is done by addressing sexist and misogynist behaviors in society at large and individual interactions” (R15, White gay genderqueer person early 20s). Respondents in this category focused entirely on women or “persons perceived to be female” in their definitions of feminism; feminism was described as beliefs about women, rights for women, and addressing things in society that were detrimental to women.

Equality Between Men and Women

Not all respondents focused solely on women in their definitions of feminism. A group of 51 respondents (14.9%) brought men into their definitions as a comparison group. Some defined feminism simply as “equality between men and women,” (R3, White straight woman early 30s and R46, White straight woman late 30s). Others elaborated: “Feminism is about acknowledging that women and men, while not the same, are inherently equal - equally capable, equally important, deserving of equal respect and equal pay” (R13, Queer white woman late 20s).” “Feminism is the belief that men and women are equal and should be treated as such, that women should not be discriminated against through pay inequity, violence, legislation, etc.” (R4, Straight

white woman late 20s). Although not dramatically different from the respondents who defined feminism as “equality for women” alone, this group added a few crucial elements. First, they removed some ambiguity by answering the implied question of “equal to whom?” Second, they set up a construction of gender as a binary system, consisting of two categories: men and women.

Equality for All Genders and Sexes

Other respondents did not limit their definitions of feminism to binary constructions of gender. A total of 99 respondents (28.9%) wrote about equality for all genders and sexes-- approximately double the number who wrote about equality between men and women. One respondent claimed that “all genders are equal. If you believe this, you're a feminist” (R5, Biracial bisexual woman early 40s). Another characterized feminism as “believing in trying to achieve true gender equality” (R51, Straight white woman early 30s). A third defined feminism as “A belief that people of every gender should be treated equally. All the rest is detail” (R19, White bisexual woman early 20s). The exact sentences varied, but every respondent in this category wrote in terms of “gender equality,” rights for “all genders” or “all sexes,” or ending “gender discrimination” without specifically writing about men and women.

Equality for All

Broadening the definition even further, 35 respondents (10.2%) defined feminism as a belief in equality for all. These respondents used words like “all people” or “everyone” when they discussed their personal definitions of feminism. One respondent defined feminism as “Believing in and acting to support the equality of all people” (R10, Straight white man late 60s). Another defined feminism as

“Being inclusive and accepting of people. (R100, White lesbian woman late 20s). A third defined a feminist as “Someone who believes in equal rights and equal treatment of all people” (R69, White bisexual woman early 30s). These respondents went a step beyond opening feminism up to all genders and dropped gender completely from their definition. An additional 7 respondents (2.0%) did not even specify “all people” and answered simply “equality.”

Intersections of Equality

In addition to all of the varying ways of including gender in personal definitions of respondents, 66 (19.3%) made specific mentions of other potentially marginalized social characteristics. “[F]eminism, for me, is a social justice movement to create gender equity. it also includes the dismantling of racism, heterosexism, ageism, adultism, ableism, and other oppressions” (R14, Straight white woman early 20s). Another respondent defined feminism as “a movement and belief that all people should be treated equally, with dignity and respect. intersects with sexism, racism, classism, cissism, etc” (R89, Straight white woman early 30s). A third respondent clarified how her personal identity and experience interacted with her personal definition of feminism over time, stating that feminism is “Fighting and speaking against all forms of oppression. As a white woman, I’m especially concerned with matters of race. As I’ve become disabled, I’ve added that to my attention” (R22 White bisexual woman early 30s). For these respondents, it seems merely saying “gender equality” would not necessarily include groups like disabled women, transgender women, or women of color. They felt compelled to specifically name groups like those in order to signify their inclusion in the definition of feminism.

Defining Feminism- Other Aspects

Defining feminism around equality was the most common theme, whether it was equality for women, equality of women to men, equality for all genders, or equality for everyone. The second most common theme, mentioned by 122 respondents (35.7%), was definitions of feminism as a social movement. Some respondents in this category specifically called feminism a social movement, while others simply wrote more about the activism and other work of feminism rather than about any beliefs or philosophy. One respondent noted that “feminism, for me, is a social justice movement to create gender equity” (R14, Straight white woman early 20s). Another stated “Feminism is a social justice movement geared toward equality and bodily autonomy and ending violence (physical, sexual, and state) against women and marginalized peoples” (R38, Straight white woman late 20s). A third respondent made it very clear that the work of feminism is more important to her than its theoretical concepts:

I'm sure I could have written [a definition of feminism] as an undergrad but I don't sit around figuring out what my labels mean anymore. I live my own feminism every day in the best ways I know how, but that tends to mean more about working with the poor and immigrants than hanging out talking about feminist theory or obsessing about abortion rights. (R2 Straight white woman late 20s)

A smaller but still significant number of respondents—25, or 7.3%—mentioned a specific social issue as a part of their personal definition of feminism. The social issues that were noted most frequently included pay inequity, gender-based violence, freedom of choice, bodily autonomy, abortion rights, and other legal rights. For example, one respondent said:

My version of feminism is based on freedom of choice. This means that any choice a person makes which does not harm or take choice away from another person is valid and should be respected as such. The issues I am most passionate about that relate to feminism are: access to free, legal and safe abortion and contraception; justice for survivors of rape and sexual abuse; preventing violence against persons of all genders and orientations; marriage equality; LGBTQ rights; law reform in areas such as poverty-related crime and drug offenses (viewing these as symptoms of an unjust society rather than punishing people who are already suffering); democratic socialism and sex-positivity. (R64, White pansexual woman early 20s)

For these respondents, specific social issues were part and parcel of the definition of feminism. While others mentioned equality and left the particular issues to be debated or assumed, those in this category carefully delineated the issues, possibly for clarity or possibly to reflect their personal values more accurately.

Seventeen respondents (5.0%) included in their definition of feminism the idea that it was a framework for understanding or awareness. Some said that feminism meant becoming aware of some aspects of the state of the world, that feminism is “an awareness of the societal bias against women and other marginalised groups, and a desire to end this” (R62, White pansexual genderqueer trans man early 20s) or “awareness of inequalities, awareness of social mores and pressures, awareness of current events related to social justice” (R54 White bisexual woman early 20s). Others talked about feminism in terms of understanding or knowing certain things:

Feminism means knowing women are human, treating women as human, and trying to get the rest of the world to do the same. Feminism means knowing the patriarchy is in charge of everything. Knowing the patriarchy is in charge of everything means knowing the patriarchy has taught every single human being on this planet to hate women and consider women inferior to men... (R84, White bisexual woman late 20s)

To me, feminism is a way of studying and perceiving the world; to be feminist is to consider all humans equal, whatever their gender, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, race, income, etc., and to advocate for the recognition of this inherent equality between humans. (R73, Straight white woman early 20s)

For this group, feminism is at least partially a kind of knowledge and understanding of the world. Knowledge of inequality, of oppression; an understanding of how the world is that rings true for these respondents. As seen in the quotes above this knowledge was characterized as necessary but not sufficient—feminism was not just knowing that there was inequality but also wanting to do something about it. However, understanding was typically listed first and may have been viewed by respondents as a first step toward future action.

Finally, eleven respondents (3.2%) were openly critical of feminism in their stated definitions. Many of these critiques centered around perceived exclusions of some marginalized groups from the movement. For example, one respondent defined feminism as “A social movement and system of beliefs about gender equality, framed around the experiences and concerns of middle-class white ciswomen” (R132 Lesbian Chinese woman early 20s). Another defined feminism as “White women who support other white women especially those who are pro-choice” (R308 Straight Black woman

early 20s). Other critiques claimed that feminism had lofty ideals but failed to live up to them: “Ideally feminism would stand for the advancement of women; in practice, that hasn't happened. Feminists stand for too many different things for me to even begin to define the word” (R176 Bisexual White man early 20s). Although the selected quotes are from notably diverse respondents, 7 of the 11 respondents in this category were white women. This category was only slightly more diverse in terms of race and gender than the overall makeup of the respondent population.

Summary

How did participants in the feminist blogosphere conceptualize feminism? Did they identify as feminists and if so, what did that mean to them? Who and what was included in their definitions of feminism? Most respondents in this study did identify as feminists, and the grand majority of them had exclusively positive things to say about feminism in general. Identification with waves and generations of feminism did not seem particularly salient to respondents, and very few actively included a wave or generation in their identity. The largest group of respondents called themselves feminists because it fit their personal beliefs and ideals. The strongest and most frequently mentioned ideal was about equality, although respondents differed in how they framed equality—for women, between men and women, for all genders, or for all.

Some respondents defined feminism as a kind of work to be done, and either included or excluded themselves from feminist identity based on how engaged they were in this work. Some spoke of specific social issues on which they worked such as abortion rights and other kinds of bodily autonomy, equality under the law, and end to gender-based violence. Others leaned more on academic types of work such as

knowledge, understanding, and giving themselves and others frameworks for conceptualizing things like patriarchal oppression. Some of these respondents also talked about feminism and a feminist self-identity being a good fit for their professional and volunteer work, but beliefs and ideals were mentioned far more often than active work toward any goal. So, some respondents seemed to be saying “yes, I’m a feminist because I believe in equality” while others seemed to be saying “I believe in equality but I don’t do much about it so I don’t identify as a feminist.”

While most respondents had positive feelings about feminism, there were critical voices even among participants in the explicitly feminist online space from which the respondent pool was drawn. Those who were critical of feminism often felt excluded from it by virtue of their race, sexuality, gender identity (cisgender men and transgender everybody), social class, and/or disability. Many mentioned that the feminist movement has historically championed the rights and viewpoints of cisgender white women, and that although they agree with principles of equality, they (the respondents) would not want to be seen in connection with that unfortunate history.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have explored the feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s and early 2010s. Because the third wave of the U.S. feminist movement can be characterized as an internetworked social movement—one that exists on and in conjunction with the internet and the world wide web—the blogosphere was a critically important space with new opportunities and challenges. During this time period, the feminist movement moved into the blogosphere and away from earlier forms of internet communication and community such as message boards and listservs. A decade or so later, the blogosphere waned and gave way to shorter form social media. This dissertation research captures the movement at a critical conjunction, just at the beginning of the internetworked social movement, and explores the thoughts, identities and boundaries of that place and time.

As the feminist blogosphere developed, participants grappled with the question of what kind of space it would be. Would it be a place of challenge and coalition for people with diverse viewpoints? Or more of a “home” space, where feminists could come together in relative safety with the knowledge that they were among friends? Both sorts of spaces exist in the face-to-face world offline, and different users came to the blogosphere with different—often clashing—expectations. Over time, as the blogosphere waned, online spaces made clearer distinctions about what kind of space they intended to be. Closed online groups created rules that users must agree to before participating, or even short quizzes that would be used to determine if the potential participant was a good fit for the space. Other spaces, such as Twitter (X) were clearly demarcated as more of a free-for-all. In the beginning, however, the feminist

blogosphere experienced a unique period of uneven growth as it worked to figure out what kind of space it would be.

Participants in the feminist blogosphere were having a conversation—a sprawling, multifaceted, messy conversation—about who feminists are, what feminism is, how feminism did work and how it *should* work. In articles, posts, and comments sections they interacted in discussions around vocabulary, tone, and conversational framing. These interactions may have seemed peripheral to other kinds of feminist activism, but for some respondents it was clearly a primary goal of participation in the feminist blogosphere. Clark-Parsons described the feminist blogosphere as “critical spaces for feminists to debate the inclusivity of the movements tactics and messages” (2022, 107) and this dissertation found ample support for that claim. Online feminists intentionally sought out the back-and-forth of internet participation to teach them what is considered appropriate within the boundaries of feminism—for example, what words and phrases were most up to date and least sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist. What language, practices, and policies were most inclusive and welcoming. They challenged each other to grow, to do better. Distinct from the more recent phenomenon of “cancelling” someone who has made a misstep, challenges in the blogosphere could be the beginning of a productive conversation.

Some of these challenges were received as good-faith attempts to move a conversation forward, while others were not. The back-and-forth of the blogosphere, while clearly welcoming and enriching for some, was perceived by others as inherently exclusive and gate-keeping. Respondents perceived this exclusion as a function of characteristics like their social class, education, race, or gender identity.

The feminist blogosphere was not immune to the digital divide, and so some of the more unfortunate patterns of earlier feminist activism were replicated here rather than erased or ameliorated. One potentially marginalized group that experienced positive effects of the move to the internet was feminists with disabilities. Those whose physical mobility or daily allotment of energy was restricted by their disability found online participation much more accessible than attending meetings or engaging in activism in person. They wrote joyfully about how the blogosphere opened up new avenues for them to be feminists and do feminism.

Participants in the blogosphere who felt excluded or attacked by the challenging interactions of the blogosphere reported a strong tendency to withdraw from that space. Some continued reading blog posts and comments but refrained from authoring any, while others quit the blog where it happened altogether. Participants who felt appropriately challenged, on the other hand, often found the experience to be rewarding and even sought it out once in a while in order to learn more. A third category of participants never authored any blog posts or comments but reported a tendency to “lurk” in the blogs to watch others be challenged and learn from the experience. Some respondents reported changing their behavior and vocabulary in other online spaces and in their offline life in response to challenges they witnessed online. This phenomenon, which would be invisible in the blogosphere itself, was captured in this dissertation’s survey responses and represents a fascinating way that an internetworked social movement can change hearts and minds.

All of this participation in the feminist blogosphere—all of the reading and writing and back-and-forth, or watching and learning by seeing others be challenged—takes time and energy and focused attention. As the online world shifted from the

long-form blogosphere into microblogging like Twitter and short video blogging like TikTok, the focus moved away from anything that takes that much effort and time. There do not seem to be any public spaces online equivalent to the largely abandoned blogosphere where conversations with this kind of depth and breadth can happen. There are some spaces that offer rough approximations, like closed and heavily moderated Facebook groups or subreddits, but these are only semi-public and involve varying levels of intentional gate-keeping. The mixture of coalition space and “home” space represented by the feminist blogosphere, a place where meaning-making, self-correction, and growth could take place, is no longer active.

The blogosphere offered a unique public space where the conversation about feminism was open to anyone who had the ability to access the internet. Even still, it could be a terrible and alienating experience for people who were new to feminism and trying to get their bearings. Many talked about participation in blogs in almost the same way one would talk about taking a class without having taken the prerequisite courses; there are codes and vocabulary and social norms that you have to figure out on your own, and help is not guaranteed to be available or gentle. Some participants could “lurk” in the spaces to learn these things, but learning social norms by observation is difficult and risky—even more so for people with autism or other neurodiversities. Other participants charged ahead and asked questions when they were unsure what was happening, risking the collective disdain of a group who had already answered those questions for many other newcomers.

Most, but not all, respondents to this study felt included in the feminist blogosphere at least to some degree. In parallel, most but not all respondents identified as feminists and had a positive view of feminism both as an ideology and as

a social movement. A few quoted bell hooks when defining feminism, but most seemed to craft definitions of their own—and the variety included some interesting patterns. The most common thread was equality, mentioned by the grand majority of respondents in one way or another. They differed, however, in how they expanded on the idea of equality. Some wrote of equality for women, others of equality between men and women, some of equality for all genders, and others opened it up even further to include race and other characteristics. There is such a difference between saying “I want women to be equal to men” and “I want everyone of all genders to be equal” and “I want everyone to be equal” and specifically naming other things, intersectional things, like race and social class and ability/disability. The characteristic third wave tension between working toward inclusion and concern for diffusion of interests was very much still present in respondents’ definitions of feminism.

Also present in their definitions of feminism were two ideas about what feminism could be: something you *think* or something you *do*. Some respondents said that feminism is thinking that men and women are equal, and therefore anyone who agrees with this idea is automatically a feminist. When asked if they identify as feminists, these respondents talked about what they think, believe, and understand. Other respondents said that feminism is a kind of work or action—marching for women’s rights, lobbying congress, writing articles or books—and therefore someone is a feminist if they do these things. When asked if they identify as feminists, these respondents talked about what they did or did not do. Some said they were feminists because they belonged to NOW or because they worked in a feminist non-profit organization, while others said they agreed with ideas of gender equality but could not in good conscience call themselves feminists because they did not participate in any

feminist work. Other respondents who did not identify as feminists at all critiqued the movement for its lack of inclusion, claiming that feminism was too closely tailored to the ideals and needs of middle-class White women.

Through this dissertation, I have captured a snapshot of a space and a moment of time in the U.S. feminist movement. The feminist blogosphere of the late 2000s and early 2010s was the beginning of feminism as an internet networked social movement, and I have shown some of the ways that this space challenged but also replicated historic patterns of inclusion and exclusion. As with previous iterations of the feminist movement, there was tension between those who defined the movement entirely around women and those who argued that it is impossible to talk about women without talking about their race, social class, sexualities, and other diverse characteristics. In the blogosphere it became possible for more diverse voices to have access to the public conversation and to challenge gatekeepers- as long as they had access to the internet. As with previous iterations of the feminist movement, there was tension between those who were deeply interested in defining philosophical concepts and those who wanted to get on with the work and the activism. The blogosphere was a space more easily suited to the thought work of hashing out definitions and concepts, but it led some to define those challenging conversations as activism in its own right.

This dissertation adds to the scholarship of the feminist movement by tracing a critical period when that movement shifted into a new space. Building on previous works about waves of the feminist movement (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003; Whittier, 1995; Pierce, 2003; Henry, 2004), I have illustrated a portion of the third wave, as well as a tendency of practicing online feminists to eschew the wave metaphor in favor of more individualist identities and definitions. Building on works more specifically

dedicated to the examination of the third wave (Walker, 1995; Findlen, 1995; Messner & Montez de Oca, 2005; Faludi, 1991; Aronson, 2003), I have shown some of the key goals, challenges, and identities of third wave internetworked feminists. By gathering survey data and interviews, I have captured aspects of this internetworked movement, such as the privilege-checking behaviors of lurkers in the blogosphere, that could not be captured by observation or content analysis.

Further, this dissertation adds to the scholarship of social movements by addressing the relevance of the “wave” metaphor as a framework for conceptualizing the U.S. feminist movement. Pierce (2005) argued that there was a “wave 2.5” between the second and third waves, indicating that the overall wave metaphor was in need of some theoretical nuance. Respondents in this study could reasonably be categorized by historians as participants in the third wave of the feminist movement, but they showed very little interest in this idea. Perhaps this kind of static classificatory schema is best left behind in favor of a more fluid understanding of social movements. Maybe future feminists will explain their history as a woven cloth with disparate threads forming a coherent whole, or a symphony where different instruments take the lead at different moments but the music never fully stops. Or perhaps they will reject the idea of any metaphorical classification as inherently limiting and embrace an oppositional approach more akin to queer theory. Whatever happens next, this dissertation illustrates that the rise of the feminist blogosphere continued to problematize the “wave” framework for understanding the feminist movement.

With the blogosphere now defunct, the internetworked feminist movement has transitioned into other spaces. Some long-form conversations still happen in closed

and gate-kept online spaces or in digital newsletters via platforms like Substack, while other short-form conversations happen in sites like Twitter (X) or TikTok. Those spaces are now where activism is organized and where meaning is made—they are not the location of the feminist movement (as well as a host of related social justice movements). In addition, some feminist activism is now organized via mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, leading to collective action on screen. The new locations of the internetnetworked feminist movement now carry the hope of inclusion and equality, as well as the dangers of splintering and replicating past harms. But every new wave of feminism owes a lot to its predecessors, and whether we are now in the fourth wave, a time of popular feminism, or something entirely new, it is undeniable that the feminist movement was forever transformed when it made it to the blogosphere.

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Appendix A

ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Demographics Block

Q1: In your opinion, which of the following best describes your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Trans person, intersexed person, genderqueer person, or other nonbinary gender (specify if desired)

Q2: In your opinion, which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- heterosexual or straight
- homosexual, gay, or lesbian
- bisexual
- other sexual orientation (specify if desired)

Q3: In your opinion, which of the following best describes your race¹?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian Indian
- Chinese
- Japanese
- Korean
- Filipino
- Vietnamese
- Other Asian (specify if desired)
- Native Hawaiian
- Guamanian or Chamorro
- Samoan
- Other Pacific Islander
- Biracial or other race (specify if desired)

Q4: In your opinion, are you of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latina/o origin?

- No, not of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latina/o origin
- Yes- Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
- Yes- Puerto Rican
- Yes- Cuban
- Yes- another Hispanic, Spanish, or Latina/o origin (specify if desired)

Q5: What is your age?

- Under 18 [selecting this will end the survey]
- 18-19 years
- 20-24 years
- 25-29 years
- 30-34 years
- 35-39 years
- 40-44 years
- 45-49 years
- 50-54 years
- 55-59 years
- 60-64 years
- 65-69 years
- 70-74 years
- 75-79 years
- 80-84 years
- 85-89 years
- 90 years and over

Q6: What is your combined annual household income?

- Less than 30,000
- 30,000 – 39,000
- 40,000 – 49,000
- 50,000 – 59,000
- 60,000 – 69,000
- 70,000 – 79,000
- 80,000 – 89,000
- 90,000 – 99,000
- 100,000 or more

Q7: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than High School
- High School/GED
- Some College
- 2-year College Degree
- 4-year College Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree (JD, MD)

Q8: Which occupational category best describes your employment?

- Management: professional & related occupations
- Management: business and financial operations occupations
- Management occupations, except farmers & farm managers
- Farmers & farm managers
- Business and financial operations occupations
- Business operations specialists
- Financial specialists
- Computer and mathematical occupations
- Architects, surveyors, cartographers, and engineers
- Drafters, engineering, and mapping technicians
- Life, physical, and social science occupations
- Legal occupations
- Education, training, and library occupations
- Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations
- Health diagnosing and treating practitioners & technical occupations
- Health technologists and technicians
- Health care support occupations
- Fire fighting, prevention, and law enforcement workers, including supervisors
- Other protective service workers, including supervisors
- Food preparation and serving related occupations
- Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations
- Personal care and service occupations
- Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations
- Supervisors: construction and extraction workers
- Construction trades workers
- Extraction workers
- Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations
- Production occupations
- Supervisors: Transportation and material moving workers
- Aircraft and traffic control occupations
- Motor vehicle operators
- Rail, water, and other transportation occupations
- Material moving workers
- Stay at home parent
- Student
- Not currently employed

Q9: In what country do you currently reside?

- [All current countries listed]

Online activities Block

(respondents will choose an answer by clicking a box or radio button)

Note: The following questions ask you to report on your online activities that are related to feminism. For the purpose of these questions, please consider a website or activity to be “feminist” if it includes any of the following qualities: a philosophy of equality between sexes or genders; a concern for women’s rights including legal rights, workplace equality, and social justice; a commitment to reproductive freedoms and/or abortion access; a concern for decreasing or ending violence against women, a desire to question gender roles and challenge social norms for men and women.

Have you ever done any of the following? How often?

- Used a search engine to find websites with information about feminism.
- Site tied to an offline feminist club/group/organization
- Site created independent of any offline feminist club/group/organization.
- General site tied to an offline media outlet such as television news, newspaper, or magazine.
- General news site created exclusively for the internet, without a companion newspaper or television program.
- Used a general knowledge website such as Wikipedia to find information about feminism.
- Visited the website of a feminist organization to which you already belong.
- Created or edited a website for a feminist organization to which you already belong.
- Visited the website of a feminist organization you do not belong to & heard about on television, from a friend, or from another offline source.
- Visited a message board tied to an offline organization with feminist goals?
- Visited a message board about feminism but not tied to any offline organization?
- Posted a message to any message board? Which ones?
- Signed up to receive regular email updates from a feminist website? Which one/s?
- Signed up for a feminist listserv?
- Posted a message to a message board? How often?
- Served as a moderator or administrator to a message board?
- Created a message board?
- Visited a blog tied to an offline organization with feminist goals?
- Visited a blog about feminism but not tied to any offline organization?

- Written for or posted a message to a blog? Which one/s?
- Signed up to receive regular email updates from a blog? Which ones?
- Signed up for an RSS feed to receive updates from a feminist blog?
- Served as a regular contributor, administrator, or moderator of a feminist blog?
- Created a feminist blog?
- Visited a social networking site like Facebook or MySpace?
- Created a personal page or profile in a social networking site like Facebook or MySpace?
- Do you list feminism, feminist organizations, feminist events, etc. as an interest or value on this page or profile?
- Do you display links to feminist websites, articles about feminism or feminist events?
- Do you display badges, bumper stickers, icons, or other images related to feminism, feminist causes, or feminist events?
- Do you display photographs of yourself participating in feminist activism?

Feminist Identity & Experience Block

(respondents will type out answers in a text field, no length restrictions)

- Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? Why or why not?
- Do you consider yourself to be a womanist, humanist, or other? Explain.
- Do you feel as though you are a part of a particular “wave” of feminism?
- Why or why not?
- How has this affected your feminist activities and experiences?
- Do you feel as though you are a part of a particular “generation” of feminism?
- Why or why not?
- How has this affected your feminist activities and experiences?
- How does your race, class, and sexuality affect your experience of feminism?
- Did you have a feminist “click” moment? [defined as a particular time period or event that strongly influenced you to begin identifying yourself as a feminist]
- Which is more important to you, connecting with other feminists or seeking independence through feminist values and goals?
- When you visit and/or participate in feminist and other women’s rights websites:
- What is your primary goal? (e.g. to get news, to learn about concepts, to make connections with others)
- What websites do you visit regularly? Daily? Infrequently?

- Do you prefer websites that discuss a wide range of feminist and women's rights issues, or websites that focus on a particular area such as transgender rights or persons with disabilities? Explain.
- How important do you believe it is for feminist websites to discuss a wide range of feminist and women's rights issues?
- How important do you believe it is for feminist websites to be focused on a clear goal, such as increasing equality in the workplace?
- How important do you think it is for women's rights websites to pay attention to the needs of marginalized groups such as transgendered people and people of color?
- How important do you think it is for marginalized groups to have websites devoted solely to issues surrounding their group?
- How important for members of marginalized groups to visit and participate in websites dedicated to a wide range of topics?
- If one exists, have you read the commenting or participation policy of the websites you frequent?
- Have you ever been challenged to change your grammar or your manner of discussing topics on a feminist or women's rights website?
- How did you react?
- How did you feel about the incident?
- Do you believe you were treated fairly?
- Did the incident change how you felt about the website? Online feminism in general?
- Did the moderator(s) of the website get involved in the incident? How so?
- Have you ever challenged someone to change their grammar or their manner of discussing topics on a feminist or women's rights website?
- How did they react?
- How did you feel about the incident?
- Do you believe you were treated fairly?
- Did the incident change how you felt about the website? Online feminism in general?
- Did the moderator(s) of the website get involved in the incident? How so?
- Have you ever reported another individual to the moderators of a website for being disrespectful or for violating a policy? Describe.
- When you participate in feminist or women's rights websites, under what circumstances do you reveal personal information about yourself?
- Statuses such as age, gender, race, sexuality
- Beliefs about particular goals or social issues

- Do you emphasize any particular part of your identity (such as race, gender, or sexuality) when you participate on these websites? Do you de-emphasize any part or parts of your identity? Is your identity usually irrelevant?
- Do you feel that you need to visit several feminist or women's rights websites in order to get all the information you need? Which ones for which information?
- Do you feel that you need to visit several feminist or women's rights websites in order to address all of the topics that interest you or are relevant to you? Which ones?

Appendix B

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographics

Q1: In your opinion, which of the following best describes your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Trans person, intersexed person, genderqueer person, or other nonbinary gender (specify if desired)

Q2: In your opinion, which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- heterosexual or straight
- homosexual, gay, or lesbian
- bisexual
- other sexual orientation (specify if desired)

Q3: In your opinion, which of the following best describes your race¹?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian Indian
- Chinese
- Japanese
- Korean
- Filipino
- Vietnamese
- Other Asian (specify if desired)
- Native Hawaiian
- Guamanian or Chamorro
- Samoan
- Other Pacific Islander
- Biracial or other race (specify if desired)

Q4: In your opinion, are you of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latina/o origin?

- No, not of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latina/o origin
- Yes- Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
- Yes- Puerto Rican
- Yes- Cuban
- Yes- another Hispanic, Spanish, or Latina/o origin (specify if desired)

Q5: What is your age?

- Under 18 [selecting this will end the interview]

- 18-19 years
- 20-24 years
- 25-29 years
- 30-34 years
- 35-39 years
- 40-44 years
- 45-49 years
- 50-54 years
- 55-59 years
- 60-64 years
- 65-69 years
- 70-74 years
- 75-79 years
- 80-84 years
- 85-89 years
- 90 years and over

Q6: What is your combined annual household income?

- Less than 30,000
- 30,000 – 39,000
- 40,000 – 49,000
- 50,000 – 59,000
- 60,000 – 69,000
- 70,000 – 79,000
- 80,000 – 89,000
- 90,000 – 99,000
- 100,000 or more

Q7: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than High School
- High School/GED
- Some College
- 2-year College Degree
- 4-year College Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree (JD, MD)

Q8: Which occupational category best describes your employment?

- Management: professional & related occupations
- Management: business and financial operations occupations
- Management occupations, except farmers & farm managers
- Farmers & farm managers

- Business and financial operations occupations
- Business operations specialists
- Financial specialists
- Computer and mathematical occupations
- Architects, surveyors, cartographers, and engineers
- Drafters, engineering, and mapping technicians
- Life, physical, and social science occupations
- Legal occupations
- Education, training, and library occupations
- Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations
- Health diagnosing and treating practitioners & technical occupations
- Health technologists and technicians
- Health care support occupations
- Fire fighting, prevention, and law enforcement workers, including supervisors
- Other protective service workers, including supervisors
- Food preparation and serving related occupations
- Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations
- Personal care and service occupations
- Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations
- Supervisors: construction and extraction workers
- Construction trades workers
- Extraction workers
- Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations
- Production occupations
- Supervisors: Transportation and material moving workers
- Aircraft and traffic control occupations
- Motor vehicle operators
- Rail, water, and other transportation occupations
- Material moving workers
- Stay at home parent
- Student
- Not currently employed

Q9: In what country do you currently reside?

- [All current countries listed]

Feminism and identity

- Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? Why or why not?
- Do you consider yourself to be a womanist, humanist, or other? Explain.
- Do you feel as though you are a part of a particular “wave” of feminism?
- Why or why not?
- How has this affected your feminist activities and experiences?

- Do you feel as though you are a part of a particular “generation” of feminism?
- Why or why not?
- How has this affected your feminist activities and experiences?
- How does your race, class, and sexuality affect your experience of feminism?
- Did you have a feminist “click” moment? [defined as a particular time period or event that strongly influenced you to begin identifying yourself as a feminist]
- Which is more important to you, connecting with other feminists or seeking independence through feminist values and goals?

Feminist Organizing

- As a website coordinator, how do you conceptualize your role within the feminist movement?
- What do you believe are the goals of the current feminist movement?
- What are your personal goals as a feminist coordinator?
- How does your website contribute to the achievement of these goals?
- As a website coordinator, how do you conceptualize your role within the feminist blogosphere?
- Do you read other feminist/women’s rights blogs on a regular basis? Which ones?
- How important do you believe it is to network with other online feminist coordinators?
- If you network or collaborate with other feminist coordinators online, how do you do so? (examples: linking to their websites, linking to specific posts on their sites, inviting them to do guest posts, etc).
- Have you done similar networking offline? If so, how is it different from networking online? How is it the same?
- Do you use only the internet in your feminist organizing, or do you use other methods and technologies such as face-to-face groups or print media?
- If internet only, what are the benefits and drawbacks of this practice?
- If multiple methods, what other methods and/or technology do you use?
- How long have you been doing feminist organizing online?
- Do you coordinate your website on your own, or with a group?
- If a group, how did the group develop?
- How do you divide tasks among the group? For example, are tasks divided according to technical skills or according to the coordinators’ interests in different subject areas?
- What was your motivation for starting the website (or for beginning your own participating role, if the website was pre-existing)?
- What do you believe is the most beneficial thing about using the internet for feminist organizing?
- What is the most difficult thing about online feminist organizing for you?

- What audience does your website target?
- What were your motivations for starting the site? Have they changed since then? How?
- Do you see the internet as a tool for reaching feminists?
- If so, which populations? (e.g. young people, minority groups)
- Do you believe that the internet affects minority groups' ability to participate in third wave feminism? Explain.
- Is it important to you (is it one of your goals) to give a voice to marginalized groups?
- Do you hope that your site strongly pertains to a specific marginalized group? Do you hope to be more broadly accessible and/or relevant?
- Have you taken any steps to change your website's accessibility to marginalized groups? Explain.
- Have you taken any steps to change your website's appeal to marginalized groups? Explain.
- Has your website ever been challenged as discriminating against marginalized groups? If so, how did you respond?
- Do you believe that it is important to provide for the needs of all feminists and women's rights activists in one virtual space?
- Do you believe that it is important for groups who have been marginalized to have virtual spaces dedicated to specific issues regarding their marginalization?

Appendix C

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE IRB APPROVAL LETTER



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Hulliher Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551
Ph: 302/831-2136
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: May 15, 2010

TO: Nena Craven, M.A.
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [162494-1] Surfing the Third Wave: The Present-Day Feminist Movement Online

IRB REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: May 15, 2010
EXPIRATION DATE: May 14, 2011
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding. In accordance with federal regulations, the requirement of documentation of consent has been waived for this project.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Elizabeth Peloso at 302-831-8619 or epeloso@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.