The Limitations of Social Media Feminism

No Space of Our Own

Jessica Megarry

palgrave
macmillan

Social and Cultural Studies of Robots and AI

Series Editors
Kathleen Richardson
Faculty of Computing, Engineering, and Media
De Montfort University
Leicester, UK

Cathrine Hasse
Danish School of Education
Aarhus University
Copenhagen, Denmark

Teresa Heffernan
Department of English
St. Mary's University
Halifax, NS, Canada

This is a groundbreaking series that investigates the ways in which the "robot revolution" is shifting our understanding of what it means to be human. With robots filling a variety of roles in society—from soldiers to loving companions—we can see that the second machine age is already here. This raises questions about the future of labor, war, our environment, and even human-to-human relationships.

More information about this series at
http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/15887

Jessica Megarry

The Limitations of Social Media Feminism

No Space of Our Own

palgrave
macmillan

Jessica Megarry
School of Social and Political Sciences
University of Melbourne
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Cover illustration: -1001-/gettyimages

For Sandy,
for whom I have infinite space and time

Acknowledgements

The first thanks must go to the women who participated in this research: thank you for your time, for the laughs, for sharing your stories and insights, for the hospitality you offered, for the ongoing friendship and for your belief in the possibility of—and your dedication to working towards—women's liberation. Although they could choose to be anonymous in the research outputs, I am thankful that the women I interviewed elected to be identified by their real names (bar one, who writes under a pseudonym), as this means they can be given due credit for the ideas expressed in this book. My research participants put forward sophisticated analyses of how social media is shaping feminist activism that I had not yet considered, and they related these to wider political processes. This research has benefited enormously from their contributions.

For their ongoing support and for providing me with such sound advice, I would also like to thank my doctoral supervisors, Professor Sheila Jeffreys, Dr Sara Meger and Professor Sally Young. In particular, this book would not have been possible without Sheila Jeffreys. It has been wonderful to work with you over so many years—from an Honours project to a PhD—and to call you a friend.

The editorial team at Palgrave Macmillan have been similarly wonderful, a big thank you to Rachael Ballard, Joanna O'Neill and series editor Kathleen Richardson.

Contents

Interviewee Biographies

Linda Bellos (UK) has worked in a number of movements over the last 50 years, including the Socialist and Lesbian Feminist movement. She has been a Jewish Feminist Labour Party activist and was the vice chair of Black Sections of the Labour Party, a councillor, then a council leader. Throughout her life, she has developed her analysis of power. It is still the case that White men seem to retain an ideology which justifies them being the most powerful of the diversity of humans. Bellos remains a proud lesbian feminist and a proud African woman. She also remains rather fond of the country in which she was born: England.

Sam Berg (USA) is a writer and event organizer focused on reducing men's demand for prostitution. In the 2000s, before Facebook and Twitter, anti-prostitution feminists gathered on the website forum boards at Genderberg.com, one of the earliest internet radical feminist activist communities. Between 2012 and 2019, Berg organized 15 events and conferences on radical feminism. In 2013, she helped establish the gender-critical non-profit Women's Liberation Front (WoLF).

Taina Bien-Aimé (USA) has over two decades of experience defending the rights of women and girls at the national and global levels. She is the executive director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), one of the oldest international organizations dedicated to end-

ing trafficking in women and girls and commercial sexual exploitation as practices of gender-based violence. Prior to this position, Bien-Aimé was the executive director of Women's City Club of New York, an advocacy organization that helps shape policy in New York. For 20 years, she was involved with Equality Now, an international human rights organization dedicated to promoting the human rights of women and girls. She also served on the New York Women's Foundation Board for nine years and now sits on the New York City Mayor's Commission on Gender Equity. Bien-Aimé holds a Juris Doctor from New York University School of Law, where she received the Vanderbilt Medal.

Anne Billows (UK) is a radical feminist activist who has studied film in the UK. She was an active blogger, both individually and as part of an international feminist collaboration. Billows has also been involved in organising several face-to-face international feminist gatherings.

Mariana Borges Vanin (USA) is a feminist activist and the programs and communication coordinator at the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women.

Tiger Drummond (UK) is a lesbian feminist activist. She has been a regular participant in women-only conferences and gatherings and has also been engaged in social media feminism on platforms such as Tumblr and Facebook.

Al Garthwaite (UK) has been an active feminist since 1970, focussing especially on opposing violence against women in all its forms, women's control over our own bodies, childcare, and our representation in the workplace. She co-founded Reclaim the Night marches in England, and social enterprises including the feminist film-making and training organisation Vera Media, two nurseries and a holiday centre for women and children in the Yorkshire Dales. Garthwaite is now a Labour councillor, using her feminist perspective and skills to make Leeds a safe, attractive and environmentally sustainable city. She is a trustee of organisations including the Feminist Archive. When not sitting in meetings, she loves the outdoors, her cats, visiting friends and playing with the grandchildren.

Cristabel Gekas (AU) was involved in feminist activism from 2014 to 2015, both in person and on social media. During this time, she engaged in discussions on feminist theory and practice on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. She was also a proud member of a lively feminist consciousness-raising group, which was started by a group of female peers who met at university.

Alicen Grey (USA) is a brown, bisexual female writer whose work has enjoyed viral success and earned numerous prizes in competitions. She's best known as the mastermind behind *GYNX*, an award-winning dark comedy about five vigilante women who castrate rapists, which premiered Off-Broadway in 2017. Grey no longer has a social media presence, but you can keep up with her shenanigans at her personal website.

Carol Hanisch (USA) was a founding member of New York Radical Women in 1967. She initiated the group's 1968 protest of the Miss America Pageant, where she and three others disrupted the contest by hanging a large 'Women's Liberation' banner from the balcony. She wrote the paper 'The Personal Is Political' (1969) and was an editor of the Redstockings book *Feminist Revolution* (1975). She also founded the journal *Meeting Ground* (1977), which continues as MeetingGroundOnLine.org as a blogzine 'for the liberation of women and working people'. She has also participated in anti-racism, anti-war, labor and environmental movements. Her personal website contains many of her earlier writings and speeches.

Lynne Harne (UK) joined the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in 1971 and became a lesbian after her daughter was born. In 1972 she moved into a lesbian collective with women who had protested Miss World. Over the 1970s, she took part in creating women-only community and feminist direct action with small groups of local women. This culminated in being part of Angry Women, a group combatting pornography and male violence. She later worked for the Lesbian Custody Project and on challenging hetero-sexism in local government. She entered academia in the 1990s, with her key publications including *All the Rage: Reasserting Radical Lesbian Feminism* (1996) and *Violent Fathering and the Risks for Children* (2011). She has now returned to radical feminist activism.

Susan Hawthorne **(AU)** joined the WLM in 1973. Her book *In Defence of Separatism* (2019) was written as an honours thesis in philosophy in 1976. She is the author/editor of 27 books across non-fiction, fiction and poetry including *Wild Politics* (2002), *Dark Matters* (2017) and *The Sacking of the Muses* (2019). She is working on a new non-fiction book entitled *Vortex: The Crisis of Patriarchy* (forthcoming 2020). In 1974, she was a member of Melbourne's Rape Crisis Collective, was Chair of the International Feminist Book Fair and in 1994 was a founding member of the Performing Older Women's Circus. She is the publisher and co-founder with Renate Klein of Spinifex Press and an adjunct professor at James Cook University, Townsville.

Alanna Inserra **(AU)** is a feminist activist from Melbourne, Australia. She founded the Melbourne-based branch of the international anti-street harassment organisation, Hollaback!

Sheila Jeffreys **(UK)** was active in the WLM in the UK from 1973 to 1991 when she moved to Australia to teach at the University of Melbourne. She moved back to the UK on retirement in 2015. As a feminist activist she has campaigned against violence against women and for lesbian feminism. She has authored ten books on the history and politics of sexuality including *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970–1990* (2018).

Hilla Kerner **(CA)** has been an activist in the WLM since the mid-1990s. Her work is focused on male violence against women and includes frontline work, grassroots organising and public education. She has been a member of the Vancouver Rape Relief collective since 2006.

Lierre Kieth **(USA)** is a writer, small farmer, and radical feminist activist. She is the author of six books including *The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, and Sustainability* (2009), which has been called 'the most important ecological book of this generation'. She is also the coauthor, with Derrick Jensen and Aric McBay, of *Deep Green Resistance: Strategy to Save the Planet* (2011). Keith has been arrested six times for acts of political resistance. She shares land with giant trees and giant dogs.

Julia Long (UK) is a radical lesbian feminist activist and the author of *Anti-porn: The Resurgence of Anti-pornography Feminism* (2012). She has worked in teaching, local government and academia, and she now works with women who have experienced male violence.

Rachel Long (USA) is a feminist activist who has engaged in Facebook and Twitter feminism, including for her role as development manager at the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women.

Finn Mackay (UK) was a youth worker before setting up and managing domestic abuse prevention education and anti-bullying programmes in London. In 2004, Mackay set up the London Feminist Network and revived the London Reclaim the Night. A long-time activist, Mackay first got involved in feminism through the women's peace movement. Securing a PhD from the Centre for Gender and Violence Research at the University of Bristol, she then went to teach sociology at the University of the West of England, where she is a senior lecturer. She is the author of *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement* (2015) published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Sandra McNeill (UK) is a feminist activist who joined the WLM in 1975. She was involved in setting up East Leeds Women's Workshop, Women Against Violence Against Women, Justice for Women and Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds (Leeds Rape Crisis Centre). McNeill was part of organising the first UK Reclaim the Night marches, particularly in London; national and local conferences; feminist newsletters and many benefits—women-only dances and socials with women performers to raise money for feminist causes. She is now a trustee of Feminist Archive North.

Meghan Murphy (CA) is a freelance writer and journalist, and the founder and editor of Canada's leading feminist website, *Feminist Current*. She has been heavily involved in feminist discussions on social media, and she is known for going against the grain. Murphy is one of the only popular feminist bloggers to publicly articulate both a radical feminist and socialist position against the sex industry. She is also well known for her critiques of third-wave feminism, burlesque, self-objectification in selfies, gender identity politics and choice feminism. In November 2018,

Murphy was permanently banned from Twitter for discussing gender identity politics and women's sex-based rights.

Jenny Rankine (NZ) was born in Adelaide on Kaurna land, but became an activist only after she moved to Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1979. She came out as a lesbian that year and in the 1980s wrote and co-edited *Broadsheet*, the national feminist magazine. She later wrote for a long-term lesbian newsletter and website. She has organised programmes about sexual violence, working women's rights and a wide range of other feminist, lesbian and anti-racist issues. She holds a PhD on using anti-racist graphics to disrupt online racism against Māori.

Amy Richards (USA) is the president of Soapbox, Inc. and the founder of Feminist Camp. She is the author of *Manifesta: Young Women Feminism and the Future* (2000)*, Opting In: Having a Child Without Losing Yourself* (2008), and other works. She is a consulting producer on *MAKERS: Women Who Make America* and an executive producer of the Emmy-nominated *WOMAN*.

Caitlin Roper (AU) is a feminist activist and doctoral student at RMIT University in Melbourne, where she is researching female-bodied sex dolls and robots. She is the campaigns manager at Collective Shout, an organisation that works toward a world free from sexual exploitation. She is also the founding member and chair of Adopt Nordic Western Australia. Roper is a regular blogger at outlets such as the Huffington Post, and she is involved in social media feminism on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Kathy Scarborough (USA), like many girls, grew up angered by, and struggled individually against, the restrictions put on her. She was not yet in high school when Women's Liberation became widely known. In college, she chaired a student feminist group, began following Redstockings' work, and met Carol Hanisch and Kathie Sarachild after inviting them to speak. Scarborough was a member of Redstockings for a period in the early 1980s and became supportive of socialist/communist ideas through feminism. She participated in a couple of failed attempts to reignite the WLM in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Today, Scarborough co-edits (with Carol Hanisch) a 'blogzine' called *Meeting Ground Online* (meet-

inggroundonline.org/), and she is also a member of a group called Feminists in Struggle (feministstruggle.org/), which was formed in 2019. She is still supportive of Redstockings.

Chris Sitka   (AU) has been active in the WLM from 1973 on. As a theorist she wrote numerous articles for the various Women's Liberation and Lesbian Liberation movement newsletters, magazines and anthologies. She also produced and distributed many leaflets and political essays in the paper-only communication days. She has attended and presented at numerous conferences, meetings, 'ovulars', festivals and live-in camps over the decades. She is still an activist who is frustrated by the limitations of 'virtual' online activism and the resultant lack of an organised resistance to patriarchy. She prefers inspiring real-life connections between radical feminists.

A Fourth Wave or a Fool's Errand?

Social media has been celebrated for revolutionising protest: it is now quicker and easier to create petitions and collect signatures, share details of direct actions and upcoming meetings, and engage in political discourse across geographical borders. One of the lingering and often ignored questions in social movement scholarship, however, is what does the move to social media signify for revolutionary movements that were once characterised by the building of strong ties between activists in physical space? What happens to activist commitment and community-building when the medium used for organising no longer requires sustained face-to-face contact? And, in the case of women's liberation—a revolutionary social movement seeking to overthrow male dominance— what happens when the tool used for organising brings women into constant contact with men, the social group whose power they wish to dismantle?

In this book I examine the extent to which social media is, or is not, compatible with organising for women's liberation. In other words, I investigate the political significance of women's adoption of social media for feminist organising. Distinct from the static webpages of the early internet, social media platforms publish evanescent, user-generated

content and are driven by a logic of constant updating, speed and connectivity. The rise of social media as the dominant system of digital communication has unleashed an avalanche of celebratory rhetoric championing the new opportunities now available to feminists to challenge the social and political order. These narratives suggest that not only are we 'witnessing seismic shifts around the uptake of feminism' (Retallack et al. 2016, 86), but also that online feminism 'has exploded as the driving force of feminism' in the twenty-first century (Crossley 2017, 97). Scholars and activists who suggest that social media has fuelled a distinct fourth wave of feminism argue that Facebook, Twitter and blogs have reanimated the movement by enabling increasing numbers of women to 'share their stories and analysis, raise awareness and organize collective actions, and discuss difficult issues' across cultural, geographical and generational lines (Martin and Valenti 2012, 6). Social media has also been heralded as a unique tool for overcoming racial and class-based differences between women, with some scholars conceptualising Twitter as a platform 'amenable to intersectionality' that offers 'an unprecedented means for solidarity and activism' (Zimmerman 2017, 54)

I contend that the celebration of feminist success on social media is premature, from both an academic and an activist perspective. Whereas 'a male presence was unthinkable' within earlier forms of feminist organising (Brownmiller 1999, 8), the so-called fourth wave of feminism is taking place in publicly visible mixed-sex digital spaces hosted by multinational corporations. This represents a markedly different organising tactic from previous eras of feminism, where women created political theory in small, women-only consciousness-raising groups, and founded independent press houses to produce and circulate feminist materials outside of male control. Today, by contrast, many women appear to be relying on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter—globally dominant, capitalist, male-owned companies—to start the revolution.

Women's liberation provides a particularly interesting case study from which to investigate questions of (digital) space, social change and power. Firstly, this is because women are allowed very few autonomous spaces in male-dominated societies. Unlike race and class-based oppression, which often results in groups living in geographically segregated communities, sex-based oppression manifests and is maintained through women living

closely with men (Morris and Braine 2001, 29). Women are often in intimate relationships with their oppressor, and the institutions of heterosexuality and marriage encourage them to remain spatially separate from other women over the duration of their lives (Rich [1980] 1993). Historically, women's liberation was a movement based around the small group structure, where activists communicated face-to-face and via autonomous newsletters, and at local, regional and national conferences. Today, by contrast, feminist organising largely no longer exists in a physically tangible form, with most of the women's and lesbian spaces fought for by Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) activists having been eroded (Morris 2016). The rise of transgender activism—particularly its associated push for people who are biologically male to be included in feminist organising as women—has also made it increasingly difficult for women and lesbians to organise autonomously in bricks and mortar women-only spaces (Jeffreys 2014, 162–182; Morris 2016). Combined with this, women have all but lost feminist bookstores and women's centres in cities across Western democracies (Delap 2016), and the consciousness-raising group, the lynchpin of organisation and mobilisation in the WLM, has also largely gone out of fashion (Hanisch 2010; Firth and Robinson 2016).

Another reason that women's liberation provides an interesting case study for investigating the revolutionary political possibilities of digital space is because it is an enormous task for women to come to consciousness of their own oppression when the perspective of their oppressor—men—constitutes social reality. Several scholars have exposed and critiqued the totalising effects of male dominance on women's lives, describing how 'the struggle for consciousness is a struggle for world' (Mackinnon 1989, 115). Catharine Mackinnon (1989, 114), for example, has articulated how women's social reality has been completely defined by male-centric ideology:

> The perspective from the male standpoint enforces women's definition, encircles her body, circumlocutes her speech, and describes her life. The male perspective is systemic and hegemonic.

Because the 'conceptual categories required to challenge the status quo hardly exist' for women (Mansbridge 2001, 4), male power is a particularly pernicious form of domination to contend with.

In this book, I consider whether social media is an aid or an obstacle to politically organising for women's liberation. Specifically, I aim to answer the central research question of whether using social media for feminist communication can revive the WLM. By asking this question, I do not mean to imply that the WLM ever completely disappeared. For this reason, I use the terminology *reignite* or *revive* the WLM, instead of *create a new WLM.* A revived WLM would necessarily look different today, because women have learned considerable political lessons since the 1970s and 1980s. Women are also now working in a different cultural and political context, which means that the tactics and strategies of WLM organising cannot be simply transposed to the contemporary landscape. Nonetheless, important insights pertaining to feminist theory and practice were also learned in the WLM. The WLM cannot simply be recreated as it was, but nor would it be politically efficacious for women to begin again from scratch. Alongside the central research question, I also seek to address three principal subsidiary questions: (1) How is feminist organising shaped by diverse technological, temporal and spatial contexts? (2) How does male power operate across media contexts and what does this mean for women's liberation? And (3) what sort of analyses, critiques and perceptions of social media feminism are held by feminist activists, both with and without experience of WLM organising?

The language of women's liberation is aligned with the type of feminism that social movement scholar Nancy Whittier (2006, 46) called 'grassroots feminism', WLM activist and scholar Jo Freeman (1973, 796; 1975, 222) called the 'younger branch' and legal scholar Catharine Mackinnon (1989, 117) called 'feminism unmodified'. Most commonly, this form of feminism is referred to as 'radical feminism' by academics and activists. While the WLM produced other distinct ideological strands (such as socialist feminism), this book is centred upon the radical feminist strand. Radical feminist theory emerged out of the WLM, and radical feminist activism and scholarship has continued since its decline in the late 1980s, albeit in a persecuted and much less visible form. As Nancy Whittier (1995, 5) has explained, 'the survival of radical feminism

has been largely invisible to scholars precisely because the movement has never had a centralized or national organization but is based in grassroots, loosely organized groups'.

The experiences of radical feminist activists on social media have not yet been specifically considered in academic literature, and there is also little scholarship which considers male dominance as an analytical category shaping digital protest outcomes. In other words, digital social movement scholarship has failed to take patriarchy seriously. Analyses of online feminist organising have proliferated in recent years, but this work has so far fallen into the category of what Renate Klein (1983, 90) has called 'research on women rather than research for women'. This body of literature investigates *how* women are using social media for feminist organising, but it has so far said very little about whether it is an effective tool for advancing the political project of women's liberation. There is little research which critically analyses how digital organising ties feminist strategies to marketing and media logic (Mendes 2017 is a notable exception), for example, or considers how the presence of men in the social media environment constrains activists' ability to cast aside the demands of stereotypical feminine behaviour, such as being appeasing, polite, and sexually attractive to men. Contemporary research on digital protest movements has also tended to be ahistorical, advancing 'a celebratory embrace of current movement practice' (Funke et al. 2017, 5). Such an approach is politically insidious for women because it fails to consider how social media and technological development shapes women's subordination more broadly, beyond their digital engagements.

Throughout this book, I aim to contribute to scholarly and activist understandings of why feminist efforts on social media have not resulted in the revival of a feminist movement which is in any way comparable to the WLM. I offer a radical feminist analysis of women's use of social media to try to bring about social change, and I argue that celebrating women's use of social media for feminist organising makes little sense, from either an academic or an activist point of view, unless claims are historically situated in terms of previous movement successes and challenges. My approach responds to recent calls for scholars to engage in 'longitudinal and comparative analyses' to better understand 'how contemporary feminism persists and is transformed in "new publics" and

through new political opportunities online' (Hurwitz 2017, 477). My decision to study earlier iterations of feminism is also intended as a political endeavour undertaken to help activists 'survive the now' (Taylor and Rupp 1991, 127) via the creation of 'movement-relevant theory' (Bevington and Dixon 2005). Despite the strong tradition in radical feminist scholarship of critiquing male social institutions and exposing how they perpetuate women's oppression, radical feminist scholars have not yet addressed the question of whether social media assists women in organising for their liberation from male dominance, or whether it perpetuates patriarchal oppression in a new guise.

The Women's Liberation Movement

Also commonly called second-wave feminism, the WLM emerged in the late 1960s across developed Western democracies such as the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Born out of the radical climate of other Leftist movements such as the civil rights and anti-war movements (Rowland 1984, 4), and extraordinary in its size and scale, the WLM represents 'one of the most renowned aspects of women's political history' (Browne 2014, 1). Within ten years, activists produced groundbreaking theoretical papers, staged imaginative direct action protests and transformed social understandings of issues of male violence such as rape, incest, sexual harassment and pornography (Whittier 2006, 48–49). In 'the breadth of its concerns and the depth of its critiques' (Jaggar [1983] 1988, 4), the WLM far surpassed earlier versions of organised feminism. It was during the WLM that activists first recognised the scope of male supremacy, placed women at the centre of their political analysis, began to imagine what women could be outside of male control and made material changes in their personal lives. For example, many women across the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand abandoned beauty practices and other traditional requirements of femininity (Whittier 1995, 141), left their boyfriends or husbands and chose to become lesbians (Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, 52–53; Whittier 2006, 48), lived in all-women households or squats (Grahn 2009; Wall 2017) and engaged in various forms of separatism from men (Hoagland and Penelope 1988).

The process of consciousness-raising was pivotal to the growth of the WLM. As prominent WLM activist and scholar Susan Brownmiller (1999, 80) noted in her memoir:

> In New York City during the late sixties and early seventies, nothing was more exciting, or more intellectually stimulating, than to sit in a room with a bunch of women who were working to uncover their collective truths.

Through consciousness-raising, women discovered both 'self and sisterhood' (Miriam 1998, 204); they began to realise that the male perspective was not objective fact. In talking to each other about their lives, they recognised how the dominant ideology—as promoted by governments, institutions, individual men *and* other women—operates to obfuscate women's problems, often by positioning their social situation as the result of individual failures instead of systemic oppression. Consciousness-raising showed women that they were oppressed by men, and that this lived reality could be changed via collective mobilisation. Australian activist Chris Sitka expressed this sentiment in her interview when she said: 'as long as women come to consciousness of how oppressed they are, they are looking for a solution'.

WLM activists aimed to identify and oppose male dominance in all its forms and spark a revolution which would fundamentally transform women's lives. As Australian women's studies professor Susan Magarey (2015, 381) has explained, although WLM activism did see women enter formal organisations and participate in traditional political processes such as lobbying governments, its characterising feature was its revolutionary, rather than reformist, aims:

> The distinguishing feature of Women's Liberation—distinguishing these new and anarchistic gatherings of women from traditional women's organisations, and from the more reformist or special interest women's organisations that grew out of Women's Liberation—was Women's Liberation's commitment to the total transformation of the whole society, indeed of all societies.

Because of its unique revolutionary properties, studying the WLM requires scholars to explode the category of the political as it is usually conceived, and look at social movements 'in a new way' (Whittier 1995, 22). Mainstream heteropatriarchal understandings of political activism, for example, too frequently ignore the revolutionary significance of separatist practices and community-building activities that take place out of public view (Trebilcot, cited in Hoagland 1988, 7).

One of the aims of this book is to contribute to recent scholarship that has re-centralised lesbian feminism as a key pillar of the WLM (Jeffreys 2018; Morris 2016). Based upon their analysis of heterosexuality as a social and political institution that upholds male dominance, many activists in the WLM decided to live as lesbians in order to, quite literally, separate themselves from men. The refusal to accept men, both as intimate partners and in feminist organising groups, was theorised as a positive and generative act that could enable the development of new political possibilities for women. In this way, the development of lesbian feminism was a crucial driving force behind the revolutionary pursuits of the WLM. Alongside more commonly studied endeavours such as the dismantling of patriarchal social institutions, lesbian feminist activists in the WLM were engaged in building separatist, women-only feminist communities, developing an oppositional women's culture, and creating a new feminist ethic of engagement between women (Whittier 1995, 21). Despite the political significance of these pursuits, such revolutionary aspects of the WLM are often ignored by scholars, or else cast as anachronistic concerns of a bygone era (Hemmings 2010).

Whereas the WLM focussed on materially challenging oppressive power structures based upon the collective experiences of women under male dominance, what is called feminism today is often based upon an individualised form of politics (Firth and Robinson 2016; Fraser 2000). According to Miranda Kiraly and Meagan Tyler (2015, xi), this individualism is representative of a new feminist orthodoxy which 'champions the benefits of [individual] choice' and which they have defined as:

> [The recasting] of women's liberation as an individual or private struggle, rather than one which acknowledges the systemic shortcomings of existing systems of power and privilege that continue to hold women back, as a class.

Compared with the collective ethos at the heart of the WLM, radical feminist scholars have argued that the competitive neoliberal ideology underwriting the kind of feminism that came to prominence after the decline of the WLM divides women and 'has permeated feminist thought to such an extent that it undermines the potential radicalism of feminist struggle' (hooks [1984] 2015, 9).

In combination with the individualisation of feminist concerns, the 1980s also saw a theoretical shift in the academy. The rise of postmodernism paved the way for an 'oversimplification' of radical feminist theory by scholars who preferred to speak of 'deconstruction, hybridity and identity' and positioned the concerns of the WLM as 'partial' and passé (Sangster 2015, 400, see also Hemmings 2010). From the 1990s onwards, the dominance of queer theory has additionally rendered any explicit acknowledgement of the analytical categories central to radical feminism such as 'patriarchy, male dominance or male power […] theoretically unviable' (McRobbie 2015, 17). Today, the core concepts of radical feminism are still utilised by scholars across disciplines, but radical feminist theory itself is often caricatured and 'left for dead', buried beneath linear narratives of feminist progress (Duriesmith and Meger 2020, 357). In the case of contemporary digital cultures scholarship, both radical and lesbian feminism are frequently demonised (see Phipps 2016; Zimmerman 2017). In the next chapter, I will expand on this discussion, and I will also provide an overview of some of the key tenets of radical and lesbian feminist theory that make it particularly suitable for an analysis of how male dominance shapes digital feminist outcomes.

In the years since the decline of the WLM in the late 1980s, the language of women's liberation has largely dropped out of academic discourse. Instead of women's liberation, academics now more commonly speak of feminism as a broad umbrella movement comprising multiple political perspectives described as, for example, radical, liberal, postmodern, intersectional or queer feminism. It is also now common to see scholars individualise their political position, referring to 'my feminism' or 'our feminism' without attempting to situate their views in relation to a wider framework. In this book, I contend that the terms *feminism* and *the feminist movement* have a specific meaning. They denote the political and ethical project which aims to identify and expose male dominance in

all its forms, construct a feminist alternative to the current social order and liberate women from male control (Mackinnon 1989; Miriam 1998; Rich 1976; Thompson 2001). Radical feminist theorist Denise Thompson (2001, 2) has conveyed this simply as 'women defending their own interests in the face of male supremacy'.

Revolution or Social Control? The Shifting Terrain of Social Media Scholarship

When I first began research for this book, scholarly work theorising the link between social media and social change was largely celebratory. The Arab Spring uprising and the emergence of Occupy Wall Street protests across major global cities saw scholars championing social media as a new and exciting democratic tool for facilitating collective mobilisations (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Castells 2012; Shirkey 2008). Yet the grandiose revolutionary fever that characterised early analyses of social media 'died down in just a few short years' as commentators and scholars watched the so-called 'Egyptian revolution [lead] to something worse— the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood' (Nagle 2017, 11). The current academic climate is much more cautionary and pessimistic about the role social media might play in political revolution. There is now an increasing recognition that social media is not politically neutral, and that it is instead underwritten by an ideology which advances the logics of imperialism and capitalist alienation.

Recent critical internet scholarship has drawn attention to digital power relations, and it has also highlighted how state and corporate surveillance is structuring digital political activism (Fuchs 2017; Lovink 2016). Instead of being emancipatory and revolutionary, these scholars suggest that social media can more accurately be characterised as a tool of social control. Despite the political Left's continuing enthusiasm for digital networking technologies—based upon the idea that they altruistically 'give ordinary people a way to organize themselves democratically outside the state'—this claim still remains couched in potential, rather than evidence (Greenfield 2018, 180). Key architectural differences aside (such as

more publicly or privately geared interfaces), social media companies all operate on similar principles of 'popularity, hierarchical ranking, quick growth, large traffic volumes, fast turnovers and personalised recommendations' (van Dijck 2013, n.p). Digital networking platforms have also all so far advanced a largely hands-off approach to community regulation, where the rhetoric of freedom disguises their manifestly corporate interests (Herrman 2017).

Early celebratory claims were often underwritten by a conceptualisation of digital space as a revitalised public sphere where the traditional barriers to political participation had been alleviated. From this point of view, democracy itself had become networked, with the open and collaborative features of social media enabling citizens to bypass hierarchies and amplify their voices more easily than was possible using print-based media. Taking the form of many-to-many rather than one-to-many communication, social media was seen to offer unprecedented opportunities for activists to connect directly and instantly with other citizens and diverse audiences (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; van Dijck 2012). For this reason, social media has been distinguished from traditional media based upon its participatory or *social* properties. This claim, however, is also highly contestable. As communication scholar Heidi Herzogenrath-Amelung (2016, 1086) has explained, 'the term "social media" is in itself deeply ideological in that it claims certain inherently positive qualities—user-centred community-building—for these media that it denies to older media forms'.

As I will argue throughout this book, getting rid of hierarchies within feminism is dependent upon the political commitment of activists (see Dean 2019, 329), it is not a task that can be outsourced to corporate multinationals. Some social movement scholars state that social media has 'offered a more widely accessible and transparent venue than face-to-face conferences for feminists to debate the meanings of feminism and discuss internal conflicts' (Hurwitz 2017, 477). Yet access to a space does not mandate the equal inclusion of all participants (Goodin 1996). Such a reading also ignores how digital feminism still restricts access to women who are digitally literate, can afford the cost of an internet-connected computer or smartphone, have the free time to participate and are

politically willing to create an account. As interviewee Anne Billows explained, using social media:

> Requires good internet and requires good writing skills and it requires being able to learn the various internet platforms quickly … as a tool for making feminism accessible, [social media] makes feminism accessible to certain women.

Not all women are heard equally on social media, and those who are most listened to and promoted via sharing and liking functionalities are likely to be women who obey platform norms and present as white, middle class, able-bodied and heterosexual. As recent critical scholarship attests, the claim that social media facilitates intersectionality by making space for diverse voices within feminism is especially circumspect when considering how search engines and algorithms are implicitly biased (Greenfield 2018), often actively discriminating against women of colour (Daniels 2009; Noble 2018). Rianka Singh and Sarah Sharma (2019, 303) have also recently argued that 'the very structure of platform feminism straightens and whitens' the activist landscape because 'rising up' is 'the dominant spatial tactic' available to women in digital space. Insidiously, this normative drive to speak up—or occupy space—on digital platforms now 'takes up more room than the quieter collective and communal forms of resistance' in feminist imaginaries (Singh and Sharma 2019, 303), and functions to foreclose alternatives. As I will discuss in more detail throughout this book, my interviewees contested the idea that digital platforms offer a more egalitarian space for communication than face-to-face discussions or print-based media.

Considered in a more critical way, the emancipatory and celebratory rhetoric that continues to be employed by social movement scholars in relation to digital feminist activism begins to appear increasingly naïve. Suggesting that women's use of social media platforms for feminist organising reflects their 'innovation' and 'creativity' (Crossley 2017, 115; Mendes et al. 2019, 2) fails to consider how digital space promotes a vision of feminist politics based around assimilation to male systems and their normative demands. It is imperative that social movement scholars investigate the political economy of digital feminist activism, as there is

economic value in both the abuse of women on social media and the circulation of feminist materials (Banet-Weiser 2018). Feminists using social media are complicit in producing the data that is being monetised by platforms, profits that Silicon Valley executives are now investing in the development of robotics and artificial intelligence technologies (Heffernan 2019), both masculinist projects geared towards the development of a posthuman technological future (Bassett et al. 2020). It is also necessary to interrogate whether women's use of social media for feminist organising fuels, rather than challenges, the contemporary neoliberal social structure. Perhaps social media offers women a particular version of engineered connectivity, one that is suited to time-poor individuals, who, in the face of market deregulation and the rolling back of the welfare state, have been increasingly subjected to the ideology that success is an individual responsibility (Springer et al. 2016). As some scholars have recently argued, women might be 'densley connected today […] through business networks and social media', but it is also important to consider how these networks further promote 'alienating forms of semi-coerced, performative connectedness' (Firth and Robinson 2016, 347), and what this might mean for feminism.

Politics, (Digital) Space and Women

The move to organising in mixed-sex digital space should also warrant considerable critical attention from feminist scholars, especially given that the success of WLM organising has been traced to both the regular coming together of women in physical space (Mansbridge and Morris 2001; Whittier 1995), and the use of autonomous communication networks (Freeman 1973, 794). As I have already gestured to, social media is not merely a communication tool: as a social, cultural and political phenomenon (boyd 2015), it also structures spatial relations between individuals. Against the backdrop of a wider academic context in which globalisation and the development of digital technologies have shifted scholarly focus from space and structure to flows and networks, the question of whether 'co-presence is really necessary in the internet age' (Kohn 2003, 163) has been largely absent from considerations of feminist

activism on social media. This is a significant gap in research, because space, and access to space, is political, particularly in the context of contentious politics (Harvey 2012; Kohn 2003; Tilly 2000). Access to space is also gendered, with men being able to move through spaces and places more freely and authoritatively than women (Massey 1994). For liberation movements seeking to overthrow systems of domination, autonomous spaces of resistance are especially crucial, because they provide a 'free space' (Allen 1970) in which historically marginalised groups can develop a consciousness of their oppression and begin to formulate oppositional ideas (Mansbridge and Morris 2001).

In the drive to celebrate, make visible and claim as political the actions of feminists online, feminist social movement scholars have so far paid little attention to investigating the trade-offs or limitations of the shift to digital organising. The use of social media technologies for feminist organising now often *replaces* face-to-face organising and communication between feminists in physical spaces (Hurwitz 2017). From a spatial perspective, then, activist experience in the WLM appears in direct opposition to the 'virtual proximity' (Bauman 2003) that characterises digital organising. Scholars have long recognised that all social relations are spatial relations (Giddens 1984; Lefebvre [1974] 1991) and that collective action has a spatial dynamic (Gerbaudo 2012; Nicholls et al. 2013). While there is a growing body of research charting the relationship between the development of the WLM and spatial location (Delap 2016; Enke 2007; Wall 2017), the question of whether physical space still matters in relation to women's liberation in the digital age reveals itself to be particularly pertinent.

In a social context where attachment to locality is increasingly precarious in the face of globalisation, my focus in this book on remaining attuned to the political effects of space and place may seem anachronistic (Kohn 2003, 160–165; Massey 1994, 146–147, 151). I argue, however, that networked social media technology is not detached from material reality: rather, women use it from a position of social subordination, and this position remains geographically located. As radical feminist scholar Susan Hawthorne argued in the 1990s, despite the much theorised 'time-space compression' (see Harvey 1989, 284; Massey 1994, 146) brought

about by globalisation and advancements in digital technology, women still participate digitally from *somewhere*:

> Cyberspace depends for its existence on real space, real time, real bodies. Without space/time/bodies the cyber is inconceivable. It is a metaphor— not a place. (Hawthorne 1999, 228)

From this vantage point, it becomes clear that the belief that the digital realm could iron out traditional social inequalities is based upon a conception of citizenship and political participation within the virtual network, rather than the state (Levina 2014). Portraying the digital network as 'an antidote to the hierarchal power structures of the state' (Levina 2014, 280) offers a bird's-eye view of social relations which both eclipses women's experiences and assumes men as the generic unit of analysis (Massey 1994). As influential critical geography scholar Doreen Massey (1994, 149) has explained:

> Different social groups, and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement.

In other words, access to the digital network, and the ability to both move and build a *move*-ment in a globalised and technologically advanced world, remains gendered. In this book, I remain analytically attuned to questions of space, place and power, and I question whether organising in physical or virtual space better serves a revolutionary feminist political project.

Over the last ten years, many scholars have suggested that it is no longer useful to think about digital space as separate from 'real life' physical spaces (Jordan 2009; Papacharissi 2010). Given that smartphones connect individuals ubiquitously to social media, some have also argued that the online/offline binary is now a false distinction in relation to feminist organising. The popular view currently posits that separating the online from the offline is analytically imperfect:

The [fourth] wave […] takes full advantage of both offline and online spaces and often moves from web-to-street, vice versa, and from web-to-street-back-to-web […] the trafficking of feminism between the online and the offline […] strongly suggests that separating the online from the offline is neither possible nor desirable. (Zimmerman 2017, 56)

This approach is understandable, especially given that experiences of violence on social media have both 'real life' and digital implications for women (Citron 2014; Megarry 2014). The daily activities of work, leisure, shopping and socialising also now occur concurrently both online and offline, blurring the boundaries between these spaces. In the context of this book, however, it is important for me to consider digital space and physical space as distinct realms that hold different political possibilities for women. This is because participating in a digital Facebook group whilst remaining physically in the private home, for example, is a very different phenomenon to participating in a movement by physically turning up to face-to-face meetings, protests and social events.

Another popular way of framing the shift to digital engagement is by conceptualising social media platforms as 'mediated publics' (boyd 2010b; van Dijck and Poell 2015, 1). The idea of women using a mediated space to engage in feminist organising raises an immediate issue for women's liberation: who is doing the mediating, and does this mediation better serve women or men? If, as boyd (2010a) contests, the digital walls have ears, then feminists are currently attempting to organise under the watchful eyes of men (Megarry 2018). The adoption of social media as a feminist communication tool is a significant development in the historical trajectory of women's political organising: it represents a marked shift from WLM tactics and motivations, as well as a rejection of the values of autonomous women-only organising. This shift goes largely unacknowledged in contemporary debates, where the use of social media for feminist communication is frequently presented as a benign choice divorced from wider political consequences.

Rejecting Network Thinking

For some scholars, social media technology is a clear indicator that social morphology has changed: we now live in a network society where flexible *placeless* networks are usurping formal hierarchies and creating unique opportunities for marginalised groups to challenge traditional power relationships (Castells 2012; Knox et al. 2006; Krinsky and Crossley 2014). In the network society, power is assumed to have been decentralised, even though governments and corporations continue to play central roles in controlling digital space. Manuel Castells (2012, 9–10), for example, has claimed that 'communicative autonomy is primarily constructed in internet networks and in the platforms of wireless communication' which 'offer the possibility for largely unfettered deliberation and coordination of action'.

When charting the presumed shift from centralised to decentralised power, it is common for scholars to advance the efficacy of network analysis to try to capture and analyse the fluid workings of the network society. This is particularly the case in work pertaining to social movements (Krinsky and Crossley 2014). I do not use network analysis methodology in this book because, from a radical feminist perspective, the claim that the current context denotes a new epoch requiring novel methodological approaches is particularly circumspect. Given the plethora of research that has documented men's abuse of women in digital space (Citron 2014; Jane 2017, Megarry 2014), it is unlikely that male dominance has gone away in 'the network society', although it is perhaps taking on new—and more extreme—forms. Formal social network analysis presents limited methodological value for feminist researchers. This is because the graphs, charts and diagrams it produces are unable to explain the more complex manifestations of social reality, such as gender (Knox et al. 2006). One of the basic assumptions of the early adopters of social network analysis was that it was possible to use a set of mathematical tools to precisely and comprehensively map social relations as a network of points and lines, where points represent people (nodes) and lines denote the connections (ties) between them (Wasserman and Faust 1994).

Network analysis as a method (Tindall and Wellman 2001; Wasserman and Faust 1994), and the idea of the network society as a social structure (Castells 1996), both contain inbuilt masculinist assumptions about the contemporary social world, such as the idea that a bird's eye view of a social network represents an objective vantage point. Network analysis facilitates an investigation of power dynamics between individuals, but it is less useful for advancing an analysis of power dynamics between social groups (Scott and Carrington 2011, 6). It therefore does not provide adequate tools to conceptualise the manifestations of male dominance in digital space, or to assist in illuminating women's collective experiences of oppression. To give an example: Manuel Castells (2012) used a social network analysis perspective to investigate the organisational structure of Occupy Wall Street, and he concluded that the protest was both leaderless and horizontally structured. This demonstrates how the network analysis perspective determines the questions researchers are able to ask, and how even scholars invoking only the concept of the network can become preoccupied with highlighting individual examples of digital agency instead of exposing sites of domination and control (Otis 2001). By contrast, when Megan Boler et al. (2014) used semi-structured interviews to specifically analyse women's experiences of Occupy Wall Street, the research team found that women's roles were removed from the centre of decision-making power and that female activists remained subordinate to men. Power relations between women and men were obscured by the distanced, top-down perspective that network analysis provides, and in Castells' analysis, the Occupy protests were seen as inclusive of women merely because they were present in the activist network (Boler et al. 2014). Boler et al.'s insight that the organising structure of Occupy mimicked traditional gendered hierarchies highlights the necessity of continuing to talk to women to unmask instances of male dominance in digital space. Other feminist scholars such as Anita Gurumurthy (2011) and Caroline Bassett, Sarah Kember and Kate O'Riordan (2020) have made similar claims, challenging feminists to take up a more critical engagement with network theories. Others have highlighted the potential dangers for women of the widespread adoption of network thinking and Big Data analytics within the social sciences (see boyd and Crawford 2012).

Feminist scholars have so far appeared reluctant to propose a structural approach to studying women and the digital realm. Some have claimed that 'the Internet, as a single sociotechnical system, is much too big and complex to be thought of as feminist or nonfeminist' (Johnson 2010, 51). From this perspective, how a scholar views the effects of social media on women depends on which subsystem of online life they consider. This book is different in that it aims to theorise how social media shapes contemporary feminist mobilisations and relationships between women, from a structural perspective. Social media platforms and patterns of digital communication develop at great speed, which can place critical theory scholars on the back foot, and obscure general trends (Lovink 2011, 65; Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 62). While I pay careful attention to the different architectures of blogs, Twitter and Facebook in this book, I also believe that it is more useful for theorists to advance an analysis of social media as a cohesive institution, rather than to emphasise the differences between platforms and their various functionalities (see boyd 2015). This is analytically important, because adopting a structural analysis of how social media functions as a social and political institution allows me to consider the different political opportunities that it affords to men and women as distinct social groups. Online, power is seen as 'omnipresent but impossible to pin down' (Stalder 2006, 203), which can produce an obsession with trying to chart the 'messiness' of women's online connections (Keller 2012, 433). From a women's liberation perspective, it is important to ask whom this type of knowledge creation is benefiting, and to consider whether such scholarship reinforces male dominance.

Development of the Project

To answer the central research question of whether social media can revive the WLM, I interviewed 26 feminist activists living in the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, all with varying experiences of feminist activism spanning from the 1960s to the present day. The scope of this research is thus restricted to English-speaking Western democracies that have been highlighted as important sites of WLM

mobilisation. Two distinct cohorts of women were interviewed: the first group has experience of both WLM and social media organising, and the second group has only been involved in digital feminist activism. I wanted to interview women who had participated in the WLM and were also familiar with feminist organising practices on social media, women who could reflect from first-hand experience on the political efficacy of both strategies. The second group of women I wanted to interview were younger feminists without experience of WLM organising. I hypothesised that younger women—as digital natives—might be more likely to have richer experiences of using Twitter, Facebook and blogs to their full capacity. Interviewing two cohorts of activists enabled me to trace any evidence of ideological continuity between older and younger feminists. Interviewing intergenerational feminists also enabled me to critically investigate recent claims that older women's rejection of digital technologies is based upon generational misunderstandings (Schuster 2017, 22–23), or that opposition to digital organising strategies might be derived from the impoverished technological capabilities of older women (Fotopoulou 2016, 995).

I interviewed 26 women between January 2016 and June 2016. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours and were mainly conducted face-to-face in interviewees' hometowns. While I endeavoured to visit every interviewee in person, this was not always feasible due to financial constraints. Two women were interviewed via Skype, and one interview was completed over the phone when I returned to Australia. Due to last minute opportunities that arose on the research trip, three interviews also became group interviews. The final data set is comprised of interviews with nine women living in the USA, nine women living in the UK, five women living in Australia, two women living in Canada and one woman living in New Zealand. Of the total 26 women interviewed, 11 were active in the WLM.

I also collected historical WLM activist materials (including newsletters, conference proceedings, meeting minutes, pamphlets and personal communications), and these documents were analysed in comparison with digital activist materials sampled from social media platforms. I drew on examples discussed in interviews to focus my analysis of the digital and archival data, and some interviewees also provided me with

documents from their personal records. My analysis of digital activist materials is limited to Facebook, Twitter and blogging platforms because existing literature theorised these as the most useful digital spaces for feminism (Crossley 2017; Keller 2012; Zimmerman 2017). To access historical feminist materials, I visited archives such as the Underground Newspaper Microfilm Collection at the University of California (Berkeley), the Women's Library at the London School of Economics, Feminist Archive North at the University of Leeds, the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives at the University of Melbourne, and the Broadsheet Collective Archives at Auckland City Libraries.

My multi-method research design was useful for two primary reasons: it allowed me to 'significantly increase […] the amount of detail' I brought to my analysis (Maddison and Shaw 2012, 425), and it also facilitated more robust insights through the checking 'back and forth' between data sets (Reinharz 1992, 148). It is often claimed that older women tend to romanticise the WLM, and that this sentiment 'has tended to shape narratives' (Browne 2014, 5) that position contemporary (digital) feminism as lacking. Throughout the research process, I was careful to remain analytically attuned to the tendency of WLM activists to glorify earlier organising strategies. The use of multiple research methods also helped to alleviate this issue, because it allowed me to compare the individual accounts of WLM activists with the documentary evidence that I collected in feminist archives. Similarly, interview data pertaining to women's perceptions of digital organising strategies could be substantiated through my analysis of Facebook, Twitter and blogging platforms.

My personal activist experiences have also contributed to shaping how I have analysed and interpreted the data. Feminist scholars of social movements face numerous methodological and ethical challenges, particularly when they are also activists themselves (see Long 2012, 8–9; Roseneil 1995, 7–13; Shaw 2013, 91; Taylor and Rupp 1996, 150). Having been involved in feminist organising for over ten years, I cannot claim the position of 'neutral observer' that is traditionally valued in social science research. Instead, I have chosen to embrace my position as a scholar-activist, because, as Denise Thompson (1990, 5–6) has explained:

[Theory] starts from, and is structured and informed by, a moral and political standpoint. i.e theory involves taking a stand in relation to power-as-domination and in relation to questions of what ought and ought not to be so. This is not an insight which would be acknowledged within most "malestream" theories of the "human sciences", which tend, rather, to insist on their own objectivity and disinterestedness, and to assert or assume that the truths they uncover have universal relevance.

According to Thompson, the process of theory-building always implicitly advances *someone's* interests, and it is a scholar's choice as to whether their work aligns with the interests of dominant or subordinate groups.

In the chapters that follow, I do not attempt to make claims regarding the representativeness of women's experiences of feminist organising during the WLM, or on social media. Rather, my study has been designed to provide an illustrative sample. It would not be feasible to construct research that could be considered representative of all feminist experiences of the WLM and digital feminist organising across the countries under consideration. One reason for this is that both the WLM and contemporary radical feminism contain several distinct ideological factions. Another reason is that developments in internet technologies have resulted in feminist activism becoming less geographically bound (Maddison and Shaw 2012, 422). Hashtags, blogs and Facebook pages allow anyone with an internet connection to participate in digital feminism: developments in digital communication have therefore obfuscated the possibility of focussing clearly on one country or directly comparing between two or more nations. I aimed to gather data that could 'provide a flavour' (Mason 2002, 126) of the attitudes and experiences of radical feminist activists in relation to digital feminist organising. I acknowledge upfront that my final interview sample is weighted towards the perceptions of white women and is therefore partial. It is also weighted towards the organising experiences of women living in urban centres. When interviewees highlighted race or geography as significant factors determining the political efficacy of particular organising tactics and strategies, I have drawn attention to this throughout the book.

When designing this research, I initially aimed to interview women who self-identified as any kind of feminist. My thinking was that,

although radical feminist women would likely face specific challenges using social media, women who self-identify as queer or intersectional feminists would also have important things to say regarding the challenges of being a digital activist. I hypothesised that being able to compare the experiences of activists from diverse ideological backgrounds would make for a particularly robust account of how the use of social media is shaping feminist activist practices and impacting upon which kinds of feminism are able to thrive in the digital environment. Despite this initial intention, all bar one of the positive responses to requests for interview came from women who were ideologically aligned in some way with radical feminism. One simple reason for why it was more difficult to gain interview access to activists who do not identify as radical feminists might be because, stemming from the demonisation of radical feminism in both academic circles and the wider culture at large, some women may not have wanted to participate in research being conducted by a radical feminist. At the time of interview, a quick Google of my name would have clearly signalled my own political inclinations. The radical feminist women interviewed for this project all viewed themselves as accountable to a collective constituency of women, and this might also go some way to explaining why they were enthusiastic to contribute to this project. Sharing their thoughts on digital feminist organising was perhaps seen as a way for them to contribute to shaping future activist directions.[1]

Interviewee Referencing System

So that readers can easily delineate between the two cohorts of interviewees, women with experiences in the WLM are referenced throughout this book using the acronym 'WLM', followed by their geographical location. For example, Australian activist Susan Hawthorne, who first got involved

---

[1] Contacting women for interview was further complicated because of the prevalence of the use of pseudonyms amongst digital activists. As I will discuss further in Chap. 6, digital anonymity creates an additional barrier to establishing trust between activists today. On several occasions, I wanted to interview the author of a certain blog, but finding out her real name, where she was located and how to contact her and establish myself as trustworthy was challenging. Many radical feminist activists adopt a pseudonym online and prefer not to engage with feminists from outside their trusted circles because they fear harassment, doxing and damage to their careers.

in the WLM as a university student in Melbourne, is referenced as (Susan Hawthorne WLM, AU). Activists without experiences of WLM organising are referred to as digital natives, using the acronym 'DN'. For example, London-based activist Tiger Drummond is referenced as (Tiger Drummond DN, UK).[2] Digital natives are people who have grown up with digital technologies all their lives. They are therefore more likely to have developed advanced technological skills than those that came of age in the time of print-based media (Prensky 2001; Tapscott 1997). The term 'digital native' is analytically imperfect in the context of this book, but I adopt it to clearly signal to the reader which interview respondents *were not* politically active in the WLM. The category of interviewees that I am referring to as digital natives encompasses a wide age range of women. For example, at the time of interview in 2016, Tiger Drummond was 19, whilst other women I have characterised as digital natives were aged in their 40s. Women such as Hilla Kerner, who was born in 1970, could perhaps be more accurately described as a member of what lesbian feminist scholar Bonnie Morris (2016, 5) has called 'the middle-timers'. Referring to her own experiences of feminist organising, Morris (2016, 5) has said:

> I'm part of a bridge generation. A child of the radical 1960s and a teen in the feminist 1970s, I walked right out of adolescence and onto the strong pathways laid down by my older-cohorts in second wave feminism and Gay Liberation. The uprising initiated by older baby-boomers allowed me, and my peers, to take women's studies courses and line up for terrific lesbian concerts well before we turned eighteen and/or entered college.

Small differences in age can make a large difference to the feminist organising climate that women are first exposed to. Born just six years earlier than Kerner in 1964, Lierre Keith (WLM, USA), for example, just caught the tail end of the WLM as a teenager. Keith, therefore, is referenced as a

---

[2] Many women interviewed have relocated—both domestically and internationally, and between urban and regional places—throughout their lives as activists. For example, Sheila Jeffreys moved to Australia from the UK in the early 1990s, and she remained there for over 20 years. The location assigned to women in the referencing system refers to where they were living at the time of our interview.

member of the WLM cohort in the book. Kerner, conversely, did not get involved in feminist organising until she volunteered at a Rape Crisis Centre in 1996 in Israel, at 26 years of age. Given that the decline of the WLM began in the 1980s, I have characterised Kerner as a member of the digital natives cohort, even though her experiences in Rape Crisis were directly informed by the politics of the WLM.

Overview of Book

This chapter has introduced the reader to the central tension at the heart of this book: that the positioning of social media as an apolitical feminist communication tool obfuscates an analysis of how the technology is shaping women's oppression, as well as the practices and politics of contemporary feminism. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of the key tenets of radical feminist theory. I then critically analyse the ways in which feminist scholars have theorised the relationship between technology and women's liberation thus far, and I further interrogate the claim that feminism is now in a fourth wave. While radical feminist scholars have advanced a strong critique of reproductive technology, very little work has considered what digital technology means for women from a radical feminist perspective. Social movement scholars that have been at the forefront of research pertaining to the use of social media for feminist activism have also often failed to analyse the manifestations of male power in digital space. Chapter 2 argues that the failure to seriously consider how male power operates on social media has produced interdisciplinary scholarship which is prematurely and unjustifiably celebratory about the revolutionary potential of digital space for feminism.

Chapter 3 provides a historical reference point for the subsequent chapters of the book, where I specifically consider the political significance of feminists' adoption of social media. In Chap. 3, I outline the key features of the WLM across the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada and NZ, and I analyse how the communication strategies used by activists facilitated the growth of the movement. I argue that spatial location was a crucial driving factor of the WLM. I set out how the WLM enabled activists to move towards each other, and away from men. Highlighting

the importance of physical proximity between activists to movement growth, I also demonstrate how women-only physical spaces such as women's centres, feminist bookstores, squats and regular women's social events provided a fundamental foundation for activism and movement-building that enabled activists to prefigure a feminist revolution.

Chapter 4 charts how male subjectivity is inescapable for feminists on social media, and it highlights how this raises new challenges for women's autonomous political organising. In this chapter, I argue that, despite the various tactics adopted by activists to try to create women-only spaces online and keep themselves safe from male violence, the use of social media has made feminists and feminism increasingly vulnerable to male interference and male surveillance practices, at both the platform and the user level. In comparison to face-to-face and print-based organising, I explore how digital space increases men's access to women, offering them new opportunities to intervene in feminist debates, locate and watch feminist activity, and harass individual activists.

Chapter 5 investigates the political efficacy of using social media to try to raise women's consciousness, develop feminist theory and provide a space for theory-building and activism to co-exist. The chapter first offers a critical analysis of how the intellectual process of the WLM enabled activists to maintain a strong link between theory and practice. I then outline a feminist politics of time, and chart how the temporal logic of social media, alongside the emphasis on personal expression and the individualist ideology embedded in the technological design, disrupts the feminist intellectual process developed in the WLM. I argue that feminist organising demands stability and time. Compared with the face-to-face and print-based culture of the WLM, social media spaces severely impede women's ability to collectively build theory, strategise for future actions and retain a historical record of feminist ideas.

During the WLM, activists were engaged in the crucial radical task of trying to prefigure a new, feminist ethic of engagement based upon collectivity. In Chap. 6, I critically analyse how platforms shape relationship-building between women. Drawing specifically on the work of lesbian feminist philosophers who have theorised female friendship and bonding outside of male control as crucial to feminist revolution, this chapter argues that communication between women on social media is often

combative and unaccountable, and does not alleviate hierarchies and further the development of sisterhood in ways that are useful to movement-building. Instead of providing a space conducive to the development of new forms of engagement between women, social media forces feminists to work within a male infrastructure and pursue a male ethic of engagement based upon antagonism, individualism, mistrust and hero-worship. The final chapter of the book, "Female Performers on a Male Stage", calls for feminists to reject social media and return to earlier forms of revolutionary feminist praxis.

References

Allen, Pamela. 1970. *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*. New York: Times Change Press.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2018. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Bassett, Caroline, Sarah Kember, and Kate O'Riordan. 2020. *Furious: Technological Feminism and Digital Futures*. London: Pluto Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2003. *Liquid Love*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bennett, W. Lance, and Alexandra Segerberg. 2013. *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bevington, Douglas, and Chris Dixon. 2005. Movement-Relevant Theory: Rethinking Social Movement Scholarship and Activism. *Social Movement Studies* 4 (3): 185–208.

Boler, Megan, Averie Macdonald, Christina Nitsou, and Anne Harris. 2014. Connective Labor and Social Media: Women's Roles in the 'Leaderless' Occupy Movement. *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 20 (4): 438–460.

boyd, danah. 2010a. Privacy, Publicity, and Visibility. Microsoft Tech Fest, Redmond. http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/2010/TechFest2010.html.

———. 2010b. Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications. In *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, ed. Zizi Papacharissi, 39–58. New York: Routledge.

———. 2015. Social Media: A Phenomenon to be Analyzed. *Social Media + Society* 1 (1): 1–2.

boyd, danah, and Kate Crawford. 2012. Critical Questions for Big Data. *Information, Communication and Society* 15 (5): 662–679.

Browne, Sarah. 2014. *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Brownmiller, Susan. 1999. *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*. New York: The Dial Press.

Castells, Manuel. 1996. *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Vol.1: The Rise of the Network Society*. London: Blackwell Publishers.

———. 2012. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Citron, Danielle. 2014. *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Crossley, Alison Dahl. 2017. *Finding Feminism: Millennial Activists and the Unfinished Gender Revolution [Electronic Book]*. New York: New York University Press.

Daniels, Jessie. 2009. "My brain database doesn't see skin colour": Colour-blind Racism in the Technology Industry and Theorizing the Web. *American Behavioural Scientist* 59 (11): 1377–1393.

Dean, Jodi. 2019. Communicative Capitalism and Revolutionary Form. Millennium: *Journal of International Studies* 47 (3): 326–340.

Delap, Lucy. 2016. Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974–2000. *History Workshop Journal* 81 (1): 171–196.

Duriesmith, David, and Sara Meger. 2020. Returning to the Root: Radical Feminist Thought and Feminist Theories of International Relations. *Review of International Studies* 46 (3): 357–375.

Enke, Anne. 2007. *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space and Feminist Activism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Firth, Rhiannon, and Andrew Robinson. 2016. For a Revival of Feminist Consciousness-Raising: Horizontal Transformation of Epistemologies and Transgression of Neoliberal TimeSpace. *Gender and Education* 28 (3): 343–358.

Fotopoulou, Aristea. 2016. *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks: Between Empowerment and Vulnerability*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fraser, Nancy. 2000. Rethinking Recognition. *New Left Review* 3: 107–120.

Freeman, Jo. 1973. The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement. *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (4): 792–811.

Freeman, Jo. 1975. Political Organization in the Feminist Movement. *Acta Sociologica* 18 (2/3): 142–161.

Fuchs, Christian. 2017. *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Funke, Peter N., Andrew T. Lamas, and Todd Wolfson. 2017. Bouazizi's Refusal and Ours: Critical Reflections on the Great Refusal and Contemporary Social Movements. In *The Great Refusal: Herbet Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements*, ed. Andrew Lamas, Todd Wolfson, and Peter Funke, 1–28. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Gerbaudo, Paolo. 2012. *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goodin, Robert. 1996. Inclusion and Exclusion. *European Journal of Sociology* 32 (2): 343–371.

Grahn, Judy. 2009. Ground Zero: The Rise of Lesbian Feminism. In *The Judy Grahn Reader*, 312–317. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Greenfield, Adam. 2018. *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*. Brooklyn: Verso.

Gurumurthy, Anita. 2011. Feminist Visions of the Network Society. *Development* 54 (4): 464–469.

Hanisch, Carol. 2010. Women's Liberation Consciousness-Raising: Then and Now. *On the Issues*, Spring. https://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2010spring/2010spring_Hanisch.php.

Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.

———. 2012. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. London: Verso.

Hawthorne, Susan. 1999. Cyborgs, Virtual Bodies and Organic Bodies: Theoretical Feminist Responses. In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, ed. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, 213–249. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Heffernan, Teresa. 2019. Introduction. In *Cyborg Futures*, ed. Teresa Heffernan, 1–15. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hemmings, Clare. 2010. *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Herrman, John. 2017. How Hate Groups Forced Online Platforms to Reveal Their True Nature. *New York Times Magazine*, August 21. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/magazine/how-hate-groups-forced-online-platforms-to-reveal-their-true-nature.html

Herzogenrath-Amelung, Heidi. 2016. The New Instantaneity: How Social Media are Helping Us Privilege the (Politically) Correct Over the True. *Media, Culture and Society* 38 (7): 1080–1089.

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia. 1988. Introduction. In *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 1–14. London: Onlywomen Press.

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia, and Julia Penelope, eds. 1988. *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*. London: Onlywomen Press.

hooks, bell. [1984] 2015. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. New York: Routledge.

Hurwitz, Heather McKee. 2017. From Ink to Web and Beyond: U.S. Women's Activism Using Traditional and New Social Media. In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, ed. Verta Taylor, Holly J. McCammon, Jo Reger, and Rachel L. Einwohner, 462–483. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jaggar, Alison M. [1983] 1988. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield.

Jane, Emma. 2017. *Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History*. London: SAGE.

Jeffreys, Sheila. 2014. *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism*. London: Routledge.

———. 2018. *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970–1990*. London: Routledge.

Johnson, Deborah G. 2010. Sorting Out the Question of Feminist Technology. In *Feminist Technology*, ed. Linda L. Layne, Sharra L. Vostral, and Kate Boyer, 36–54. Chicago: University of Illinois.

Jordan, Bridgette. 2009. Blurring Boundaries: The "Real" and the "Virtual" in Hybrid Spaces. *Human Organization* 68 (2): 181–193.

Keller, Jessalynn Marie. 2012. Virtual Feminisms: Girls' Blogging Communities, Feminist Activism, and Participatory Politics. *Information, Communication and Society* 15 (3): 429–447.

Kiraly, Miranda, and Meagan Tyler, eds. 2015. *Freedom Fallacy: The Limits of Liberal Feminism*. Ballarat: Connor Court.

Kitzinger, Celia, and Rachel Perkins. 1993. *Changing Our Minds: Lesbian Feminism and Psychology*. London: Onlywomen Press.

Klein, Renate. 1983. How to Do What We Want to Do: Thoughts about Feminist Methodology. In *Theories of Women's Studies*, ed. Gloria Bowles and Renate Klein, 88–104. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Knox, Hannah, Mike Savage, and Penny Harvey. 2006. Social Networks and the Study of Relations: Networks as Method, Metaphor and Form. *Economy and Society* 35 (1): 113–140.

Kohn, Margaret. 2003. *Radical Space: Building the House of the People*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Krinsky, John, and Nick Crossley. 2014. Social Movements and Social Networks: Introduction. *Social Movement Studies* 13 (1): 1–21.

Lefebvre, Henri. [1974] 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Levina, Marina. 2014. From Feminism without Bodies, to Bleeding Bodies in Virtual Spaces. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11 (3): 278–281.

Long, Julia. 2012. *AntiPorn: The Resurgence of Anti-Pornography Feminism*. London: Zed Books.

Lovink, Geert. 2011. *Networks Without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

———. 2016. *Social Media Abyss: Critical Net Cultures and the Force of Negation*. Cambridge: Polity.

Lovink, Geert, and Ned Rossiter. 2018. *Organization After Social Media*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia.

Mackinnon, Catharine. 1989. *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Maddison, Sarah, and Frances Shaw. 2012. Feminist Perspectives on Social Movement Research. In *The Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Naggy Hesse-Biber, 413–433. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Magarey, Susan. 2015. Women's Liberation was a Movement, Not an Organisation. *Australian Feminist Studies* 29 (82): 378–390.

Mansbridge, Jane. 2001. The Making of Oppositional Consciousness. In *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris, 1–19. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mansbridge, Jane, and Aldon Morris, eds. 2001. *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subject Roots of Social Protest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Martin, Courtney, and Vanessa Valenti. 2012. #FemFuture: Online Revolution. New Feminist Solution Series: Barnard Centre for Research on Women, http://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS8-FemFuture-Online-Revolution-Report-April-15-2013.pdf.

Mason, Jennifer. 2002. *Qualitative Researching*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE.

Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McRobbie, Angela. 2015. Notes on the Perfect. *Australian Feminist Studies* 30 (83): 3–20.

Megarry, Jessica. 2014. Online Incivility or Sexual Harassment? Conceptualising Women's Experiences in the Digital Age. *Women's Studies International Forum* 47: 46–55.

———. 2018. Under the Watchful Eyes of Men: Theorising the Implications of Male Surveillance Practices for Feminist Activism on Social Media. *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (6): 1070–1085.

Mendes, Kaitlynn. 2017. Brand Feminism: Promotional Culture and Contemporary Feminist Activism. Paper presented at the *Media, Public Spheres and Gender Annual Conference*. https://www.academia.edu/34775274/BRAND_FEMINISM_PROMOTIONAL_CULTURE_AND_CONTEMPORARY_FEMINIST_ACTIVISM

Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalyn Keller. 2019. *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miriam, Kathy. 1998. Re-thinking Radical Feminism: Opposition, Utopianism and the Moral Imagination of Feminist Theory. PhD thesis. University of California, Santa Cruz.

Morris, Bonnie. 2016. *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Morris, Aldon, and Naomi Braine. 2001. Social Movements and Oppositional Consciousness. In *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subject Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris, 20–37. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nagle, Angela. 2017. *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*. Winchester: Zero Books.

Nicholls, Walter, Byron Miller, and Justin Beaumont, eds. 2013. *Spaces of Contention: Spatialities and Social Movements*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press.

Otis, Laura. 2001. *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the 19th Century*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Papacharissi, Zizi. 2010. *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age*. Malden: Polity.

Phipps, Alison. 2016. Whose Personal is More Political? Experience in Contemporary Feminist Politics. *Feminist Theory* 17 (3): 303–321.

Prensky, Marc. 2001. Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1. *On the Horizon* 9 (5): 1–6.

Reinharz, Shulamit. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Retallack, Hanna, Jessica Ringrose, and Emilie Lawrence. 2016. "Fuck Your Body Image": Teen Girls' Twitter and Instagram Feminism in and Around School. In *Learning Bodies*, ed. Julia Coffey, Shelley Budgeon, and Helen Cahill, 85–103. Singapore: Springer Singapore.

Rich, Adrienne. 1976. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Bantam Books.

———. [1980] 1993. Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Experience. In *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

Roseneil, Sasha. 1995. *Disarming Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Action at Greenham*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Rowland, Robyn, ed. 1984. *Women Who Do and Women Who Don't Join the Women's Movement*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Sangster, Joan. 2015. Creating Popular Histories: Re-interpreting "Second Wave" Canadian Feminism. *Dialect Anthropol* 39: 381–404.

Schuster, Julia. 2017. Why the Personal Remained Political: Comparing Second and Third Wave Perspectives on Everyday Feminism. *Social Movement Studies* 16 (6): 647–659.

Scott, John, and Peter J. Carrington. 2011. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis [electronic resource]*. London: SAGE.

Shaw, Frances. 2013. "These Wars are Personal": Methods and Theory in Feminist Online Research. *Qualitative Research Journal* 13 (1): 90–101.

Shirkey, Clay. 2008. *Here Comes Everybody: How Change Happens when People Come Together*. London: Penguin.

Singh, Rianka, and Sarah Sharma. 2019. Platform Uncommons. *Feminist Media Studies* 19 (2): 302–303.

Springer, Simon, Kean Birch, and Julie MacLeavy, eds. 2016. *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*. New York: Routledge.

Stalder, Felix. 2006. *Manuel Castells: The Theory of the Network Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Tapscott, Don. 1997. *Growing Up Digital: the Rise of the Net Generation*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Taylor, Verta, and Leila J. Rupp. 1991. Researching the Women's Movement: We Make Our Own History, But Not Just as We Please. In *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*, ed. Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook, 119–132. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

———. 1996. Lesbian Existence and the Women's Movement: Researching the "Lavender Herring". In *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice*, ed. Heidi Gottfried, 143–159. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Thompson, Denise. 1990. Theory and its Difficulties. Lesbian Conference, Melbourne, January. http://users.spin.net.au/~deniset/alesfem/gtheoryle-sconf90.pdf.

———. 2001. *Radical Feminism Today*. London: Sage.

Tilly, Charles. 2000. Spaces of Contention. *Mobilization* 5 (2): 135–159.

Tindall, David, and Barry Wellman. 2001. Canada as Social Structure: Social Network Analysis and Canadian Sociology. *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 26 (2): 265–308.

van Dijck, José. 2012. Facebook and the Engineering of Connectivity: A Multi-Layered Approach to Social Media Platforms. *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 19 (2): 141–155.

———. 2013. Social Media and the Culture of Connectivity. *UOP Blog*, February 25.

van Dijck, José, and Thomas Poell. 2015. Social Media and the Transformation of Public Space. *Social Media + Society* 1 (2): 1–5.

Wall, Christine. 2017. Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s: Feminism, Housing and Urban Change in Hackney. *History Workshop Journal* 83 (1): 79–97.

Wasserman, Stanley, and Katherine Faust. 1994. *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whittier, Nancy. 1995. *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

———. 2006. From the Second to the Third Wave: Continuity and Change in Grassroots Feminism. In *The U.S. Women's Movement in Global Perspective*, ed. Lee Ann Banaszak, 45–68. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Zimmerman, Tegan. 2017. #Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice* 38 (1): 54–70.

2

Unravelling the Web of Equals

This book is situated within the critical turn in social media scholarship, but it also sets itself apart from this literature. Critical internet scholarship has so far focussed upon class and economic inequality as the fundamental, unifying factors in social struggle, ignoring the oppression of women by men. Critical internet scholars also continue to privilege the male user as the neutral subject in digital research, and rarely investigate digital power relations from a female perspective. For example, Christian Fuchs' *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*—now in its second edition—claims in its blurb to 'lay bare the power relations at the heart of our digital landscape' (2014, 2017). Yet Fuchs' index contains no mention of women, male dominance or patriarchy, and his one reference to feminism is in relation to the feminist critique of the public/private divide. Despite the large body of feminist research demonstrating that technology has historically allowed men to surveil women's bodies in increasingly intimate ways (Manjikian 2014; Mason and Magnet 2012; Monahan 2008, 2016), critical internet scholars have so far framed the dangers of social media surveillance largely in terms of state and corporate control of citizens. They have also often failed to consider how social media provides

men with increased opportunities to both monitor and disrupt feminist activity online (Megarry 2018).

Radical feminist analysis provides a basis for conceptualising men as monitorial actors invested in surveilling and derailing feminist organising, and radical feminism is the only political theory which offers a conceptualisation of men as social actors with a stake in maintaining male dominance. Radical feminism therefore offers particularly incisive analytical tools through which to investigate the political efficacy of using social media to organise for women's liberation. For readers who are not versed in radical feminist theory, I begin this chapter by providing an overview of its key tenets. I then review the long-standing interdisciplinary feminist debate concerning women, liberation and technology, explaining liberal feminist, postmodern and queer feminist and radical feminist positions in turn. Next, I address the theoretical assumptions underpinning the claim that feminism is now in a fourth wave. Finally, I highlight wider tensions between the discipline of social movement studies and radical feminism theory. Throughout the chapter, I argue that the contemporary literature on digital feminist activism is limited, because the failure to seriously consider how male power operates in digital space has produced scholarship which is overly celebratory about the revolutionary potential of social media for women. No real attempt has yet been made to integrate an analysis of male dominance into considerations of how the use of social media is aiding or hindering the pursuit of women's liberation.

Radical Feminist Theory

Radical feminist theory is the only political theory which explicitly conceptualises how sexual politics shape political conflict (Millet [1969] 1972). This makes radical feminism a uniquely placed framework for examining how sex-based oppression manifests on social media platforms, and how it might shape feminist outcomes. Radical feminists begin their political theorising from a standpoint which centres the needs and experiences of women as an oppressed people. 'Created by women for women' in the WLM, it unapologetically places women at the centre

of political inquiry (Rowland and Klein 1996, 11). Radical feminism identifies men as a class of people who oppress another class of people: women. The oppression of women as a class is 'the first and fundamental theme' of radical feminism (Rowland and Klein 1996, 11), and radical feminist theory pays attention to how all women are affected by this oppression (Barry 1995; Dworkin 1974; Mackinnon 1989; Pateman 1988). The political importance radical feminism attributes to conceptualising women as a sex class rests on the recognition that it is a fundamentally necessary unifying strategy for advancing feminist political activism (hooks [1984] 2015, 18). As per Marxist political theory, the concept of a sex class also signals the possibility of feminist revolution (Millet [1969] 1972; see also Jeffreys 2014, 5).[1] Rather than understanding men as dominant and/or violent by nature, and women as subordinate and/or victims by nature, radical feminist theory insists that things could be different, and that the gender hierarchy can be dismantled via women's collective action.

Radical feminist theory emerged out of the WLM across diverse cultural and geographical contexts. While it is not a monolithic framework, common strands can be identified. Radical feminism is innately concerned with critiquing male power; it understands power as power over, as the ability of one group to dominate and oppress another (Mackinnon 1989). For radical feminists, women's subordinate social position is reinforced and maintained by patriarchal social institutions as well as via the hierarchical system of gender. In contrast to postmodern and queer theoretical approaches which are more likely to conceptualise gender roles as politically neutral identities individuals can play with (see Butler 1999;

---

[1] Although many prominent radical feminist theorists conceptualise women as a *sex class*, influential radical feminist scholars Kate Millett ([1969] 1972) and Sheila Jeffreys (2014, 5) have used the term *sex caste*. *Sex caste*, rather than the more commonly used *sex class*, incorporates the recognition that women are born into a social system which renders them as socially inferior to men even before birth (Jeffreys 2014, 5). The term *sex caste* is useful because it draws attention to both the social reality, and the biological inescapably, of being a woman under male dominance. While a person can change their economic class status through individual endeavour, such an opportunity is not available to women in a patriarchal context, as they are treated as women for the entire duration of their lives, 'unless they [transgender and] claim they are really men' (Jeffreys 2014, 5). In this book, I use the terms *sex class* and *sex caste* for specific ends. When speaking about women developing an awareness of their oppression, I use the language of class consciousness. When referring to women's subordinate social status under male dominance, I employ the term sex caste.

Nestle et al. 2002; Wilchins 2014), rather than the socially constructed behaviours of the dominant and subordinate class, radical feminism pays careful attention to the social and political context in which the gender system operates (Bell and Klein 1996; Jeffreys 2018, 178–180). While women are 'not sex or gender, they are marked and defined and controlled by it' in male-dominated societies (Mackinnon 2000, 696). In practice, what this means is that masculine qualities are viewed positively, and are seen to be naturally present in males, while feminine characteristics are derided, with feminine behaviour understood as linked to biological factors rather than women's social conditioning (Fine [2010] 2011). Within the framework of a hierarchical gender system, the idea of gender itself is naturalised, which perpetuates the false impression that women's subordinate social position is linked to their individual failings, rather than the result of their structural oppression by men.

Radical feminism also contains an explicit theorisation of how women's subordination is maintained and perpetuated through male violence. As one US-based activist explained when interviewed, radical feminism diverges ideologically from other forms of feminism because it understands that male violence fundamentally shapes women's experience of the social world:

> The thing that never changes about patriarchy is what Andrea Dworkin called "the barricade of sexual terrorism"—so, rape, battering, incest, prostitution, and now of course we have pornography as well. So that, to me, is the core of radical feminism. If you understand that women have a completely different view of the world because of that, then you're a radical feminist. (Lierre Keith WLM, USA)

Women are marginalised in society because they are denied access to public life and public services such as jobs and housing, but radical feminism moves the pursuit of women's liberation beyond these more liberal issues to challenge male supremacy at its foundations. Radical feminists theorise male violence, and men's threat of violence, as a foundational element of women's subordination—impacting their freedom of movement, psychological wellbeing and their ability to build solidarity between women (Chesler [1972] 1997; Hoagland 1988; Raymond 1986; Weisman 1992).

As well as being a political project, several radical feminist scholars have emphasised the centrality of ethics, or what some have called women's moral imagination (Miriam 1998), to achieving women's liberation. As Kate Millett ([1969] 1972, 58) argued in *Sexual Politics*, the social system of patriarchy is so totalising that it obscures women's ability to recognise their oppression and understand that there could be an alternative:

> Perhaps patriarchy's greatest psychological weapon is simply its universality and longevity. A referent scarcely exists with which it might be contrasted or by which it might be confuted. While the same might be said of class, patriarchy has a still more tenacious or powerful hold through its successful habit of passing itself off as nature.

Radical feminism, therefore, implicitly contains a creative element. It must both imagine what women could be when they are liberated from male dominance *and* create the conditions necessary to move towards this vision. Throughout this book, I will explain how this insight was often expressed through the discourse of sisterhood in the WLM, and embodied though an organising praxis that encouraged women to move towards each other (and away from men).

Radical feminists have also argued that feminism, if it is to successfully challenge male power and liberate women, must encourage women to seek recognition from each other in ways that subvert male authority (Raymond 1986; Thompson 1994). One of the primary ways this was achieved in the WLM was through the political process of consciousness-raising, in which women opened up about their lives, began to trust each other and often transferred their primary loyalties from men to women (Allen 1970; Bruley [1976] 1981). By focussing on women in relation to women, lesbian feminist scholars such as Sarah Hoagland (1988, 6) have argued that the feminism of the WLM 'was deeply disturbing to the status quo'. Based upon their discussions in consciousness-raising groups, WLM activists identified how the institution of heterosexuality formed a key lynchpin of women's oppression. The 'real feminist issue', then, is not for women to achieve numerical parity with men in terms of access to positions of power, but rather that they begin to understand their social

position as an oppressed class, and develop a sense of loyalty and accountability to other women (Mackinnon 1987, 77). Denise Thompson (2001, 1) has described this creative element of the feminist project as the 'struggle for a human status for women in connection with other women, which is at no one's expense, and which is outside male definition and control'.

From a radical feminist perspective, visions of equality between women and men do not go far enough to liberate women, because the political notion of equality does not challenge male dominance at its root. Equality discourse envisions 'women in relation to men rather than women in relation to women' (Raymond 1986, 13), advancing an ideology that is *hetero-relational*. *Hetero-reality* is the term coined by feminist philosopher Janice Raymond (1986, 3) to describe the worldview whereby 'woman exists always in relation to man', as incomplete human beings. In order to challenge male dominance at its root, Raymond argued that feminism needs to advance a politics where women are not positioned or theorised in relation to men. She described the basis of feminism as 'the autonomy, independence, and love of the female Self in affinity with others like her Self—her sisters' (1986, 13). It is for this reason that lesbianism and lesbian feminist theory have been central to the feminist project (Jeffreys 2018; Thompson 1994, 175; Whittier 1995, 20). By focussing their intimate energies on women, lesbian feminists in the WLM created a space to experiment with new ways of living outside of male control. Sheila Jeffreys (1993, ix) has explained how activists 're-labelled lesbianism as a healthy choice for women based upon self-love, the love of other women and the rejection of male oppression'. This positive and political vision of lesbianism as a sexual choice able to produce social and political transformation is largely unknown amongst feminists today, who, in line with the sensibilities of queer theory, are more likely to understand lesbianism as a biologically innate sexual orientation (Jeffreys 2018; Morris 2016), and a private rather than political choice (Kitzinger 1989). As I will explain further in the next chapter, lesbian feminists in the WLM commonly understood sexuality as socially constructed and viewed the decision to live as a lesbian as a subversion of male authority.

Radical Feminism, Race and Class

One common critique levelled against the radical feminist conceptualisation of women as a sex caste is that radical feminism is universalist and homogenising because it fails to account for class and racial differences between women and 'assume[s] that white middle-class women are the *de facto* subjects of feminism' (Hemmings 2010, 43). Many scholars have contested this reading, but nonetheless this view is powerful, and 'the dominant construction of a flawed, universalist "second wave" remains difficult to dislodge' (Sangster 2015, 384). As Clare Hemmings (2010, 44) has accurately observed, the claim that radical feminist theory is universalist is often used as a silencing tactic in place of a direct accusation of racism (see also Crenshaw 2010; Hawthorne 1999b, 236). A significant part of the problem here is that scholars have often failed to consider how Black feminism developed as a product of struggle amongst WLM activists (Bruley and Forster 2016, 697–698; Thompson 2002). Instead, historical descriptions of feminism usually only discuss Black feminist writing and activism as a critique of white feminist praxis (Moravec 2018), even though Black feminist activists contributed significantly to the development of radical feminist and lesbian feminist theory (see, e.g., Moraga and Anzaldua 1981; Lorde [1984] 2007). One of the effects of this omission has been that anti-racist WLM organising has been overwhelmingly ignored by scholars.

Joan Sangster (2015, 400) has explained that the problem with the charge of universalism is that scholars often conflate the social origins (or identities) of WLM activists with their political intentions and ignore the possibility of an anti-racist radical feminism (Crenshaw 2010). Doing so positions WLM organising praxis as both anachronistic and inherently racist and it also provides a mechanism for scholars to avoid having to ever engage with the arguments of radical or lesbian feminist theory (Hemmings 2010). Most WLM activists were white and middle class—although some research does contest this (Luxton 2001; Moravec 2018)—nonetheless, the political framework of radical feminism strived to liberate all women, and account for how their oppression was based upon intersecting dynamics along the axes of sex, race and class (see

Crenshaw 1991, 2010). Whether radical feminist theory was always operationalised effectively to this end by white feminist activists in the WLM is another issue entirely.

Today, the accusation that radical feminism is universalist, and thus racist, typically plays out vis-à-vis the discourse of intersectional feminism. Interviewee Julia Long (DN, UK) suggested that feminists on social media are 'using intersectionality actually to mean anti-radical feminism a lot of the time'. Despite being typically ascribed to Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the theoretical insight 'that multiple forms of domination interact and fuse' (Gordon 2016, 340) in a way that amplifies oppression in the lives of the most marginalised predates the term 'intersectionality' (Collins 2015, 10), and is traceable through the activist writings of the WLM. The characterisation of radical feminism as inattentive to race and class is indicative of what some scholars view as 'ahistorical tendencies among progressive intellectual currents' coupled with the 'tendency to reinvent rather than building on older analyses' (Gordon 2016, 340). Early radical feminist texts and manifestos explicitly theorised women's diverse experiences of patriarchy and highlighted 'the especially disadvantaged positions of racial minority and working-class women' (Duriesmith and Meger 2020, 364). As one of my interviewees said, 'intersectionality wasn't a word we used then, but it was absolutely a concept we were discussing' (Jenny Rankine, NZ). Another recalled that: 'when we said we want a feminism that was good for women, we meant for all women, and we meant for the women who were worst off […] we did not just mean the top 1%' (Sandra McNeill WLM, UK). Linda Bellos (WLM, UK) suggested that the British WLM became increasingly attuned to accounting for how interlocking systems of oppression function. According to her, 'in the 1980s the "we" was more inclusive than the "we" had been in the 1970s, it was much more inclusive in terms of class, ethnicity, religion, disability'.

Working to foreground how racism and classism intersect with male dominance is an essential feminist task, not least because such a strategy can usefully point theorists towards an analysis of how patriarchy pits diverse groups of women against each other in order to maintain the status quo. The claim that radical feminism cannot adequately account for race and class differences functions to divide women, turning their

attention away from naming men as their common oppressors. Several radical feminist scholars have highlighted how patriarchy socialises women to distrust each other (Jeffreys 2018, 82; Raymond 1986, 151–153). Brazilian feminist activist Amanda Martins (2019, n.p.) has also recently made this point:

> A widely used argument against a union of women to destroy male supremacy is that women do not form a homogeneous category. But no group of people forms a homogeneous category. The working class has two sexes and this has never prevented militants from joining men and women into one common goal. This is a double standard: the difference between men and women in class exploitation is omitted, while differences of race and class among women are […] exalted.

Radical feminists have not always adequately addressed race and class-based issues, and it is crucial that these mistakes are addressed and learned from in the movement towards women's liberation. Past mistakes, however, do not discount the theoretical viability of conceptualising women as a sex caste 'made up of the reality of all women […] as a composite whole rather than a divided unitary whole, such that each woman, in her way, is all women' (Mackinnon [1991] 1996, 52). In other words, while the oppression of women manifests along other axes of dominance, this does not render the frame of group-based harm inherently problematic for feminism, or unable to account for differences between women (Crenshaw 2010; Phelan 2016, 10–12; Rowland and Klein 1996, 18–22; Thompson 2001, 112–126).

Radical feminism understands patriarchy as an adaptive system that feeds off other systems of oppression, one that manifests differently across historical periods and in different cultural contexts (Millett [1969] 1972). Racism and capitalism also shape the ways in which women's oppression manifests, but, from a radical feminist perspective, these injustices are, in and of themselves, unable to explain the entirety of women's oppression under male dominance (Mackinnon 1989; Millett [1969] 1972; Rowland and Klein 1996). Feminist psychologist Phyllis Chesler ([1972] 1997, 11) has explained how class-focussed analyses cannot adequately capture women's social situation:

> If every woman is, indeed, one man away from welfare or homelessness, to what class do women belong? If educated and accomplished women earn far less than their male counterparts, and remain as vulnerable to male violence as other women are, in what sense are they middle class? If a working-class woman is the (only) head of the household, and is treated with the respect usually reserved for men only, in what sense is she working class?

Some interviewees also explained how racism, in and of itself, does not capture the entirety of women's social and political situation. According to Linda Bellos (WLM, UK), it is important to recognise how both black and white women occupy a subordinate social position under male dominance: 'there [is not] a category of woman for whom the threat of rape, or the reality of rape, [does] not apply'. These accounts highlight what can be gained from conceptualising women as a sex caste, and they also demonstrate the importance of tracing the commonalities between women's diverse experiences of oppression in order to robustly theorise patriarchy.

Transgenderism and Women's Liberation

The issue of transgender inclusion within contemporary radical and lesbian feminist organising is particularly contentious (see Megarry et al. 2018). As such, I will now briefly provide the reader with an account of why transgenderism is both irreconcilable with the political project of women's liberation, and how it poses a significant threat to autonomous feminist organising today. In recent years, radical feminist political theory and radical feminist activists have been demonised as *transphobic* based upon a refusal to—in theory and in practice—accept men who claim they are women into feminist organising spaces. Rather than being a political word with a political history, the concept of a phobia emerged from the psychology industry and it functions to reframe political opposition to certain practices as irrational fears (Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, 59). For example, positioning the feminist critique of transgenderism as irrational obfuscates any recognition that such a critique is derived from

a political, rather than an emotional, basis.[2] Robert Jensen (2017, 130) has explained how people who question transgender ideology 'are often accused of negating the experience of transgender people and/or being transphobic'.[3] Here, I do not seek to contest the experiences of individual transgender people who undoubtedly do have negative experiences of normative gender. Instead, I employ a radical feminist analysis of transgender ideology throughout this book to, like Jensen (2017, 130), try to offer 'an alternative way to explore those experiences'.

First, a note on language: I use the term *transgender-identified men* to refer to men who transgender. This is because, as Sheila Jeffreys (2014, 8) has explained, 'the physical transformations created by hormones and surgery do not change the biological sex of the person upon whom they are visited'. In the context of this book, the term *transgender-identified men* provides more theoretical clarity than other commonly used terms (such as *transwomen*). The term *transwoman* is theoretically cloudy from a radical feminist perspective: it suggests that men who transgender can actually become women. In their interviews, however, some women used the descriptor *transwomen* to refer to the group I am calling *transgender-identified men*. I have chosen not to alter their quotations.

Another term I avoid in this book is *gender critical feminism*. Primarily, this is because *gender critical feminism* is not a political philosophy with a lengthy activist and academic history in the same way that radical feminism is. Increasingly, women who contest transgender ideology are being referred to as *gender critical feminists* by activists, academics and the wider media. Self-defined *gender critical feminists* are often—but not always—women who have come to feminism via transgender politics, specifically the debate over whether transgender-identified men should be able to

---

[2] To provide another example, Celia Kitzinger and Rachel Perkins (1993, 59) have explained how the psychological definition of homophobia impedes the political recognition that there are 'sensible [and] logical reasons for fearing lesbianism'. As they point out, it is completely rational for men and anti-feminist women to fear lesbians in male-dominated societies, because lesbianism poses a direct challenge to structures of male supremacy. From this vantage point, hostility to lesbians and gay men is best understood as a form of heterosexism, rather than homophobia (Rich [1984] 1986). For an explanation of how the accusation of 'whorephobia' functions to similarly obfuscate radical feminist analyses of the global sex trade, see Bindel (2017).

[3] As I will discuss further throughout this book, fear of being publicly labelled and shamed on social media as a transphobe discourages many women from critiquing the growing transgender rights movement and its practices (Jensen 2017, 120).

legally self-identify as women. The term *gender critical feminist* is often used interchangeably with the term *radical feminist* today, even though radical feminism is not a single-issue political philosophy. This can cause much confusion in contemporary activist discourse.

According to transgender theory, two classes of people exist: those who are *cisgender*, and those who are *transgender*. Cisgender people comprise the dominant group, because they experience their gender as congruent with the body they were born with. Cisgender women, according to this logic, have power over socially marginalised transgender individuals. The idea that a class of women exist who are cisgender implies that there is a category of women who *accept* their gender. This notion is antithetical to radical feminist theory because it reaffirms gender as a characteristic innate to all individuals, rather than a socially constructed set of behaviours which divide men and women into hierarchical sex roles. Susan Hawthorne (WLM, AU) expressed this view in her interview when she said that characterising women who are not transgender as cisgender 'is a complete eradication of everything that we've done […] I don't accept the term cis at all, I certainly don't accept it as a descriptor of myself'.

Transgender ideology understands gender as biologically innate, that is, stereotypical feminine qualities such as an accommodating demeanour and a love of the colour pink are derived from women's biology, rather than processes of gendered socialisation. Within transgender ideology, a class of people exist for whom their gender clashes with the body they were born with. This idea dovetails neatly with the rise of a highly profitable and expanding medical industry that promotes hormone treatment and surgical correction to transgender people who seek to align their body parts with their chosen gender expression (Jeffreys 2014). The practice of transgenderism and the medical transgendering of children and adults is becoming increasingly normalised across the Western world. For example, in 2007, the Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital treated only one patient for gender dysphoria (the medical term for the condition of feeling that one's gender identity does not align with their physical sex). By 2017, the number of referrals had risen to 230 (Dow 2017). This trend is consistent across the Western world, and it demonstrates a remarkable amount of trust in, as well as a lack of critical thinking around, narratives of medical and technological 'progress' (see Jensen 2017, 121).

The primary claim of transgenderism that poses a problem for autonomous feminist organising is that men who *feel* like women actually *are* women, and should be accepted as such in all social, political and sexual contexts. Transgender rights organising has been largely focussed around ending 'discrimination' against males claiming to be women, where discrimination denotes the refusal of women to accept transgender-identified men in women's spaces such as toilets, domestic violence shelters and political meetings (Serano 2015; Stryker and Whittle 2006). Having accepted this claim, the political Left currently understands men's claim to space within feminist organising as entirely reasonable. Transgender ideology has been largely taken up as a progressive cause, even though the rights of transgender-identified men often impinge on women's rights and their ability to denote their own bodily boundaries (Barrett 2016; Jeffreys 2014). The rights of transgender-identified men to access women's spaces are now becoming enshrined in law across Western democracies, often based solely upon the criteria that a man *self-identifies* as a woman (ABC News 2019; Ibbitson 2017). A significant component of transgender organising on social media has also been based upon publicly attacking lesbian feminists who refuse to engage in sexual activity with transgender-identified men (Jeffreys 2018, 187).

The move to allow men to self-identify as women and gain access to feminist and lesbian spaces clashes irreconcilably with how the concept of gender has been understood by radical feminists. In the words of Robert Jensen (2014, n.p.):

> Transgenderism is a liberal, individualised, medicalised response to the problem of patriarchy's rigid, repressive and reactionary gender norms. Radical feminism is a radical, structural, politicized response.

Activists in the WLM identified the gender system as a lynchpin of male supremacy and argued that gender functions as a hierarchical system which socialises women into a subordinate role. They did not view gender as an identity which individuals innately feel, or can self-identify out of; rather, they conceived of gender as a harmful patriarchal ideology which makes manifest a male vision of what women are and should be: docile, passive, sexually available and nurturing (Mackinnon 1989;

Millett [1969] 1972). Sheila Jeffreys (2014, 7) has argued that this male vision of womanhood is self-serving because it shores up male supremacy: 'men's ideas about what women are have been formed from their ruling caste position, and have assigned women characteristics that would most advantage their masters, as well as justify men's rule over them'. Overthrowing male definitions of womanhood and re-imagining what women can be outside of male control has therefore been a primary task of both academic feminism and the WLM (Jeffreys 2014, 7).

Today, however, transgender ideology is largely accepted as feminist, and it has also been widely embraced by the political Left. This is perhaps unsurprising: women's political concerns are often marginalised in mixed-sex organising contexts, even within purportedly progressive social movements (Coleman and Bassi 2011). Writing at the time of the WLM, Barbara Burris et al. ([1971] 2000, 239) noted that 'the male definition of oppression does not recognize the unique position of females as a sub-jugated group', which resulted in a 'series of attempts to re-direct the women's movement into male Left-dominated priorities'. This phenomenon continues today. Left-leaning academics and activists morally frame the question of whether transgender-identified men should be afforded space within feminism as an issue of inclusion or exclusion (see Evans 2015, 118). The problem here is that, as political theorists have demonstrated, the concepts of inclusion and exclusion are analytically intractable, and can obfuscate instances of domination (Goodin 1996; Dovi 2009). 'Widening' feminism (Hoagland 1988, 8) to include transgender-identified men has the political function of excluding women, because some women who may have had experiences of sexual abuse—or who simply do not want to work alongside men—will refuse to participate. Alicen Grey (DN, USA) explained how the contemporary discourse and practice of 'transgender inclusion' *excludes women* from feminist organising:

> There is this debate in certain feminist circles over whether certain spaces should be completely male exclusive, meaning even excluding transwomen, and someone made the point that even the act of debating whether or not something should be male inclusive is going to make a woman want to stay home. There is always going to be a woman who will silently keep it to

herself that she is terrified of men and will just pretend she doesn't have an opinion.

As I will explain further in the next chapter, framing the issue of transgender-identified men's participation in feminism as one of inclusion or exclusion ignores that women-only space is a structural requirement of consciousness-raising, and crucial to a revival of the WLM. Constantly debating the extent to which women should include men in feminist organising is draining on women's resources and does not centre women's experiences (Mackay 2015, 158–159). It also functions politically to keep women's attention focussed on men, rather than the task of movement-building with other women.

Conceptualising feminism as the movement seeking to liberate women from male control necessitates that scholars understand feminist organising as a direct security threat to male dominance. It also requires them to remain attuned to the ways in which patriarchal ideology functions to diffuse feminist challenges. As Marilyn Frye ([1977] 1988) has argued, hostility towards separatism and the demand for women-only space derives from men's recognition that women's autonomous organising poses a threat to male supremacy. This dynamic is not often understood within contemporary social movement scholarship, which is more likely to conceptualise feminism as a broad umbrella movement centred on fighting for 'gender and interrelated inequalities' (Crossley 2017, 13), rather than as the political movement that seeks to overthrow male dominance by dismantling systems of structural oppression. I now turn to a critical analysis of the academic literature that investigates the relationship between women, technology and social change.

Feminism and Technology

Feminist work addressing the question of what technology means for women spans several social science disciplines including political science, sociology, philosophy and media and communications (Barad 1988; Haraway 1988; Wajcman 2010; Wyatt 2008). Many feminist debates in this area are concerned with the ontology of technology itself, and

question whether technology is oppressive to women because men dominate its use, or because the technologies themselves are inherently patriarchal (Manjikian 2014, 51). In order to chart a path through this literature and highlight the features most salient for readers of this book, here I outline the dominant feminist approaches (liberal feminist, postmodern/queer feminist and radical feminist) to theorising the relationship between technology and women's liberation.

Liberal Feminism

The dominant approach underwriting scholarship pertaining to women and the internet is most commonly termed liberal feminism.[4] Drawing on mainstream liberal political philosophy that conceives of individual humans as fundamentally self-interested but nonetheless rational actors, liberal feminism attempts to harness the liberal values of justice, equality and fairness to fight for women's rights within the patriarchal state system. Liberal approaches to women and technology commonly promote the idea that although women suffer and are abused via digital technologies, they can still be used to advance women's interests (Halbert 2004, 126–127; Raymond [1993] 1995, 90). From a radical feminist perspective, the liberal feminist approach to technology is severely limited, because it tries to 'add on feminist values to [the] current structure [which] could only result in superficial, if any, change' (Arditti et al. 1984, 4). Janice Raymond ([1993] 1995, 90) has explained how the liberal feminist approach to technology is reflective of a 'having it both ways' balancing act. With reference to reproductive technologies, Raymond has argued that scholars often prioritise the question of *how* they benefit women, before considering the necessarily prior question of whether they *can*. The problem with framing research in such a way is that it facilitates an avoidance of questions of power and control and sets a scholarly agenda that goes looking for positive aspects of new technologies. In Raymond's words, liberal feminist scholars discuss technology in

---

[4] For an in-depth analysis of liberal feminism and its limitations for women's liberation see Chambers (2008), Jaggar ([1983] 1988, 173–203) and Kiraly and Tyler (2015).

terms of 'abuse fused with use', perhaps as an attempt to fulfil the male scholarly mandate of building 'balanced' and 'rational' theory that might be taken seriously by virtue of its 'nuanced' appraisal (Raymond [1993] 1995, 90).[5]

For-and-against liberal feminist approaches proliferate in relation to digital technology. For example, Australian feminist researcher Dale Spender (1993, 7–8) argued in the 1990s that digital technology represents 'recycled problems of male dominance', and she drew attention to how violence against women in digital space functions to keep women away from the centre of technological power. Yet Spender's book on cyberspace, *Nattering on the Net*, stopped short of critiquing the technology industry itself, and ended up advancing the liberal feminist position of putting women's difficulties online down to problems of access and decision-making power. In this early analysis, Spender (1995, 249) characterised the internet as a social institution which women should learn to live with, rather than challenge outright. For her, the internet is an institution which has the potential to 'promote egalitarian, cooperative communication exchanges' (198), it just has not done so thus far. Similarly, writing nearly 20 years later, legal scholar Danielle Keats Citron (2014, 100) advanced a robust understanding of the impact of online harassment on women, but, like Spender, she too argued that 'the next stage of the women's rights movement should be focussed on achieving equality in digital networks'. As a starting point for feminist critique, liberal feminist approaches to the internet are useful in their ability to highlight the lack of options available to women online, but they do not easily lend themselves to questioning digital culture in-and-of-itself, or to considerations of whether digital technology operates in women's interests.

Another problem with liberal feminist approaches to analysing women and technology is that the solutions posited—such as creating feminist networking spaces online and getting women into positions of power in technology companies—are unlikely to tangibly challenge male power. Countless feminist activist groups, government bodies and non-government organisations now exist with the express purpose of 'taking

---

[5] Seeking to provide a 'balanced' approach to appraisals of technology is also evident in recent work by postmodern/queer feminist scholars who position social media as a site of both 'vulnerability and empowerment' for women (Fotopoulou 2016, 1).

back the tech'. This is quite remarkable given that women already make up the bulk of users on social media (Pew Research Centre 2018), and this has not yet resulted in a feminist transformation of digital norms. Analysing women's digital networks as a marker of feminist success and framing them as an 'act of resistance' to men's domination of the internet is therefore a limited framework through which to investigate the relationship between women, technology and social change (Halbert 2004, 127).

Postmodern/Queer Feminism

Postmodern/queer feminist approaches to understanding women and technology are also largely unhelpful for analysing whether social media is useful for advancing the political project of women's liberation. This is primarily because they advance an apolitical vision of feminist revolution that does not directly challenge male power structures or adequately theorise women as a sex caste. In the late 1980s and 1990s, postmodern feminist literature advanced the idea that digital technology could be inherently liberating for women. According to Liesbet van Zoonen (1992, 2001), the dominant feminist understanding of information and communication technologies in the 1980s was that they were male dominated, with female access as both users and producers limited due to structural, social and psychological factors. In the decades following, however, feminist ideas changed dramatically, and earlier feminist critiques of the internet were usurped by a *cyberfeminism* which privileged the utopian possibilities of digital technologies (van Zoonen 2001).

Developments in digital technology coincided with the postmodern turn in academia, an observation that has prompted some scholars to argue that postmodernism 'has its roots deep in the convergence of neoliberal ideology and the revolution in information and communication technologies' (Hassan 2012, 195). Underwriting much of the recent literature celebrating women's use of social media for feminist organising are the ideas contained in Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* ([1984] 2000). Haraway questioned the normative division between nature and technology and argued that the figure of the cyborg could explode the

traditional binaries (such as reason/emotion and human/machine) through which scholars had so far represented the world. She sought to open new possibilities for feminist analysis and feminist political action through her understanding of humans and technology as symbiotically bound hybrids. By understanding ourselves as cyborgs made up of various parts, Haraway argued that women could more implicitly represent their differences and move towards transcending embodied gender identities, ultimately destabilising the hierarchical gender system (Haraway [1984] 2000). Within her postmodern theoretical framework, however, embracing ontological ambivalence became the revolutionary and empowering act for women, rather than exposing and challenging male dominance.

To highlight the shortcomings of Haraway's approach, it is first necessary to briefly expand on the differences between postmodern, queer and radical feminist frameworks. Radical feminists have identified postmodern political theory as an enemy of feminism (Bell and Klein 1996; Brodribb 1992; Mackinnon 2000), or, as Denise Thompson (2001, 2) has characterised it, 'merely another ruse of male supremacy'. The radical feminist opposition to postmodernism is based upon the recognition that postmodernism obfuscates women's political concerns. Within a postmodern political framework bodies become words and are analysed as texts rather than living entities (Klein 1996, 347). Thus, for the postmodern scholar, the body becomes nothing but ether in the face of digital data and code, and it is presumed to be rendered knowable only through various competing discourses (Shaw 2003, 48).

Initially emerging as a subset of postmodernism, queer feminism also presents limited possibilities for analysis in the context of this book. Although feminist and queer politics are regularly conflated in contemporary scholarship (e.g., Fotopoulou 2016), the queer political project is, like postmodernism, often actively hostile to women and lesbians, and antithetical to the pursuit of women's liberation (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1996). In the 1990s, queer emerged as an alternative to gay and lesbian politics. It was seen as more inclusive of diverse sexualities, and more adequately able to capture social complexities. Queer theory expanded on the postmodern idea that 'gender and sexuality are products of discourse rather than given realities' (Fotopoulou 2016, 127), and this made

it very difficult for feminists to speak about patriarchy as a material power structure shaping women's lives. As it is used today, queer is an umbrella term that includes gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual, but queer-identifying, couples (people that Linda Garber ([2009] 2016, 82) has called 'queer straights'; see also Miller et al. 2016). Some scholars have characterised queer politics as an attempt to 'remasculinise' the lesbian feminist theory of the WLM, noting how lesbian feminist concerns are diluted, and lesbians rendered invisible, in queer spaces that include men (Jeffreys 2018, 179; see also Garber 1994). Today, the tension between queer feminism and lesbian feminism remains unresolved and it is a continuing source of activist and academic controversy (Megarry et al. 2018).

An individualised vision of liberation is clearly evident in Haraway's ([1984] 2000, 295) claim that 'dangerous [political] possibilities' for resisting the 'worldwide intensification of domination' might stem from women embracing the 'transgressed boundaries' between the categories of human and technology. To transgress or 'queer' something is viewed by scholars as a way of challenging oppressive regimes by highlighting the artificiality of normative boundaries (Fotopoulou 2016, 127). One of the primary political projects of postmodern and queer theorists has been to destabilise the political category of women in favour of playing with gender expression. Queer theorists such as Judith Butler (1999) have argued that gender is produced through repeated performance, and that the gender system can be challenged via the expression of unexpected behavioural characteristics. Because digital networking technologies provide individuals with a space conducive to self-representation and 'world-making' (Fotopoulou 2016, 126), social media has been theorised as particularly amenable to the task of seeking liberation via processes of representation, recognition and transgression.

Radical feminist scholars such as Sheila Jeffreys (2014, 42) have argued that Butler's theoretical move obscures the 'material power relations of male domination' and obfuscates the feminist insight that the gender system perpetuates women's oppression. According to Jeffreys (2014, 42), queer theorists following Butler aimed 'to make gender a bit more flexible' via transgressive personal expression. Within a queer/postmodern vision of liberation, 'individual bodies [are] challenged rather than the

body politic, such that body modification, branding, cutting and tattooing [can] be seen as progressive practices' (Jeffreys 2014, 41). This drive operates according to the same logic as transgender ideology, which advocates hormone treatment and surgery as routes to liberation. It also dovetails with the political project of transhumanism, which, following developments in robotics and artificial intelligence technologies, advocates for a complete abandonment of the human, liberation via technological modification and the 'unfettered commodification' of the body (Richardson 2019, 122).

To return to Haraway (1994, 63), it is difficult to understand precisely what feminists should do to challenge or expose male dominance in a world where 'the axes of the technical, organic, mythic, political, economic and textual intersect in optically and gravitationally dense nodes that function like wormholes to cast us into the turbulent and barely charted territories of technoscience'. Haraway ([1984] 2000, 294) does away with considerations of both the material body and political examinations of women's shared experiences, asking instead that women focus their attention 'out there', where 'machines are made of sunshine; […] all light and clean because they are nothing but signals'. She employs a politically meaningless language built on transcendence and disconnection from both emotional and physical life. Not only are women divided from each other in her cyborg theory, but their bodies and their material experiences are required to become 'ether, quintessence', nothing more than surfaces, texts and code (Haraway [1984] 2000, 294). The insidiousness of such an approach to feminist politics is that it is packaged as liberation for women and expressed as a vehicle through which they can more deeply express their fragmented cyborgian selves. Digital cultures scholar Sally Wyatt (2008, 112) has explained that Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* 'lacks a programme for action' and does not make space for the role of activism and collective political struggle in bringing about a feminist revolution. It is for this reason that WLM activist Carol Hanisch (2010, n.p.) has argued that postmodernism and queer politics represents a 'regression into jargon that nicely conceals, confuses, and complicates both the problems and the solutions' for feminists.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminists understand that male dominance pervades all social institutions (Bell and Klein 1996), and they have historically been deeply sceptical of the claim that developments in the technology sector could lead to positive outcomes for women (see Arditti et al. 1984; Corea 1988; Huws [1982] 1984; Raymond [1993] 1995). Drawing attention to how new technologies are always developed in line with male interests, they have argued that, despite claims of scientific objectivity and altruism, the process of technological development is imbued with male values and a male philosophical outlook:

> New technologies do not fall from heaven. Technology is a social institution, and its developments reflect the social and political system of which it is part. How can a small group of white men based in industrialised countries, who support, fund, and control science and technology worldwide, convince us that they are 'objective', that their work is politically neutral? A separation between technological developments and the world in which they are applied is unreal. It is but one world (Arditti et al. 1984, 4).

Radical feminist scholars have critically questioned the idea that existing social inequalities can be fixed via the development of technological solutions in the form of computers, pills or artificial wombs. They have also drawn attention to how the directions pursued by technologists are underwritten by a male, capitalist and colonial political agenda which tends to produce new problems for women (Arditti et al. 1984, 3; Hawthorne 1999a, 125). Particular attention has been paid to the rapid expansion and lack of regulation of the international surrogacy industry, which reduces women to wombs that the powerful can rent, and has produced new forms of exploitation, particularly for Global South women (Ekman 2014; Klein 2017; Roache 2019).

Radical feminist scholars have also traced how digital developments advance male power to the detriment of women, particularly through the expansion of the global pornography and prostitution industries (Dines 2010; Hughes 2002; Jeffreys 2013). Abigail Bray (2013, 7), for example, has argued that social media enables men to conduct a sex war against

women. In her book, *Misogyny Reloaded*, Bray conceptualises sexually violent Facebook pages as political terrorism, or 'the casual normalisation of lethal misogyny'. Armed with smartphones, Bray described how men are using digital communication technologies as political weapons 'to secure their status by practicing hatred against girls and women' (Bray 2013, 12).

Amongst the existing radical feminist scholarship on technology, only one clear anomaly exists in relation to the argument outlined above. In 1970, influential WLM activist and scholar Shulamith Firestone argued that technology offered an emancipatory and politically neutral tool which could *and should* be used by feminists in the struggle for women's liberation. Firestone's ([1970] 1972) book, *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution* was one of the first key texts of the WLM to identify sexuality, the nuclear family and reproduction as political arrangements which uphold women's social subordination to men. While Firestone's text has been crucial in shaping radical feminist thought, her vision that technology should be used as a vehicle for women's liberation has been placed under intense scrutiny in the decades following its publication. Before detailing these critiques, I will first outline Firestone's central argument.

Firestone understood that the liberation of women is dependent upon the elimination of the sex-class distinction, and that a feminist revolution would have to do away with oppression grounded in women's reproductive capacity. Consistent with radical feminist theory, she argued that the underlying power structures of male dominance must be transformed, and oppressive social institutions dismantled, if women are to be truly liberated. In contrast to other radical feminist scholarship pertaining to technology, Firestone also suggested that technological innovation held the potential to release women from the bondage of childbirth, wage labour and the nuclear family structure. Within her vision of a feminist future, reproductive technology and the development of cybernetics would lead to women's freedom from male control:

> The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes equally, or independently of either, however one

chooses to look at it; the dependence of the child on the mother (and vice versa) would give way to a greatly shortened dependence on a small group of others in general, and any remaining inferiority to adults in physical strength would be compensated for culturally. The division of labour would be ended by the elimination of labour altogether (through cybernetics). The tyranny of the biological family would be broken (Firestone [1970] 1972, 19).

Denise Thompson (2001, 117) has explained that, because Firestone 'perceived pregnancy and childbirth as inherently oppressive of women, she could only recommend that they be abolished by technological means'. Firestone ([1970] 1972, 193) proposed that artificial wombs would free women from the 'tyranny of reproduction' and turn child rearing into a responsibility of the whole society, rather than the burden of women alone. To ensure the full membership of women and children in society and the complete dismantling of the nuclear family structure, she also argued that the development of cybernetics would undermine the male breadwinner/female homemaker binary and 'eventually strip the division of labour at the root of the family of any remaining practical value' (Firestone [1970] 1972, 206).

Central to Firestone's ([1970] 1972, 190) thesis was the claim that technology in its current form perpetuates domination only because it is controlled by men. She analysed technology as a politically neutral entity and argued that it could be useful to women when used and developed in a feminist social context. Firestone was concerned that feminists had so far focussed on the evils of reproductive and cybernetic technology and had failed to recognise their revolutionary significance. For her, a primary goal of WLM activism was for women to seize control of technological innovation. In *The Dialectic of Sex* she urged women to concentrate 'their *full* energies on demands for control of scientific discovery' and argued that technology does not have an inbuilt ideology: 'atomic energy, fertility control, artificial reproduction, cybernation, in themselves, are liberating—*unless* they are improperly used' (Firestone [1970] 1972, 187). Contrary to the more recent radical feminist work discussed above, Firestone did not criticise technology as a social institution that structures patterns of behaviour and is driven by a male, capitalist, imperialist

ideology. Instead, she argued that the '*misuse* of science has often obscured the value of science itself' (Firestone [1970] 1972, 190).

In direct contrast to Firestone, other scholarship that came out of the early WLM took a much more overtly critical approach to theorising the relationship between technology and women's liberation. For example, in her influential text *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett ([1969] 1972, 41) discussed how women are prevented from accessing the centres of industrial and technological power in patriarchal societies. She also argued that men actively retain control of technological production to ensure their dominant social status. For Millett, expansion of technological industry was unlikely to result in increased social capital for women, because women 'do not own or control or even comprehend the process in which they participate' (Millett [1969] 1972, 41). This insight still holds true in the contemporary context. Although Millett was writing in 1969, gendered processes of socialisation continue to divert women away from science and technology careers and ensure that they occupy relatively few positions of power in relation to technological design (Hurwitz 2017, 476; Wajcman 2000, 452). In the USA, where only 26% of computing professionals are women, men continue to drive software design and development, network engineering and operation (Corbett and Hill 2015). Furthermore, women's 'systematic ignorance' (Millett [1969] 1972, 42) of the workings of technology is still perpetuated by the hostile environment of workplaces. As recent insider testimonies reveal, social media companies are characterised by a masculine competitive culture and high levels of sexual harassment (Chang 2018; Wiener 2020).

Radical feminists writing after Firestone argued that reproductive technology is a politically dangerous social institution which feminists should actively resist (Corea 1988; Ekman 2014; Arditti et al. 1984; Klein 1992, 2017; Raymond [1993] 1995). They highlighted how developments in reproductive technology have not led to an increase in women's freedom, but have, instead, made it easier for men to control women's bodies. For example, Janice Raymond ([1993] 1995, viii) argued that reproductive technology is a form of medical violence against women because it violates 'the integrity of a woman's body in ways that are dangerous, destructive, debilitating and demeaning'. Renate Klein (1996, 347) also argued that the values imbedded in reproductive technology are

inherently dehumanising: 'aimed at reducing women to their body parts, specifically their dismembered fertility'. For Klein (1996, 348), it is politically dangerous for women to accept the ideology of reproductive scientists who seek to 'divide-and-recombine' women, both from each other, and from their own bodies. Whereas Firestone ([1970] 1972, 188) positioned women's reproductive capacity as a bodily nuisance to be overcome and disposed of—in *The Dialectic of Sex* she describes pregnancy as both 'barbaric' and 'the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species'—radical feminist scholars have since argued that liberation for women should be based upon a conception of women as holistic persons enmeshed in a wider ecological system that *has limits* (Hawthorne 2002; Jensen 2017, 142–143).

It is important to note that arguing that reproductive technologies are inherently oppressive for women is not the same as suggesting that the experience of motherhood under male dominance is women's destiny. On the contrary, the radical feminist critique of reproductive technologies developed from the perspective that it is politically dangerous for women to place control of their bodies in the hands of men (Raymond [1993] 1995, 91). As Raymond ([1993] 1995, 91) has argued: 'women as a class have a stake in reclaiming the female body, not as female nature, but by refusing to yield control of it to men, to the fetus, to the state'. During the WLM, for example, it was common for activists to reject the male medical establishment and set up women's health centres to teach themselves holistic care. Women recognised that, despite claiming altruistic intent, reproductive scientists sought to alienate women from their bodies by retaining control of women's sexuality, reproduction and health (Klein 1996, 346–348). Rather than rejecting pregnancy outright as a site of domination, radical feminists such as Adrienne Rich (1976) and Janice Raymond ([1993] 1995) have questioned the social and political forces which shape reproduction in ways which benefit men, and highlighted how it is the patriarchal institutionalisation of motherhood that is oppressive to women, rather than motherhood itself.

Radical Feminism and Digital Technology

In comparison to the ongoing scrutiny radical feminists have applied to advances in reproductive technology and their unwavering political opposition to the surrogacy and IVF industries, surprisingly little has been said critiquing digital networking technology from a radical feminist perspective. It is difficult to determine precisely why this has been the case. It is possible that radical feminists have been in a better position to critique reproductive over digital technologies because, while surrogacy and IVF relate so obviously to the body, the political dangers of the advent of digital technologies have not been so easily related to women's material lives. Digital space has been persistently associated with disembodiment within academic discourse (Easter 2018, 677), which might offer some explanation as to why radical feminists have not been as attuned to the dangers of internet technologies for women.

In the 1990s, radical feminists Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein offered some important reflections on digital technology, raising key questions about what it might mean for feminist activism and women's liberation (Hawthorne 1999a; Hawthorne and Klein 1999; Klein 1999). Their edited collection *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity* turned an early critical eye to the ways in which male power operates in relation to digital technologies. For example, they identified the central ethical paradox inherent in using a male-designed technology for feminist purposes and they also stressed that feminists should avoid being seduced by the hype afforded to digital technology as a vehicle of social change:

> The internet is a powerful force for networking, and for sharing of knowledge and resources. But it is also a technology originally intended for the military and for global domination. In our [feminist] communities, we are faced with the question of whether to use the technology or not. (Hawthorne and Klein 1999, 8)

While Hawthorne and Klein's collection acts as an important and influential precursor to this book, their volume differs in that it remained hopeful in its predictions about what the internet might mean for women.

Cyberfeminism analysed internet technologies as 'abstract objects or things' (Shaw 2003, 48)—as evidenced in introductory claims such as 'cyberculture is only as diverse and interesting, or as violent and boring, as those who contribute to it' (Hawthorne and Klein 1999, 14)—rather than as an institution actively shaping women's oppression. *Cyberfeminism*'s ultimately hopeful tone reveals just how seductive the rhetoric of digital emancipation can be, even to radical feminist scholars.

A Fourth Wave?

Having introduced the reader to the principal debates pertaining to women, technology and social change, I will now investigate the claim that social media has sparked a fourth wave of feminism (Munro 2013). Wave terminology is the dominant paradigm through which the feminist movement is discussed, but I do not use wave terminology in this book. The term *first wave* is commonly used to describe the period of women's suffrage activism beginning in the late 1800s and spanning into the early 1900s; *second wave* denotes feminist activity during the WLM (late 1960s till late 1980s); and the post-WLM period is usually described as *third wave* feminism. While the idea of a *fourth wave* of feminism remains under-theorised in the available literature, with scholars continuing to disagree about its origins (Baumgardner 2011; Zimmerman 2017), the link between social media and the rise of the so-called fourth wave is largely uncontested. Whereas the WLM is commonly associated with independent press houses and self-published newsletters, and the third wave has been linked to internet technologies more generally (Shade 2002), many scholars agree that so-called fourth-wave activists rely heavily on social media (Chamberlain 2016; Crossley 2017, 21–22; Evans 2015, 15).

The wave metaphor has received sustained scholarly critique based upon its depiction of the feminist movement as a series of ebbs and flows of activism (Chamberlain 2016; Crossley and Taylor 2015; Mackay 2015). The main critique of the wave metaphor has been that it erases the efforts of feminist organisers who sustain the movement through periods of backlash and diminished public visibility. Verta Taylor (1989), for

example, coined the term 'abeyance' to describe how social movement actors develop complex structures to ensure the continuation of radical ideas, tactics and traditions in periods of political hostility. For Taylor (1989, 761), abeyance is the 'holding process by which movements sustain themselves in nonreceptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilisation to another'. The idea of a movement in abeyance is useful for explaining the survival of radical feminist grassroots organising, which has continued since the decline of the WLM despite increasing social and political hostility.

Another important critique of the wave metaphor is that it links what can be more accurately described as different feminist ideologies to specific generations and time periods (Mackay 2015; Shaw 2003, 45, 51). Interviewee Meghan Murphy (DN, CA) explained how she does not identify herself as a 'second-wave feminist' because that term is 'rooted in generations'. Even though she was not involved in the WLM, Murphy still traced her political worldview to the ideology of women's liberation: 'that's where my feminism is, those are the women that I learned from, those are the women that I ally with [...] that ideology is what I'm committed to'. Wave discourse situates feminist politics in a linear narrative of progression where each wave is associated with a new generation and more robust political ideas. Within this narrative, radical feminist politics and the WLM are demonised and presumed no longer relevant, because the (younger) third wave is seen to have addressed and eclipsed the political mistakes of second wavers (see Gillis et al. 2004). In opposition to this view, Finn Mackay (2015) has critiqued the wave metaphor on the basis that it leaves little space to theorise third-wave feminism, along with its embrace of pornography and prostitution and its rejection of women-only spaces, as a backlash to the radical feminist politics of the WLM.

Understanding feminist waves as ideologically distinct is useful in the context of this book. Doing so disrupts the narrative of feminist progress, and it also provides a framework that can account for how the third wave's reliance on male theoretical frameworks and individualised political frames renders it fundamentally 'antithetical to radical feminism' (Mackay 2015, 157). Whereas self-identified third-wave scholars celebrate the third wave as an achievement of postmodern multiplicity characterised by individualisation, fragmentation and contradiction (Budgeon

2011, 3; Whelehan 2007, xv), radical feminist scholars have argued that its politics are underpinned by a belief that 'the pursuit of opportunity lies solely in women's hands' and is no longer impacted by structural inequality (Kiraly and Tyler 2015, 1). WLM activists sought to develop a woman-centred political framework outside of the parameters of male thought and they considered autonomous women-only space to be an integral aspect of feminist organising. By comparison, third-wave feminism represents a type of 'feminism-lite' which clearly rejects and actively works against the political insights and organising strategies of the WLM (Kiraly and Tyler 2015, xi; see also Thompson 2001, 2).

Mackay's (2015) understanding of feminist waves as politically distinct ideologies becomes less useful, however, when it comes to theorising the so-called fourth wave. While her argument suggests that a fourth wave would represent a move away from the individualised politics of the third wave, scholars have not yet evidenced any marked departure from third-wave feminist ideology in mainstream digital feminist protest (Munro 2013; Risam 2015). For example, author and activist Jennifer Baumgardner (2011) wrote an early account of the fourth wave which emphasises how it *continues* the political project of the third wave in its embrace of mixed-sex organising and male-led political projects such as transgender rights:

> In place of zines and songs, young [fourth wave] feminists created blogs, Twitter campaigns, and online media with names like Racialicious and Feministing, or wrote for Jezebel and Salon's Broadsheet. They commented on the news, posted their most stylish plus-size fashion photos with info about where to shop, and tweeted that they, too, had had an abortion. "Reproductive justice," coined by women of color in the 1990s, became the term of choice for young feminists. Transgenderism, male feminists, sex work, and complex relationships within the media characterized their feminism. (Baumgardner 2011, 251)

For writers like Baumgardner, the point is not so much that third- and fourth-wave feminist ideologies are distinct, but rather that activists had taken up social media as their communication tool of choice.

To add further confusion to the scholarly debate on feminist waves, feminist activists approach the term *fourth wave* differently depending on whether they align themselves with the politics of women's liberation or with liberal feminism, queer feminism or transgender politics. According to social movement scholars Elizabeth Evans and Prudence Chamberlain (2015, 404), activists use the wave metaphor 'strategically' as a 'political call to arms'. For example, when radical feminists claim that a fourth wave exists (see Kiraly and Tyler 2015, xiii), this is a rhetorical move representing a break with third-wave ideologies and signalling hope that a collective political consciousness more aligned with the WLM is re-emerging. Online groups who take up the WLM's critique of transgenderism also use the fourth-wave label as a rallying cry that signals their linkage to radical feminist political theory. The group 4thWaveNow, for example, describes itself as 'a community of parents and friends skeptical of the "transgender child/teen" trend' and features a quote from the prominent WLM theorist and poet Adrienne Rich on its homepage.[6] Popular media sources, on the other hand, have positioned the fourth wave as generationally aligned with millennials and often cite liberal feminist celebrities as its spokeswomen (see, e.g., Untitled Magazine 2015).

In a context where both radical feminist, queer feminist and liberal feminist groups are claiming the label *fourth wave* for themselves, the concept of a fourth wave, and of feminist waves more broadly, is of little theoretical use in the context of this book. Wave discourse often poses challenges because it did not emerge organically from activists; rather it has been retrospectively applied to periods of feminist organising by scholars. As interviewee Sheila Jeffreys remarked (WLM, UK): 'we didn't call ourselves second wave, we just thought of it as feminism'. The wave metaphor also contributes to the fracturing of feminism for the benefit of adversaries. Speaking of diverse waves opens a space within feminism for competing claims and contradictory ideologies to all be positioned as feminist, and taken as evidence of a strong, revived movement. In this reading, anything that anybody posts on social media under the label of feminism can be interpreted as evidence of a fourth wave. This is part of a wider problem within social movement scholarship where scholars

---

[6] See https://4thwavenow.com/

largely evade a normative evaluation of activist strategies (Martin 2007, 25, see also Goodwin and Jasper 2015). Instead of offering a definition of key terms such as *feminism* and *the feminist movement*, feminist social movement scholars prefer to define feminism broadly to capture the widest possible range of women's mobilisations for analysis (Ferree and Mueller 2004, 579). Broad definitions of feminism are limited in their ability to clearly identify what feminists seek change from, and what they want it changed to (see Thompson 2001, 5). Nor can they provide the intellectual tools to adjudicate between competing perspectives regarding what feminism is, and whether it is experiencing a revival.

Social Movement Studies and Women's Liberation: Wider Problems

To further unpack the claim that feminism is now in a fourth wave, in this section I consider the conceptual and analytical biases embedded in the discipline of social movement studies. Doing so will assist the reader in understanding why this book reaches very different conclusions to existing digital feminism scholarship.

Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1998, 622) were some of the first scholars to challenge the male bias evident within the social movement studies discipline, pointing out that the 'institutions and processes' which theorists consider fundamental to protest outcomes are experienced differently by men and women. In the 1990s, Taylor and Whittier challenged feminist social movement scholars to place women at the centre of their analysis and work to reconceptualise the core concerns of the discipline. Many feminist scholars have since turned their attention to this task, critically interrogating how social movement studies scholarship reinforces traditional divisions between public and private, movements and institutions, and what counts and does not count as activism (for a comprehensive review see Bereni and Revillard 2012).

In addition to the challenges feminist social movement studies scholars have posed to the traditional concerns of the discipline, radical feminist theorists have also explained that arguing with male-centred theory on its

own terms binds women within its discourse and is therefore an intrinsically limiting endeavour for developing feminist theory (Klein 1996). Male theoretical frameworks circumscribe women's political thought for the benefit of men, perpetuating and reinforcing *hetero-reality* (Klein 1996, 350). They also redirect feminist thought away from exposing and contesting male dominance (Thompson 2001). This phenomenon is evident in the two main frameworks of social movement studies—*resource mobilisation theory* and *new social movement theory*—both of which do not adequately theorise women's subordinate social position in relation to men, and also fail to consider male social dominance as an analytical category relevant to social movement mobilisations.

The resource mobilisation perspective—also termed the American approach—focusses on empirical questions concerning *how* movements mobilise (Crossley 2002, 10). It emphasises the role of external political processes and internal organisational dynamics on the origins and evolution of social movements, and it has been critiqued for its inability to account for the *why* questions of mobilisation such as historical factors pertaining to the origins of activists' political dissatisfaction and motivations (Buechler 1993; Roseneil 1995, 14). According to resource mobilisation theory, individuals join social movements as rational actors who have weighed up the costs and benefits of participation and decided they have something to gain (Buechler 1993, 218). Cost/benefit analysis is a severely limited framework for trying to explain women's collective political action, not least because being publicly identified as a feminist typically incurs severe and immediate costs for women in the form of social ostracism and harassment. A cost/benefit analysis of social movement participation also downplays the role of ideology in accounting for the persistence of social movements and activist motivation. Resource mobilisation theory is unable to explain how women come to translate their individual grievances into a politicised collective agenda and it also ignores how the creation of a worldview provides the context in which activists can 'foster mobilisation, formulate goals, and debate strategy' (Buechler 1993, 223).

The European tradition of social movement research, conversely, has been explicitly concerned with understanding *why* movements emerge when they do. Referred to as *new social movement theory*, this approach

attempts to explain the rise of social movements post-1960 in relation to the shift from industrial to post-industrial society. Arguing that society had become less homogenous, and that political conflict therefore could no longer be explained via a Marxist theory of class relations, new social movement theory is an influential body of work which has resulted in greater attention being paid to social and cultural elements within movements (Diani 1992; Melucci 1996, 6). The importance of women's culture in relation to the growth and success of women's liberation is a key theme of this book, and in the next chapter I will further discuss how the development of an oppositional women's culture played a pivotal role in mobilising and sustaining WLM activists.

Despite paying more attention to culture, new social movement theory is also a flawed lens through which to study women's political organising. This is because it has 'too often assumed that all movements confront basically similar tasks and operate out of the same interior logic' (Morris and Braine 2001, 20). Although the WLM is commonly analysed in tandem with other movements of the late 1960s such as the civil rights and anti-war movements, the WLM was a distinctive social movement with its own unique political concerns. Frustrated with Leftist men who continued to oppress women and ignore their political demands in mixed-sex social movements, the WLM, from its inception, issued a radical challenge to Leftist understandings of class-based politics (which to this day has not been answered) (Burris et al. [1971] 2000; Phillips [1998] 2009).

The central early claim of feminist activists that the 'the personal is political' was politically potent *precisely because* it issued a fundamental challenge to male-centric radical thought. As Anne Phillips ([1998] 2009, 3) has explained:

> [The] WLM signalled a move away from the contestations between capital and labour that has preoccupied generations of Marxist activists, and questioned the radicalism of those new social movements that were themselves extending the meaning of politics, but rarely to the point of including who did the housework or who typed the leaflets or who had the power in bed.

New social movement theory is an ineffective frame through which to investigate the feminist movement, because it does not specifically consider changes in male dominance or how sexual politics shape political conflict (Long 2010, 111; Roseneil 1995, 14–15). Radical feminists, conversely, have theorised 'compulsory heterosexuality' as a social system integral to male dominance (Rich [1980] 1993) and they have also demonstrated how women's political outcomes are shaped through domination in their intimate relationships. Through a combination of institutional and personal pressures, they have argued that women are funnelled into hierarchical intimate relationships with men, and that alternative forms of sexual and emotional connection such as lesbianism are stifled in this process (Jeffreys 1993; Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, 52–53; Rich [1980] 1993; Wittig 1992).

Social movement studies scholarship also often fails to pay sufficient attention to the role of social institutions and social structures in shaping women's choices. For example, radical feminist theorists have been strongly critical of the male-dominated fields of social psychology and political sociology (Cardea 1985; Kitzinger and Perkins 1993), from which the discipline of social movement studies borrows heavily (Oliver and Johnston 2000, 37; see also Morris and Braine 2001, 20–21). Social psychology has played a key role in forming the frameworks of male dominance, because it looks for individual traits and individual explanations for human behaviour instead of analysing how choices are shaped by social context. From this basis, radical feminists have argued that psychological analysis is incompatible with women's liberation (Cardea 1985; Kitzinger and Perkins 1993). In a paper that was distributed widely in the WLM, Naomi Weisstein ([1971] 1973) provided a searing early feminist critique of psychology. Weisstein ([1971] 1973, 194–195) argued that theorising women's behaviour without paying attention to the dominating effects of male power is a flawed theoretical exercise:

> One must understand the social conditions under which women live if one is going to attempt to explain the behavior of women. And to understand the social conditions under which women live, one must be cognizant of the social expectations about women.

While contemporary social movement studies scholarship pays more attention to social context than the field of psychology, 'it still does not adequately situate individuals and social networks within systems of domination' (Morris and Braine 2001, 21; see also Hetland and Goodwin 2013).

The language used by social movement studies scholars also tends to obfuscate women's political concerns rather than illuminate them. Many now avoid speaking of 'the movement', preferring instead to concentrate on accounting for how mobilisation and collective action is impacted by diverse social phenomena. It is very difficult to understand how scholars are meant to account for the 'multiplicity of synchronic and diachronic elements' (Melucci 1996, 6) in movements, or how this theoretical framework is of any use for shedding light on the factors that aid or limit feminist mobilisations and outcomes. Charles Tilly (2004, 7) has gone so far to argue that speaking of 'the movement' stunts the intellectual pursuit of 'describ[ing] and explain[ing] how social movements actually work' and that doing so is a lowly endeavour more suited to activists concerned with 'aid[ing] recruitment, mobilization or morale'. From Tilly's (2004, 7) perspective, treating the movement as an entity would obscure:

> The incessant jockeying and realignment that always go on within social movements, and […] the interaction among activists, constituents, targets, authorities, rivals, enemies, and audiences that makes up the changing texture of social movements.

Sarah Maddison and Frances Shaw (2012, 416) have also critiqued prior research on Australian feminist activism on the basis that it assumes 'the women's movement is a defined object for study that can be explored in terms of history, goals and achievements'. They have argued that feminists need to analyse collective political action as a *process* in order to pay attention to questions of 'how collective mobilisation can occur and be sustained in complex societies' (Maddison and Shaw 2012, 416).

The danger of the kind of approach advocated for by Maddison and Shaw is that it tends to overemphasise examples of individual agency at the expense of structural analysis. Commonly, it facilitates scholarly analyses of women's political action that fail to even mention the system that

feminists are fighting against: male dominance. As Marxist scholars Gabriel Hetland and Jeff Goodwin (2013, 86) have explained, contemporary social movement scholarship reveals a postmodern preoccupation with the particular which often obscures the wider political forces at play. From this vantage point, short-term shifts in how activists frame their political grievances and organise their social networks in any era need to be considered in relation to wider political structures such as capitalism, and, as is of primary concern in this book, male dominance. Otherwise, the drive to produce scholarship of increasing complexity and nuance can block the process of abstraction on which both theory-building and political action depend (Harvey 2000, 241; Healy 2017).

Another problem scholars have flagged within the wider discipline of social movement studies is that it has often marginalised or ignored the online components of activist practices (Maddison and Shaw 2012, 415). As a result, feminist social movement studies research has understandably sought to establish digital space as a key site of contemporary feminist activism. To offset recurring claims in the mainstream media that 'feminism is dead', feminist social movement scholars have demonstrated that young women are robustly engaged in feminist activism in digital space (Harris 2008; Schuster 2013). They have found, mapped and investigated how women are using the internet for their activism (Crossley 2017; Evans 2015; Mendes et al. 2019), and they have emphasised the need to take women's digital networks seriously when studying activist culture (Mendes 2015; Shaw 2012). These approaches, however, do not sufficiently attend to questions of male power and control in digital space. Moving away from structural theorising and the focus on material power structures characteristic of political theories such as radical feminism and Marxism, feminist theory in the twenty-first century has been more likely to investigate the role of language and discourse as sites of women's oppression or resistance to male dominance. This trend is clearly evident within feminist social movement studies research, where scholars have conceptualised social media as a site of *discursive* feminist protest (Mendes 2015; Shaw 2012). From this perspective, social media is cast as revolutionary based upon its self-publishing properties which allow women to transcend traditional barriers to face-to-face political participation,

discuss their experiences, express their political views in their own words and intervene in mainstream debates.

Considering how social media might provide women with a new avenue for challenging dominant cultural and political discourses is an important avenue of research, especially considering that the mainstream media has long been recognised by feminist scholars as a flawed vehicle through which to advance feminist politics. The mainstream media has played a key role in perpetuating male-serving social and sexual norms (Brown 2002). Journalists such as Susan Faludi (1992) and scholars such as Angela McRobbie (2009) and Karen Boyle (2019) have demonstrated that the mainstream media are more likely to mirror male ideology and reinforce anti-feminist backlash than give fair or sympathetic coverage to feminist ideas. Women's issues have also been frequently belittled in the mainstream press, which often presents women as either one-dimensional sex-objects to be consumed by men, or as domestic, traditionally feminine homemakers.

Analysing social media platforms primarily as sites of discursive activism allows scholars to avoid critically analysing whether digital political participation is producing material outcomes for women. While culture is a necessary 'terrain of struggle' for social movements, the danger of analysing the success of digital feminism primarily on the discursive level is that, as Nancy Fraser (2000, 109–110) has argued in relation to contemporary identity politics, 'the roots of injustice are located in demeaning representations but these are not seen as socially grounded'. To put this another way, digital participation and the visibility of feminism in digital spaces does not, in and of itself, make patriarchy go away for women (Klein 1999, 186). Oppressive ideologies have social roots, and they manifest materially through the uneven distribution of power, economic resources and, in the case of patriarchy, sexual violence against women (Mackinnon 1989).

Another significant oversight of digital feminist scholarship is that male presence in social media spaces has been largely ignored, even though mixed-sex protest sites have been historically dangerous for women who have been abused both by the hands of governments and by the male activists they are fighting alongside. Several feminist scholars have argued that addressing violence against women in mixed-sex protest

spaces is often subsumed by a narrative of the greater struggle waged against the forces the protest is attempting to overthrow (Burris et al. [1971] 2000; Coleman and Bassi 2011; Enloe 2013). The anarchist movement, for example, clearly illustrates what is at stake for women in mixed-sex movements. A culture of sexism and violence against women persists in anarchist circles, and it remains unclear within anarchist philosophy who will protect women from sexual violence after the toppling of the state (Gaarder 2003, 46; Portwood-Stacer 2013, 97–100). The small body of literature specifically considering women's experiences in mixed-sex social movements demonstrates how social movements are in themselves sites of oppression for women, even when the movement has broad social justice aims (Boler et al. 2014; Coleman and Bassi 2011).

Conclusion

It is unclear from the existing literature how social media, as a new social institution structuring communication in digital space, is likely to be less hostile to women than other male-dominated institutions or offer them more opportunities to challenge the status quo. Social media has been identified as the principal site of feminist organising today, but wider questions still remain regarding when and how the technology reinforces or destabilises male power. In this chapter, I have made the case that radical feminist theory provides particularly useful analytical tools for studying women's digital protest outcomes. In the next chapter, I outline the key organising strategies of the WLM, paying particular attention to spatial location. It was in the context of a physically grounded movement that women began to interpret social problems, understand the need for women-only spaces, build an oppositional culture and imagine themselves outside of male control. This analysis of the importance of women-only physical space to the development of the WLM sets the stage for the rest of the book, which investigates how social media is shaping feminists' political organising strategies.

References

ABC News. 2019. Transgender Law Reform to Allow Victorians to Change Birth Certificate Gender Without Surgery. June 18. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-18/vic-transgender-laws-make-it-easier-to-change-birth-certificate/11220342

Allen, Pamela. 1970. *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*. New York: Times Change Press.

Arditti, Rita, Renate Klein, and Shelley Minden, eds. 1984. *Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood?* London: Pandora Press.

Barad, Karen. 1988. Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 10 (2): 87–128.

Barrett, Ruth, ed. 2016. *Female Erasure: What You Need to Know About Gender Politics' War on Women, the Female Sex and Human Rights*. Pacific Palisades: Tidal Time Publishing.

Barry, Kathleen. 1995. *The Prostitution of Sexuality*. New York: New York University Press.

Baumgardner, Jennifer. 2011. Is There a Fourth Wave? Does it Matter? http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/genwom/baumgardner2011.html.

Bell, Diane, and Renate Klein, eds. 1996. *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Bereni, Laure, and Anne Revillard. 2012. A Paradigmatic Social Movement? Women's Movements and the Definition of Contentious Politics. *Sociétés Contemporaines* 85: 17–41.

Bindel, Julie. 2017. 'Whorephobia' isn't a Threat to Feminism—but Ignoring the Abuse of Women Is. *Independent*, March 15. https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/whorephobia-queer-feminism-fourth-wave-sex-work-prostitution-a7631706.html

Boler, Megan, Averie Macdonald, Christina Nitsou, and Anne Harris. 2014. Connective Labor and Social Media: Women's Roles in the 'Leaderless' Occupy Movement. *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 20 (4): 438–460.

Boyle, Karen. 2019. *#MeToo, Weinstein and Feminism*. Palgrave Pivot: Cham.

Bray, Abigail. 2013. *Misgoyny Reloaded*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Brodribb, Somer. 1992. *Nothing Mat(T)ers: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Brown, Jane D. 2002. Mass Media Influences on Sexuality. *Journal of Sex Research* 39 (1): 42–45.

Bruley, Sue. [1976] 1981. Women Awake: The Experience of Consciousness-Raising. In *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975–80*, ed. Feminist Anthology Collective, 60–67. London: The Women's Press.

Bruley, Sue, and Laurel Forster. 2016. Historicising the Women's Liberation Movement. *Women's History Review* 25 (5): 697–700.

Budgeon, Shelley. 2011. *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Buechler, Steven M. 1993. Beyond Resource Mobilisation: Emerging Trends in Social Movement Theory. *The Sociological Quarterly* 34 (2): 217–235.

Burris, Barbara, Kathy Barry, Terry Moore, Joann DeLor, Joann Parent, and Cate Stadelman. [1971] 2000. The Fourth World Manifesto. In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow, 238–264. New York: New York University Press.

Butler, Judith. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism And The Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Cardea, Caryatis. 1985. The Lesbian Revolution and The 50-Minute Hour: A Working Class Look at Therapy and the Movement. In *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures*, ed. Jeffner Allen, 193–218. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Chamberlain, Prudence. 2016. Affective Temporality: Towards a Fourth Wave. *Gender and Education* 28 (3): 458–464.

Chambers, Clare. 2008. *Sex, Culture and Justice: The Limits of Choice*. Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press.

Chang, Emily. 2018. *Brotopia: Breaking Up the Boys' Club of Silicon Valley*. New York: Portfolio.

Chesler, Phyllis. [1972] 1997. *Women and Madness*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.

Citron, Danielle. 2014. *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Coleman, Lara Montesinos, and Serena A. Bassi. 2011. Deconstructing Militant Manhood. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13 (2): 204–224.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2015. Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology* 41: 1–20.

Corbett, Christianne, and Catherine Hill. 2015. *Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women's Success in Engineering and Computing*. Washington: American Association of University Women.

Corea, Gena. 1988. *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs*. London: The Women's Press.

Crenshaw, Kimberlè W. 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics and Violence Against Women Of Colour. *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–1299.

———. 2010. Close Encounters of Three Kinds: On Teaching Dominance Feminism and Intersectionality. *Tulsa Law Review* 46 (1): 151–189.

Crossley, Nick. 2002. *Making Sense of Social Movements*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Crossley, Alison Dahl. 2017. *Finding Feminism: Millenial Activists and the Unfinished Gender Revolution* [Electronic Book]. New York: New York University Press.

Crossley, Alison Dahl, and Verta Taylor. 2015. Abeyance Cycles in Social Movements. In *Movements in Times of Democratic Transition*, ed. Bert Klandermans and Cornelis van Stralen, 64–90. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Diani, Mario. 1992. The Concept of Social Movement. *The Sociological Review* 40 (1): 1–25.

Dines, Gail. 2010. *Pornland: How Porn Has Highjacked Our Sexuality*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Dovi, Suzanne. 2009. In Praise of Exclusion. *The Journal of Politics* 71 (3): 1171–1186.

Dow, Aisha. 2017. 'It Has Become Much More Visible': Boom in Transgender Children Seeking Treatment. *The Age*, December 1. https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/it-has-become-much-more-visible-boom-in-transgender-children-seeking-treatment-20171130-gzwahn.html

Duriesmith, David, and Sara Meger. 2020. Returning to the Root: Radical Feminist thought and Feminist Theories of International Relations. *Review of International Studies* 46 (3): 357–375.

Dworkin, Andrea. 1974. *Woman Hating*. New York: E.P. Dutton.

Easter, Brandee. 2018. 'Feminist_Brevity_in_Light_of_Masculine_Long-Windedness:' Code, Space, and Online Misogyny. *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (4): 675–685.

Ekman, Kajsa Ekis. 2014. *Being and Being Bought: Prostitution, Surrogacy and the Split Self*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Enloe, Cynthia. 2013. *Seriously! Investigating Crashes and Crises as if Women Mattered*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Evans, Elizabeth. 2015. *The Politics of Third Wave: Feminisms: Neoliberalism, Intersectionality and the State in Britain and the UK*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Evans, Elizabeth, and Prudence Chamberlain. 2015. Critical Waves: Exploring Feminist Identity, Discourse and Praxis in Western Feminism. *Social Movement Studies* 14 (4): 396–409.

Faludi, Susan. 1992. *Backlash: The Undeclared War on Women*. London: Vintage.

Ferree, Myra Marx, and Carol McGlurg Mueller. 2004. Feminism and the Women's Movement: A Global Perspective. In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, 576–608. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Fine, Cordelia. [2010] 2011. *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Difference*. London: Icon Books.

Firestone, Shulamith. [1970] 1972. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution.* London: Paladin.

Fotopoulou, Aristea. 2016. *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks: Between Empowerment and Vulnerability*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fraser, Nancy. 2000. Rethinking Recognition. *New Left Review* 3: 107–120.

Frye, Marilyn. [1977] 1988. Some Reflections on Separatism and Power. In *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, ed. Sarah Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 62–72. London: Onlywomen Press.

Fuchs, Christian. 2014. *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. 1st ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.

———. 2017. *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Gaarder, Emily. 2003. Addressing Violence Against Women: Alternatives to State- Based Law and Punishment. In *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, ed. Randall Amster, Abraham DeLeon, I.I. Luis Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella, and Deric Shanno, 46–56. London: Routledge.

Garber, Linda. 1994. *Tilting the Tower*. New York: Routledge.

———. [2009] 2016. The Curious Persistence of Lesbian Studies. In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, ed. Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke, 76–78. London: Routledge.

Gillis, Stacy, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, eds. 2004. *Third Wave Feminism*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Goodin, Robert. 1996. Inclusion and Exclusion. *European Journal of Sociology* 32 (2): 343–371.

Gordon, Linda. 2016. 'Intersectionality', Socialist Feminism and Contemporary Activism: Musing of a Second-Wave Socialist Feminist. *Gender & History* 28 (2): 340–357.

Goodwin, Jeff, and James M. Jasper, eds. 2015. *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*. Malden: John Wiley and Sons.

Halbert, Deborah. 2004. Shulamith Firestone: Radical Feminism and Visions of the Information Society. *Information, Communication and Society* 7 (1): 115–136.

Hanisch, Carol. 2010. Women's Liberation Consciousness-Raising: Then and Now. *On the Issues*, Spring.

Haraway, Donna. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14 (3): 575–599.

———. 1994. A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies. *Configurations* 2 (1): 59–71.

———. [1984] 2000. A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, 291–324. London: Routledge.

Harris, Anita. 2008. Young Women, Late Modern Politics, and the Participatory Possibilities of Online Cultures. *Journal of Youth Studies* 11 (5): 481–495.

Harvey, David. 2000. *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hassan, Robert. 2012. *The Age of Distraction: Reading, Writing, and Politics in a High-Speed Networked Economy*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Hawthorne, Susan. 1999a. Connectivity: Cultural practices of the Powerful or Subversion from the Margins? In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, ed. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, 119–136. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

———. 1999b. Cyborgs, Virtual Bodies and Organic Bodies: Theoretical Feminist Responses. In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, ed. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, 213–249. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

———. 2002. *Wild Politics*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Hawthorne, Susan, and Renate Klein, eds. 1999. *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Healy, Kieran. 2017. Fuck Nuance. *Sociological Theory* 35 (2): 118–127.

Hemmings, Clare. 2010. *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Hetland, Gabriel, and Jeff Goodwin. 2013. The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies. In *Marxism and Social Movements*, ed. Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky, and Alf Gunvald Nilsen, 83–102. Leiden: Brill.

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia. 1988. *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Value*. Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies.

hooks, bell. [1984] 2015. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. New York: Routledge.

Hughes, Donna. 2002. The Use of New Communications and Information Technologies for Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children. *Hastings Women's Law Journal* 13 (1): 129–222.

Hurwitz, Heather McKee. 2017. From Ink to Web and Beyond: U.S. Women's Activism Using Traditional and New Social Media. In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, ed. Verta Taylor, Holly J. McCammon, Jo Reger, and Rachel L. Einwohner, 462–483. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Huws, Ursula. [1982] 1984. Domestic Technology—Liberation or Enslavery? In *Sweeping Statements: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1981–83*, ed. Hannah Kantor, Sarah Lefanu, Shaila Shah and Carole Spedding, 76–80. London: the Women's Press.

Ibbitson, John. 2017. Canada Shows Leadership in Advancing Human Rights. *The Globe and Mail*, November 12. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/with-gender-identity-bill-canada-shows-leadership-in-advancing-humanrights/article35323583/.

Jaggar, Alison M. [1983] 1988. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield.

Jeffreys, Sheila. 1993. *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective On The Lesbian Sexual Revolution*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

———. 2013. The 'Agency' of Men: Male Buyers in the Global Sex Industry. In *Rethinking Transnational Men: Beyond, Between and Within Nations*, ed. Jeff Hearn, Marina Blagojevic, and Katherine Harrison, 59–75. New York: Routledge.

———. 2014. *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism*. London: Routledge.

———. 2018. *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970–1990*. London: Routledge.

Jensen, Robert. 2014. Some Basic Propositions About Sex, Gender and Patriarchy. *Dissident Voice*. June 13. https://dissidentvoice.org/2014/06/some-basic-propositions-about-sex-gender-and-patriarchy/

————. 2017. *The End of Patriarchy: Radical Feminism for Men*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Kiraly, Miranda, and Meagan Tyler, eds. 2015. *Freedom Fallacy: The Limits of Liberal Feminism*. Edited by Miranda Kiraly and Meagan Tyler, xi–xviii. Ballarat: Connor Court.

Kitzinger, Celia. 1989. Liberal Humanism as an Ideology of Social Control: The Regulation of Lesbian Identities. In *Inquiries in Social Construction Series, Vol. 2. Texts of Identity*, ed. John Shotter and Kenneth J. Gergen, 82–98. London: Sage Publications.

Kitzinger, Celia, and Rachel Perkins. 1993. *Changing Our Minds: Lesbian Feminism and Psychology*. London: Onlywomen Press.

Klein, Renate. 1992. *The Ultimate Colonisation: Reproductive and Genetic Engineering*. Dublin: Attic Press.

————. 1996. (Dead) Bodies Floating in Cyberspace: Post-Modernism and the Dismemberment Of Women. In *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, ed. Diane Bell and Renate Kleim, 346–358. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

————. 1999. The Politics of Cyberfeminism: If I'm a Cyborg Rather than a Goddess Will Patriarchy Go Away? In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, ed. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein. North Melbourne Spinifex Press.

————. 2017. *Surrogacy: A Human Rights Violation*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Long, Julia. 2010. *Object!*: The Re-Emergence of Feminist Anti-Pornography Activism in the UK. *PhD thesis*. Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences, London South Bank University.

Lorde, Audre. [1984] 2007. *Sister Outsider*. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

Luxton, Meg. 2001. Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada. *Labour / Le Travail* 48: 63–88.

Mackay, Finn. 2015. Political Not Generational: Getting Real about the Second Wave. In *The Freedom Fallacy: The Limits of Liberal Feminism*, ed. Miranda Kiraly and Meagan Tyler, 155–164. Ballarat: Connor Court.

Mackinnon, Catharine. 1987. *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses On Life And Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

————. 1989. *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

————. [1991] 1996. From Practice to Theory, or What Is a White Woman Anyway? In *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, ed. Diane Bell and Renate Klein, 45–54. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

————. 2000. Points Against Postmodernism. *Chicago- Kent Law Review* 75 (3): 687–712.

Maddison, Sarah, and Frances Shaw. 2012. Feminist Perspectives on Social Movement Research. In *The Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Naggy Hesse-Biber, 413–433. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Manjikian, Mary. 2014. Becoming Unmanned. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16 (1): 48–65.

Martin, Brian. 2007. Activism, Social and Political. In *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*, ed. Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn G. Herr, 19–27. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Martins, Amanda. 2019. Feminist Consciousness: Race and Class. *Meeting Ground Online*, May 14. http://meetinggroundonline.org/feminist-consciousness-race-and-class/

Mason, Corinne, and Shoshana Magnet. 2012. Surveillance Studies and Violence Against Women. *Surveillance and Society* 10 (2): 105–118.

McRobbie, Angela. 2009. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Megarry, Jessica. 2018. Under the Watchful Eyes of Men: Theorising the Implications of Male Surveillance Practices for Feminist Activism on Social Media. *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (6): 1070–1085.

Megarry, Jessica, Meagan Tyler, Kate Farhall, and Catherine Weiss. 2018. Queer Inclusion or Lesbian Exclusion: Project Update (Nov 2018). https://www.academia.edu/37906812/Queer_Inclusion_or_Lesbian_Exclusion_Project_Update_Nov_2018_

Melucci, Alberto. 1996. *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mendes, Kaitlynn. 2015. *Slutwalk: Feminism, Activism and Media*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalyn Keller. 2019. *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miller, Shaeleya D., Verta Taylor, and Leila J. Rupp. 2016. Social Movements and the Construction of Queer Identity. In *New Directions in Identity Theory and Research*, ed. Jan E. Stets and Richard T. Serpe, 1–25. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Millett, Kate. [1969] 1972. *Sexual Politics*. London: Sphere Books Ltd.

Miriam, Kathy. 1998. Re-thinking Radical Feminism: Opposition, Utopianism and the Moral Imagination of Feminist Theory. PhD thesis. University of California, Santa Cruz.

Monahan, Torin. 2008. Dreams of Control at a Distance: Gender, Surveillance, and Social Control. *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies* 9 (2): 286–305.

———. 2016. Built to Lie: Investigating Technologies of Deception, Surveillance, and Control. *The Information Society* 32 (4): 229–240.

Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldua, eds. 1981. *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

Moravec, Michelle. 2018. A Narrow History of Feminism Impoverishes Activism. *Medium*, October 11. https://medium.com/@ProfessMoravec/a-narrow-history-of-feminism-impoverishes-activism-565161d62dcd.

Morris, Bonnie. 2016. The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Morris, Aldon, and Naomi Braine. 2001. Social Movements and Oppositional Consciousness. In *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subject Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris, 20–37. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Munro, Ealasaid. 2013. Feminism: A Fourth Wave? *Political Insight* 4 (4): 22–25.

Nestle, Joan, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins. 2002. *GENDERqUEER: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*. Los Angeles: Alyson Publications.

Oliver, Pamela E., and Hank Johnston. 2000. What a Good Idea! Ideologies and Frames in Social Movement Research. *Mobilization* 4 (1): 37–54.

Pateman, Carole. 1988. *The Sexual Contract*. Cambridge: Polity.

Pew Research Centre. 2018. Social Media Fact Sheet. *Pew Research*, February 5. http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/

Phelan, Kate M. 2016. *How Can the Oppressed Know Their Own Oppression?* PhD thesis. School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University.

Phillips, Anne, ed. [1998] 2009. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Portwood-Stacer, Laura. 2013. *Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Raymond, Janice. 1986. *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection*. London: The Women's Press.

———. [1993] 1995. *Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle Over Women's Freedom*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Rich, Adrienne. 1976. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Bantam Books.

———. [1984] 1986. Invisibility in Academe. In *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985*. London, Virago.

———. [1980] 1993. Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Experience. In *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

Richardson, Kathleen. 2019. The Business of Ethics, Robotics, and Artificial Intelligence. In *Cyborg Futures*, ed. Teresa Heffernan, 113–140. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Risam, Roopika. 2015. Toxic Femininity 4.0. *First Monday* 20 (4): n.p.

Roache, Madeline. 2019. Ukraine's 'Baby Factories': The Human Cost of Surrogacy. *Aljazeera*. September 13. https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/ukraine-baby-factories-human-cost-surrogacy-180912201251153.html

Roseneil, Sasha. 1995. *Disarming Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Action at Greenham*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Rowland, Robyn, and Renate Klein. 1996. Radical Feminism: History, Politics, Action. In *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, ed. Diane Bell and Renate Klein, 9–36. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Sangster, Joan. 2015. Creating Popular Histories: Re-interpreting "Second Wave" Canadian Feminism. *Dialect Anthropol* 39: 381–404.

Schuster, Julia. 2013. Invisible Feminists? Social Media and Young Women's Political Participation. *Political Science* 65 (1): 8–24.

Serano, Julia. 2015. *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive*. Berkeley: Seal Press.

Shade, Leslie Regan. 2002. *Gender and Community in the Social Construction of the Internet*. New York: Peter Lang.

Shaw, Rhonda. 2003. 'Our Bodies, Ourselves', Technology, and Questions of Ethics: Cyberfeminism and the Lived Body. *Australian Feminist Studies* 18 (40): 45–55.

Shaw, Frances. 2012. *Discursive Politics Online: Political Creativity and Affective Networking in Australian Feminist Blogs*. PhD thesis. Department of Politics and International Relations, University of New South Wales.

Spender, Dale. 1993. Introduction: Shifting the Goalposts. In *Heading Nowhere in a Navy Blue Suit and Other Tales from the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Sue Kedgley and Mary Varnham, 3–12. Thorndon: Daphne Brasell Associates.

———. 1995. *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Stryker, Susan, and Stephen Whittle, eds. 2006. *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Taylor, Verta. 1989. Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance. *American Sociological Review* 54 (5): 761–775.

Taylor, Verta, and Nancy Whittier. 1998. Guest Editors Introduction: Special Issue on Gender and Social Movements: Part 1. *Gender and Society* 12 (6): 622–625.

Thompson, Denise. 1994. Defining Feminism. *Australian Feminist Studies* 9 (20): 171–192.

———. 2001. *Radical Feminism Today*. London: Sage.

Thompson, Becky. 2002. Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism. *Feminist Theory* 28 (2): 337–359.

Tilly, Charles. 2004. *Social Movements, 1768–2004*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Untitled Magazine. 2015. Millennial Feminism: The 4th Wave of Feminism has Officially Arrived. Untitled Magazine—#GirlPower Issue. September 24. http://untitled-magazine.com/millennial-feminism-the-4th-wave-of-feminism-has-officially-arrived/

van Zoonen, Liesbet. 1992. Feminist Theory and Information Technologies. *Media, Culture and Society* 14 (1): 9–30.

———. 2001. Feminist Internet Studies. *Feminist Media Studies* 1 (1): 67–72.

Wajcman, Judy. 2000. Reflections on Gender and Technology Studies: In What State is the Art? *Social Studies of Science* 30 (3): 447–464.

———. 2010. Feminist Theories of Technology. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34: 143–152.

Weisman, Leslie Kanes. 1992. *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Weisstein, Naomi. [1971] 1973. Psychology Constructs the Female. In *Radical Feminism*, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone, 178–197. New York: Quadrangle Books.

Whelehan, Imelda. 2007. Foreword. In *Third Wave Feminism*, ed. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, 2nd ed. Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Whittier, Nancy. 1995. *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Wiener, Anna. 2020. *Uncanny Valley: A Memoir*. New York: MCD Books.

Wilchins, Riki. 2014. *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*. Bronx: Alyson Publishers.

Wilkinson, Sue, and Celia Kitzinger. 1996. The Queer Backlash. In *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, ed. Diane Bell and Renatye Klein, 375–381. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Wittig, Monique. 1992. *The Straight Mind: And Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Wyatt, Sally. 2008. Feminism, Technology and the Information Society: Learning from the Past, Imagining the Future. *Information, Communication and Society* 11 (1): 111–130.

Zimmerman, Tegan. 2017. #Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice* 38 (1): 54–70.

3

'By women, for women, about women': The Women's Liberation Movement as a Free Space

Emerging as a direct challenge to the New Left in the late 1960s, the WLM positioned itself as a movement 'by women, for women, about women' (Susan Hawthorne WLM, AU). Aiming to centre women in all aspects of the movement, activists developed original theoretical as well as structural innovations which distinguish the period of women's liberation organising from both earlier (Rees 2007, 6; Somerville 1997; Whittier 1995, 21) and later forms of feminism (Gillis et al. 2004; Hurwitz 2017). Based upon their revolutionary political vision, activists devised 'new, politically guided ways of relating to each other, setup organizations to meet their own needs, develop[ed] a feminist culture, and generally integrate[d] their political principles into most aspects of their daily lives' (Whittier 1995, 21). Yet for many feminist activists today, the political organising strategies used during the WLM are largely unknown. As one activist who had just 'caught the tail end' of the WLM remarked in her interview, she now feels like a 'refugee' amongst younger feminists who have little understanding of the practices and culture of WLM organising (Lierre Keith WLM, USA). Not only is there a lack of historical knowledge amongst activists, the WLM has also been

---

Quote in the chapter title from Susan Hawthorne (WLM, AU).

understudied academically in the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, with most accounts appearing in the form of activist memoirs rather than academic inquiries.[1]

Given how much is unknown about the everyday movement-building practices and organising culture of the WLM, this chapter functions as a historical reference point for the rest of the book. I aim here to provide a flavour of the common characteristics of WLM organising across the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Critically analysing the organising strategies of the WLM, perhaps the most renowned period of resistance to male dominance to date, is an important starting point for theorising the political efficacy of using social media for feminist communication. I am aware that WLM tactics cannot be simply transposed to the contemporary neoliberal context marked by increasing socio-economic inequality, a decline in the availability of public services, a rise in precarious employment and increased levels of surveillance (Harvey 2005; Springer et al. 2016). WLM activists did not have to contend with these specific challenges. Nonetheless, I maintain that understanding the motivations behind women's liberation organising strategies is useful for today's feminists because the decisions made in different historical contexts can be helpful in illuminating ways forward in the present. In the words of democracy theorist Margaret Kohn (2003, 3) 'the past does not provide formulas for the future, but it can provide reference points for the present'.

In this chapter, I also aim to contribute to the growing body of research that analyses the relationship between the growth of the WLM and place and space (Beins 2017; Delap 2016; Enke 2007; Wall 2017). Feminists today have now largely lost women's centres, feminist bookstores and the ability to host autonomous political and social events (Jeffreys 2018;

---

[1] In the words of WLM activists and scholars Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon ([1995] 2000, 1–2), 'it is hard to imagine a historical event as widespread and powerful as the WLM that has been so poorly documented and reported'. The organising culture of the WLM has been the object of greater academic scrutiny in the US (for example Freeman 1975; Whittier 1995) and British context (for example Browne 2014; Bruley 2016; Rees 2007) than the other countries considered in this study. Accounts of the WLM in New Zealand (Cahill and Dann 1991; Dann 1985; Kedgley and Varnham 1993) and Australia (Long Breast Press 2017; Sitka 1989; Taylor 2009) largely appear in memoir form. Similarly, the Canadian context remains understudied, although Joan Sangster (2015) and Meg Luxton (2001) offer useful starting points.

Morris 2016), spatial locations that grounded the WLM in cities and towns. Not only did these locations facilitate regular face-to-face encounters between activists, they also provided an infrastructure for movement-building that is unimaginable for activists becoming involved in feminist organising today, when no such facilities exist. As feminist social movement studies scholar Agatha Beins (2017, 44) has argued, it is important that scholars consider not only how social movement participants develop a collective identity and an ideology, but also how the intangible is made manifest in the everyday lives of activists: 'ideas and ideologies as well as identity must not only be conceivable but also materializable—that is, they need a place to exist'. Paying analytical attention to how the *places* of the WLM contributed to its growth therefore opens new ways of thinking about the limitations of using social media for feminist organising.

Alongside an investigation of the importance of place to the WLM, I also consider in this chapter how the production of print-based media contributed to spatially locating women's activism. Feminists today are driven to occupy social media spaces, but this reliance on an ephemeral communication medium severs movement-building from a physical grounding in place. During the WLM, conversely, activists relied on face-to-face communication and print-based media; it was a movement characterised by the regular coming together of women in physical rather than digital space. Crucially, this involved the movement of women towards each other in the absence of men. This chapter argues that the political strategy of separatism—also commonly referred to as women-only organising—facilitated the development of a visionary politics, a women's culture and the emergence of prefigurative forms of living that both materially changed individual women's lives and propelled the movement forward. Here, I can only give a modest indication of the political significance of women-only organising to the development of the WLM. As well as pointing more broadly to revolutionary possibilities enabled by autonomous media-production and an oppositional women's culture, I draw specifically on the examples of squatting/co-housing and political lesbianism to illuminate the central argument.

Given that the use of concepts such as space and place are plagued by a complex history of social science debates (see, e.g., Merrifield 1993), it is important to briefly set out how I use them in this book. In relation to

political life, space and place need to be conceptualised in terms of power relations (Massey 1994). My analysis of the significance of space and place to feminist movement-building delineates between the two concepts in the following manner: place is used in reference to physical sites of interaction (such as bars, living rooms and conference venues), while space refers to modes of interaction that become possible in particular places. In other words, spaces are sites where power relations are lived and played out, or, alternatively, undermined. Agatha Beins (2017, 44) has described the distinction between space and place in similar terms: 'spaces are the discursive and relational structures through which specific places become meaningful' (see also de Certeau 1984, 117).

Women's Liberation as a Spatial Phenomenon

It is also important to note that the analytical primacy given to place and space in this chapter is derived from interviewees' conception of social movement as a spatial process. Both younger and older activists interviewed for this project largely rejected the recent claim that social media has sparked a fourth wave of feminism, and they spoke critically of the declining emphasis on face-to-face organising within contemporary feminist activism. Alanna Inserra (DN, AU), for example, challenged the idea that social media is a useful feminist mobilisation tool: she saw it being used for 'reposting, reblogging, people just taking content that they've seen that they identify with and posting it on to their followers' rather than to facilitate women 'meet[ing] on the ground'. WLM activists also rejected the idea that social media has sparked a revival of feminism because they did not see women coming physically together:

> Something is happening [when] the women are physically together [...]. I don't see a movement at the moment, I see individuals going into little enclaves and reinforcing themselves, but not actually [coming together]. There is no movement. (Chris Sitka WLM, AU)

> A movement to me is composed of women on the ground, meeting each other. There are odd flashes of something happening on social media, but

[…] women are not coming together anywhere to create a movement. (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK)

For these interviewees, there was a clear link between the development of the WLM and the spatial mobility of women.

Understanding social movement as a spatial process provides a useful lens for analysing the political efficacy of WLM organising tactics. Principally, this is because recent feminist scholarship has tended to promote a reductive vision of the concept of social movement, which ignores the significance of both autonomous organising spaces and the building of alternative cultural forms to oppressed groups. For example, feminist hashtags are now described *as* movements in and of themselves (the #metoo movement, the #beenrapedneverreported movement, the #solidarityisforwhitewomen movement), as are specific protests (the Slutwalk movement [Mendes 2015], the Reclaim the Night movement [Mackay 2015]), feminist organisations (the Hollaback! movement) and feminist Facebook groups (the Destroy the Joint movement[2]). The motivation behind the tendency to refer to what can more accurately be described as examples of communication tools, specific protests or activist groups is unclear, and may well be the result of scholarly laziness. Within social movement studies literature more broadly, the term *social movement* has been frequently 'undefined and [is] often used quite promiscuously' (Rüdig et al. 1991, 125; see also Diani 1992, 2; Tilly 2004, 6). Another possible reason for the conflation is that many recent investigations of the use of social media for feminist activism are situated within the field of media and communications, where debates over how social movements can best be defined are not as contentious as they are within political science and social movement studies.

It is important to note that while types of activism such as protests, pickets, petitions and position papers, and communication tools such as

---

[2] The Destroy the Joint (DTJ) Facebook group was set up in 2012 following derogatory comments made by Sydney radio broadcaster Alan Jones towards several high-profile Australian women, including the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard. According to Jones, powerful women in Australian public life were 'destroying the joint'. The DTJ Facebook group is referred to as both a movement and a campaign indiscriminately in academic literature (see McLean and Maalsen 2013), and prominent Australian feminist Anne Summers (2013, 139) has also argued that it can more accurately be characterised as the 'modern day equivalent of a campaign newspaper'.

newsletters, posters, hashtags and blogs can form integral parts of movements, movements themselves are a broader political phenomenon. As Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) conveyed in her interview: 'a movement means movement of people together so … a newspaper is not a movement; social media is not a movement'. The tendency to refer to activist tools of communication, forms of activism, social movement organisations and specific activist groups *as* movements produces an impoverished conception of a social movement and obscures crucial elements of women's liberation. Studying the WLM made it clear to me that the growth of a social movement is not only dependent upon the production of media. Nonetheless, the choice of communication tools does shape movements. Before discussing how the communication tools used in the WLM facilitated the regular coming together of women in the absence of men, I will first explain why women-only space is crucial to the growth of women's liberation.

The Political Imperative of Women-Only Organising

> I believe something else is possible and happens when you are in a woman-only group. You know, something deeper and more radical is possible. A sort of magic happens. (Chris Sitka WLM, AU)

> It is vital for any conversation about the presence or absence of males in women's spaces to locate the notion of space itself within a political narrative about what space means in patriarchal gendered societies. (McFadden 2016, 310)

As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, the growing acceptance of transgender ideology in recent years has resulted in a 'retroactive stigma [being applied] to feminist and lesbian events that excluded men and men transitioning to embodied femininity' (Morris 2016, 2–3). Although recent feminist scholarship has been more likely to interpret attempts at women-only organising as a bigoted form of anachronistic feminism (see Phipps 2016; Zimmerman 2017), autonomous political

organising was once considered to be a crucial element of women's liberation. Scholars who are critical of recent activist attempts to create women-only spaces appear ignorant of the work of feminist theorists, democracy theorists and philosophers who have highlighted how a marginalised group's ability to procure shared autonomous places is central to their ability to formulate oppositional ideas and engage in collective political action (see Evans and Boyte 1986; Fraser 1995; Frye [1977] 1988; Kohn 2003; Mansbridge 1996; Rorty 1990).

To understand why the creation of women-only space was so significant to the growth of the WLM, it is first necessary to understand how space functions in male-dominated societies as a resource for advancing male power. As feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey (1994) and Leslie Kanes Weisman (1992) have pointed out, hierarchical gender relations are produced through the spatial organisation of society. For example, the private home functions to materially convey the power relations at the heart of the nuclear family (Kohn 2003, 17; Weisman 1992, 86). Men, having more power, have access to every space in the house and can designate certain spaces (such as a father's shed, study or den) as off-limits to women and children (Weisman [1981] 2000, 2). Women, by contrast, have little to no power, and are unlikely to create 'a space of their own equivalent to the male den' (Henley 1977, 61). While spaces such as the kitchen are marked female, men are free to move through them as they please, thereby ensuring their constant access to women. The nuclear family home perpetuates the ideology of patriarchy, and its material layout also constrains the possibilities open to women in that space.

Historically, one of the principal ways in which male dominance has been maintained and perpetuated is through the creation of a divide between the public and private sphere in social and political life. Much feminist theory has been concerned with exposing the public/private divide as a male construct which benefits men to the detriment of women (see, e.g., Walby 1990). Men, being associated with public political action, can both move through public spaces and conduct themselves as public agents in ways that are not available to women. Spaces marked public 'are assumed to be male', and women have, for centuries, been excluded from places where 'all the key decisions relating to power are deliberated and implemented' (McFadden 2016, 310). Segregation, then,

or the limiting of access, is a primary tactic employed by powerful groups to oppress others. This can be clearly seen in the domination of 'the rich over the poor, of men over women, or of whites over non-whites' (Delphy [2006] 2017, n.p.). Excluded from public life, women have traditionally been relegated to the private sphere and kept atomised from each other as housewives. As Jo Freeman (1973, 802) has explained, this system of social organisation has had profound political implications for women as a social group:

> Historically tied to the family and isolated from their own kind, women are perhaps the most organizationally underdeveloped social category in Western civilisation.

The relationship between space and social change is therefore politically significant, because space and access to space are markers of power relations (Weisman 1992, 24).

Space is both 'gendered and a highly politicised resource' (McFadden 2016, 310), and this means that the struggle to liberate women from male control is intrinsically concerned with the mobility of women. This insight should not be confused with the drive to increase the presence of women in traditionally male institutions which is, in and of itself, unlikely to bring about a feminist revolution. French feminist sociologist Christine Delphy ([2006] 2017, n.p.) has explained how increasing women's presence in traditionally male spaces does not adequately address the problem of men's domination of women:

> There is no idea more false or misguided than that numerical parity guarantees equality. For what context is more balanced than the family? And yet where is there more inequality except between husband and wife, or between parents and children?

Delphy has argued that mixed-sex spaces, like sex-segregated spaces, function to perpetuate women's oppression. In mixed-sex discussions, for example, she has argued that 'it is the dominant perception of suffering experienced by the dominated group which tends to … dominate' (Delphy [2006] 2017, n.p.). Feminist linguists have also made this point,

demonstrating how, within male-dominated societies, language and knowledge are controlled to the extent that women's perspectives are delegitimised, especially when they issue a challenge to male power (Penelope 1990; Spender 1980).

Mixed-sex spaces therefore function to repress women's political consciousness. This is because a male presence materially impacts upon women's behaviour in terms of what they say and do, and how they think. To express this another way, in a mixed-sex context, women self-police (Mackinnon 1989, 86–87). For example, interviewee Sandra McNeill (WLM, UK) described how a male presence functioned as a gatekeeping mechanism for policing women's political discussions in her mixed-sex National Abortion Campaign group in the 1970s:

> The group could talk about abortion, full stop. It couldn't talk about anything else around women's sexuality and reproduction, not even with two nice men in the room.

McNeill's experiences reflect Dale Spender's (1980, 48) observation that both sexes are socialised to accept the male right to 'decree reality' and monopolise discussions with their own concerns.

When conceptualising the relationship between space and women's liberation, it is important to be attuned to the political difference between women-only imposed spaces (or practices of sex segregation) and women-only *fought for* spaces, where 'the separation [is] initiated or maintained, at will, *by women*' for feminist purposes (Frye [1977] 1988, 63; see also Delphy [2006] 2017). Sex segregation of women from 'men and male domains' done '*at the will of men*' is a qualitatively different phenomenon from separatist spaces claimed by feminists for advancing women's liberation (Frye [1977] 1988, 63). Some spaces function as sites of repressive politics, but others can also hold possibilities for revolutionary social change (Kohn 2003). What I am referring to here are spaces of resistance and refusal, the oft-intangible phenomenon that interviewee Chris Sitka (WLM, UK) referred to in the quote at the beginning of this section as a kind of 'magic'.

The decision to organise autonomously propelled the WLM forward because it generated a 'free space' (Allen 1970) for activists to begin to

theorise their oppression and imagine themselves outside male control. Having been spatially alienated from key social institutions and isolated from each other in private homes where they were likely to be in intimate relationships with their oppressors, drawing boundaries and refusing to let men participate in feminist activism was, from a women's liberation perspective, an integral component of taking back power:

> When we start from a position of total accessibility there must be an aspect of no-saying, which is the beginning of control, in every effective act and strategy, the effective ones being precisely those which shift power, i.e., ones which involve manipulation and control of access. (Frye [1977] 1988, 68)

To move past envisioning equality in male terms, women need space away from men to imagine themselves outside of a male framework and to make connections between small examples of oppression which had previously appeared banal or unrelated. As in Marxist theory, where revolution is dependent upon the development of a class consciousness amongst the proletariat, so too is women's political action dependent upon their recognition that women denote an oppressed sex caste.

Based upon the recognition that male supremacist ideology is so complete that women are largely unaware of the extent of their subordination (Millett [1969] 1972, 58), feminist theorists have often spoken of women as existing in a state of either false or raised consciousness. Non-feminist or anti-feminist women are conceived of as having a false consciousness, because they have not yet had their consciousness *raised*. Women, having absorbed the gendered norms of patriarchal society and having access to very few autonomous spaces from which they can learn to think outside of male frameworks, frequently behave in anti-feminist ways (Graham 1994; Mansbridge 2001). Dee Graham (1994, 150) has explained this as Societal Stockholm Syndrome, the phenomenon by which women bond with men to protect themselves from male violence:

> Because we women fear male violence, we not only deny the violence but also do not express our anger at men, for to express anger might well make us the targets of male aggression. The more women fear retaliation, the less

we are likely to express our anger. Rather, survival demands that women disguise our anger, even from ourselves.

Women consistently enact strategies of survival in male-dominated societies which are individually advantageous to them, even when these actions might contribute to harming women as a social group (Hoagland 1988b, 7; Mansbridge 2001, 4). Having internalised patriarchal ideology, they learn that getting ahead in patriarchal systems requires complicity with male demands.

Small group organising in the WLM was believed to facilitate the development of a class consciousness through the process of consciousness-*raising*, a political technique for developing feminist theory, which involves women sharing their experiences without a formal leader. By talking in small consciousness-raising groups, women began to theorise their experiences of violence, discrimination and suffering as politically relevant, moving towards a structural analysis of male dominance: 'we discovered that what we thought were our own individual problems were actually systemic problems of oppression' (Susan Hawthorne WLM, AU). For example, in contrast to McNeill's account of mixed-sex organising above, some WLM activists documented discussions that occurred around sex and sexual fantasies at the first National Women's Liberation Conference held in Chicago in 1968. These accounts demonstrate how women-only meetings freed activists to make connections between seemingly diverse issues and begin to be theoretically innovative. One group discussion began with a question around the pros and cons of pregnancy, and developed to women analysing 'intercourse, orgasm and masturbation' ('Impressions of Workshops', no author 1968, 1). Here, in a space without men, nothing was off the table for consideration: women moved from discussing the minutiae of their sexual experiences to undertaking a structural analysis of how sexuality contributed to shaping female oppression.

In the words of Catharine Mackinnon (1989, 86), it was the absence of men that 'made speech possible' for WLM activists: 'men's temporary concrete absence helped women feel more free of the immediate imperative to compete for male attention and approval, to be passive or get intimidated, or to support men's version of reality'. Meeting in small

groups, women came together *as women* in the absence of men, and this was a structural requirement that both made the pursuit of consciousness possible, and 'establishe[d] the social worth of the women present' (Allen 1970, 28). Participating in consciousness-raising often resulted in women transferring their sense of loyalty from men to other women because the 'all-women context valued women to each other as sources of insight, advice, information, stimulation and problems' (Mackinnon 1989, 87).

Based upon a recognition of the importance of consciousness-raising to the development of women's political consciousness, small group organising was promoted by WLM pioneers on the basis that it would fuel movement development and lead to a feminist revolution:

> The aim of the process [of consciousness raising], as expressed in the early literature, is the production of collective understanding of the political meaning of women's collective situation as a keystone of mass action. Constantly expanding numbers of small groups, in the course of their analysis, would engage in local actions and the totality of these individual actions would constitute mass-based revolution. (Rosenthal 1984, 313)

For example, a typical statement promoting small-group organising appears in an early edition of the San Francisco-based newsletter *It Ain't Me Babe*, written by the group Red Witch (1970, 4):

> Small groups are an essential part of the Women's Liberation Movement for only in the small group do we realise the full extent of our oppression and acquire a real stake in overcoming that oppression.

In her notes prepared for a presentation given at the first National Women's Liberation Conference held at Lake Villa in 1968, Kathie Sarachild ([1968] 1970), a founding member of the group New York Radical Women, clearly sets out her vision for consciousness-raising as a revolutionary organising strategy: the expanding of consciousness was seen as an ongoing political pursuit, and women who had participated in the small group process were expected to go out and start new groups, or else help new activists to do so. The emergence of consciousness-raising across the USA was therefore not so much spontaneous, but also the

result of 'consciousness-raiser (organizer) training' (Sarachild [1968] 1970, 156) and a concrete plan for action (Hanisch 2010).

Meeting in women-only space fulfilled two important political functions: it showed women why women-only space was important for the development of women's political consciousness and it also fuelled their drive to go and carve out women-only spaces. Separating from men was politically crucial for the development of the WLM because it materially shifted men's patterns of access to women (Frye [1977] 1988, 68) and it also unlocked activist creativity. As will be demonstrated further below, WLM activists took *places* and made them *women-only spaces* where they could develop political ideas and formulate new ways of living free from male influence. Separatism from men is, in this sense, best understood as an active political decision and a form of activism in and of itself (Hoagland 1988a, 7). For my interviewees, the women-only spaces of the WLM were certainly experienced as liberating: they highlighted both visionary and creative elements of being together with women in the absence of men. Women-only space enabled activists—particularly lesbians—to develop both oppositional ideas and an oppositional culture.

Despite the importance of autonomous spaces of resistance for historically oppressed groups (Mansbridge and Morris 2001), very few historical analyses of social movements have investigated the spaces and places that make the conception of revolutionary ideas possible. Instead, they have been more concerned with tracing the ideas that activists produced. Margaret Kohn (2003, 44) has suggested that one of the reasons for the lack of attention afforded to place in social movement scholarship is because the ideas that emerge from grassroots movements are often better preserved and more accessible than records which detail the material basis of activist praxis. In the case of WLM organising, this problem has been further compounded because small group records have rarely been preserved, if they existed at all (Rees 2010, 16). As I aim to demonstrate throughout the rest of this chapter, WLM activists created women-only space in both traditionally public and private places; they used households alongside bookstores, coffee shops, women's centres and bars to further the growth of the movement and spatially locate it in cities and towns. The crucial factor transforming these spaces from sites of repression to political spaces of resistance—or 'free spaces' (Allen 1970)—was

the absence of men. Men's dominance of women in mixed-sex spaces, alongside women's social alienation from each other, impedes the development of a class consciousness amongst women. It is this primary insight into the female condition in patriarchal societies which marks the claiming of autonomous women's spaces as a revolutionary feminist act.

Communicating Women's Liberation

The communication infrastructure of the WLM grounded the movement in spatial locations and provided physical settings for women to regularly encounter other activists. Unlike the use of social media for feminist communication—which enables activists to use their smartphones or computers to participate in feminism remotely whilst still enmeshed in their everyday reality—participating in the WLM physically disrupted the course of women's day-to-day lives. Women communicated primarily face-to-face, either at organised group meetings or at conferences, informally at social events, or during chance encounters in feminist bookstores or women's centres. Feminist conversations and feminist ideas could not be accessed remotely, from within a woman's private home. Instead, women had to first move towards each other and locate the movement in their hometowns (Beins 2017, 43; Enke 2007). Joining the movement therefore comprised a spatial element: having to physically attend meetings, conferences or social events necessitated that women moved from their private home—a traditional site of male control—into feminist spaces surrounded by other WLM activists. It was also common for WLM activists to use lounge-rooms as meetings sites. Despite their location in the private sphere, these private homes were also transformed into women-only political spaces. I will return to this point later in the chapter.

The pioneers of the WLM were in regular face-to-face contact, often having first met 'on the margins' of the New Left (Evans and Boyte 1986, 102). For many, experiencing sexism in New Left movements provided the catalyst for them to break away and create a movement centred on women (Bruley 2013, 720; Evans and Boyte 1986, 102–104). Sandra McNeill (WLM, UK), for example, had been heavily involved in mixed-sex groups in the anarchist movement, the trade union movement and

Amnesty International when she lived in Essex in the mid-1970s. McNeill 'had finally had it with the men' she was organising alongside after her regular complaints of sexism went continually unheeded. As she explained: 'the guys would just keep putting the most sexist things into [the anarchist newsletter], week after week they'd go "oops, sorry, oops sorry, oops sorry"'. Based upon this experience, McNeill moved her activist energies to women's liberation.

Like McNeil, many women who entered the WLM in the late 1960s and early 1970s were experienced activists with knowledge of both the political theories and the organising strategies of the New Left. As historians and social movement scholars have documented, this political climate was a fertile ground for politicising WLM activists across developed Western democracies. Getting involved with New Left movements provided them with a language to voice their frustrations at sexism and to think about concepts such as freedom, liberation and revolution, and how they applied to women (Browne 2014, 39; Morris and Braine 2001, 32). New Left organising also provided WLM activists with several useful material skills. For example, in the case of American-based WLM activists who had been involved in Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960s, the principal female leadership 'had tested their own courage, learned to organize and run meetings, developed strategies, and, along the way, developed confidence in themselves' (Evans and Boyte 1986, 103). Women also developed practical skills such as familiarity with printing presses and copying machines. McNeill (WLM, UK) had learnt how to operate a duplicator and fix paper jams while working at the anarchist newsletter, which she described as 'a wonderful skill to come to the WLM with'.

The emphasis on face-to-face organising and word-of-mouth communication in the WLM promoted the spatial mobility of women. Prior to the emergence of digital technologies, WLM activists met regularly in small groups to communicate. Word-of-mouth communication was necessary, or else women had to wait for the post or rely on phone conversations, which not all had access to. Joining women's liberation became a way of life for the WLM activists I interviewed, and it was common for women to go to multiple meetings each week. For example, Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ) first got involved in the WLM in the regional town

of New Plymouth, where she worked at the local women's centre. Rankine joined a consciousness-raising group and 'started to get active on [issues such as] women's health, violence against women [and] equal pay'. After a year, she moved to Auckland, where her schedule became increasingly monopolised by women's liberation meetings and events:

> At that time, when you look at my diary, I won't bore you with it, but when I first went to Auckland I had a meeting every night, a different meeting every night. And during the weekend as well. That was how we organised.

Whether doing consciousness-raising or organising around specific issues, regular group meetings structured the lives of WLM activists, and brought them into constant contact with other like-minded women in women-only spaces.

Spending large amounts of time together in women-only space was crucial to the growth of the WLM because it facilitated women's political development and allowed women to develop trusting relationships. As social movement scholars have explained, 'sustained and proximate inter-action over time can create strong trusting relations among actors, which can then be drawn on to enable collective action' (Nicholls et al. 2013, 4). Consciousness-raising groups were one of the key means of solidifying connections between activists and transferring women's sense of loyalty from men to other women (Bruley 2013, 722). Unlike the 'amorphous' (Lynne Harne WLM, UK) nature of most WLM organising, where groups formed and were disbanded in a haphazard fashion according to local needs and priorities, women were likely to attend the same consciousness-raising group regularly for years. Not all WLM activists became friends, and interviewees explained how they often formed closer bonds with the women they were most politically aligned with. Discord and ideological divides were common within consciousness-raising groups, but women nonetheless developed strong working relationships and expected to remain on good terms despite disagreements: 'we didn't all like one another, particularly. We didn't all become friends. But we had a trust' (Susan Hawthorne WLM, AU).

It was from within the context of an already existing groundswell of women that activists began to develop media. Small groups turned their

attention to establishing print publications that could facilitate contact between groups and aid recruitment (Freeman 1975). Aside from word-of-mouth communication, newsletters provided a crucial means for informing activists of upcoming events: 'the newsletters were very important, because they were our only way of printing our ideas and […] communicating what was on' (Chris Sitka WLM, AU). The WLM did not have any overarching national organising body, and so feminist print culture played an important role in binding geographically dispersed groups together and generating a wider sense of collective purpose between activists (Beins 2017, 7).

The importance of feminist newsletters as a form of communication during the WLM should not be underestimated. Interviewees spoke of the extraordinary scale of feminist periodical production and noted the variety of publications available. Some newsletters catered to specific audiences, such as lesbian feminists, whilst others positioned themselves as more generally feminist. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) described the scale of feminist newsletter production in Britain as follows:

> There was the national *WIRES* [Women's Information Referral and Enquiry Service] and there was the *London Women's Liberation Newsletter*. Individual women's centres had newsletters, everybody had newsletters, there were masses and masses and masses of newsletters.

Newsletters, position papers and pamphlets were frequently duplicated by those activists with access to mimeograph machines and shared.[3] Many periodicals, such as the San Francisco-based newsletter *It Ain't Me Babe*, also contained statements urging women to pass their copies on to a friend rather than throw them away.

Most commonly, scholars have highlighted how feminist newsletters operated as important discursive spaces that generated a collective

---

[3] Despite the oral history evidence of the scale of feminist newsletter production, it has been difficult for scholars to document the reach of the WLM's material print culture. Newsletters have been poorly preserved in archives with collections often remaining incomplete (McKinney 2015, 323). Coupled with archival issues, it has also been difficult to estimate how many women read feminist periodicals, or how widely they were circulated. Publication reach was often extended beyond subscriptions via informal photocopying and distribution practices (Grahn 2009, 313; McKinney 2015, 322).

feminist imaginary and facilitated collaboration between geographically dispersed individuals (see, e.g., McKinney 2015, 2). For geographically isolated women unable to travel to the sites of the WLM, the importance of feminist newsletters as a source of comfort and connection to the movement should not be downplayed. The sharing of feminist ideas via WLM newsletters also denotes a revolutionary act in Western societies because political consciousness had so far been shaped by men and distributed via male institutions. Nonetheless, it is also important to recognise how newsletters grounded the WLM both geographically and temporally in local communities (Beins 2017, 45–46). Newsletters served a spatial as well as discursive purpose and they functioned to build a tangible rather than imagined community of activists. For example, newsletters offered clear points of contact for women interested in joining the WLM. Activists wanting to start a new group or organise a campaign used newsletters to advertise, or else they posted advertisements on notice boards in women's centres or feminist bookshops. All the newsletters analysed in this study offered a listings page of upcoming events, and these included the date of the event, the address of where it was being held and a contact phone number.

Newsletters not only provided a tangible ideological challenge to male political frameworks, they also contributed to altering the spatial arrangement of patriarchal cities because they facilitated women coming together. For example, the material presence of WLM publications provided an impetus for women to meet. Activists shared resources, particularly in more geographically isolated countries where printing costs were higher. Chris Sitka (WLM, AU) explained how Australian activists 'certainly didn't go out and buy every book. If someone had Germaine Greer's book we would all read it'. In the UK as well, sharing books was a feature of activist life: 'if we had them we passed them around, we couldn't all afford to have one' (Lynne Harne WLM, UK). The physical passing of books and other movement materials between women generated another opportunity for face-to-face encounters. Lucy Delap (2016, 171) has also explained how the print culture of the WLM was comforting to activists because it was physically tangible:

> [Women's] relationship to books, pamphlets and periodicals was based not only on their provocative ideas, but also on their physical presence, conveyed sensorially through the deep green covers of Virago Classics or the smell of book bindings.

Women bonded with each other through the presence of print materials, both because the publications were recognisable and instantly marked others in possession of them as political allies and because the act of poring over books and position papers was often a communal one. The release of a new feminist publication, for example, was an exciting event. Women consumed and critically interrogated the new ideas in small groups: '*Lesbian Ethics*[4] would arrive […] we didn't all have the subscription, we didn't all have the money. But it would arrive at Sandy's house and everybody would go […] and we would read it out loud and then you would sit up all night talking about it' (Lierre Keith WLM, USA).

The WLM's autonomous print culture also required the development of a feminist infrastructure to support it, and this included both points of distribution and production. The hostility of the mainstream media to feminist ideas meant that WLM activists had to circumvent male-owned presses in order to advance a feminist position without male interference (Brownmiller 1999, 67; Grahn 2009, 313; Hurwitz 2017, 464). Activists understood how a reliance on male media represented a threat to the growth of women's liberation. As Sandra McNeill (WLM, UK) explained, many WLM activists in the UK chose to ignore the mainstream media because they had 'had very bad reactions from the press' who would ask sexualized and demeaning questions such as 'have you burned your bra yet?' Being 'deeply suspicious of the traditional "male stream" media' (Delap 2016, 173) small feminist collectives purchased mimeograph machines to self-publish their materials (Grahn 2009) and some women started feminist press houses such as *Onlywomen* in the UK. Putting together feminist newsletters was a 'labour-intensive, time-consuming, and unremunerated' process for activists (McKinney 2015, 322; see also

---

[4] *Lesbian Ethics* was a WLM periodical published in the USA from 1984 into the 1990s. For scholarly descriptions of the journal and its topics of interest see Card (1992, 87) and Jeffreys (2018, 87, 92).

Beins 2017, 52). Interviewees discussed how activists today are free from the temporal and fiscal constraints associated with amateur newsletter production: '[now] we don't have to sit there and collate it, staple it, lug it to the post office, sort it, send it out and pay all that postage and printing costs' (Carol Hanisch WLM, USA). Nonetheless, the production of the print material of the WLM provided another avenue of community-building because it required the coming together of women in physical space. Producing movement materials via roneo machines and gestetner machines might have been time-consuming, but in those hours, women were together: talking, strategising and forming strong bonds.

Feminist bookstores also spatially challenged men's dominance of cityscapes. The materiality of books and newsletters and other ephemera of the WLM meant that activists needed physical sites to facilitate their distribution (Beins 2017; Delap 2016). Whilst newsletters, books and pamphlets were sent to women individually, feminist bookstores and women's centres nonetheless provided recognisable and relatively stable public sites of feminism where WLM activists could both access printed materials and find out what was going on (Delap 2016). Bookstores provided a tangible point of entry to feminist ideas for women new to the movement. Lierre Keith (WLM, USA), for example, first got involved in feminist activism in Philadelphia in the early 1980s, when she was 16 years old. She did not have a car, and it was difficult for her to attend meetings or city-based demonstrations regularly. Keith described her local women's bookstore as a 'respite' from male-dominated society, a place where she could connect with the movement and be exposed to the ideas of women's liberation in a cohesive manner:

> Even if you didn't know anybody there, [women's bookstores were] still a great place to be because all the ideas were there, and all the books were there, and I started to learn who the authors were, and what they meant, and what the poetry was, and why the posters, and what the symbols [were] and it's like this whole world that was there, that women had already created throughout the 70s.

Alongside movement materials such as books of feminist theory, newsletters, flyers, pamphlets and position papers, details of meetings and social events could all be found in one place.

Historical scholarship often highlights how radical feminist organising in the WLM was ephemeral and decentralised (and thus not dissimilar to contemporary digitally networked feminism, see McKinney 2015). In the view of historian Lucy Delap (2016, 172), however, paying analytical attention to place allows scholars to 'rethink the claims made about the fluid and ephemeral nature of Women's Liberation'. The idea that WLM organising was transitory tends to overshadow how participation spatially structured the lives of activists, who became physically immersed in movement activities. For many activists, the WLM was not a transitory pastime; it was time-consuming, and it involved regular and sustained participation. As Anne Enke (2007, 7) has argued:

> Women […] created a massive groundswell of feminist activism by directly intervening in the built environment. […] feminist activism, then, was not just "everywhere" and "in the air", rather it was known and practised on the ground of everyday life.

Whereas WLM activists gathered together to collectively author a position paper, it is now possible for activists to edit the same document or participate in a group chat from separate physical locations. The use of social media for feminist communication recasts social movement participation as a solitary pursuit that provides little impetus for women to move towards each other as they did during the WLM. Social media is not only used to print feminist speech today, but digital space also functions as the site of feminist publishing and has largely replaced the feminist bookstore. Although social media is prized as faster and more convenient because it eliminates the need for women to travel to a communal meeting place or to access materials, considering movement-building from a spatial perspective highlights how digital communication functions to keep women physically divided from each other. In this way, social media benefits men as a social group to the detriment of women's liberation. The technology reinforces the isolation and individualisation of women in private homes, and it also fails to challenge the patriarchal arrangement of cities.

Getting Away from Men

> We talked about an autonomous women's movement and women-only organising, and whatever your politics you agreed with that. It wasn't a question of whether you would bring men along to things […] which we have all the time now! (Lynne Harne WLM, UK)

Having argued above that activists moved towards other women regularly through the course of their participation in the WLM, I will now investigate the policies and procedures that women developed to limit male access to feminist organising. Prior experiences in mixed-sex organising circles prompted a praxis of women-only organising within the WLM. The pioneers of the WLM were fiercely divided along various political lines, but they largely saw women-only spaces as integral to their ability to authentically generate critical ideas free from the influence of men and patriarchal structures (Browne 2014, 46–47). The WLM was, in this sense, a separatist movement from its inception (Shugar 1995, 13). Debates about the role of men in feminism were more likely to be based around women's relationships to men as romantic partners (see, e.g., Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group 1981) or as mothers of sons (see, e.g., Lorde [1979] 2007), rather than whether women should be organising alongside men.

WLM activists developed several policies and procedures to restrict men's ability to influence the development of feminism. Men were not permitted at meetings or conferences and male input to feminist newsletters was also minimal, if non-existent. The explicit women-only policy of newsletters allowed women to advertise meeting times, strategise actions and develop theory autonomously. The *London Women's Liberation Newsletter* provides one example, with the June 1982 edition stating on the cover: 'This newsletter is internal to the Women's Movement and is for women only. Please do not show it to men or let them have access to it or use it to advertise on their behalf'. Such policies were a common feature in other movement periodicals throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

As with newsletters, the position papers available at conferences were intended to be read and distributed only to women. The conference pack prepared for the inaugural Women Against Violence Against Women

national conference in 1981, for example, stated that: 'ALL OF THE PAPERS AVAILABLE AT THE CONFERENCE SHOULD BE TREATED AS 'WOMEN ONLY' LITERATURE—DO NOT MAKE THEM AVAILABLE TO MEN WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF THE AUTHORS'. Not only were men prevented from attending WLM conferences as participants, but male journalists were also denied access. As Al Garthwaite (WLM, UK) explained, activists decided to make conferences women-only for two reasons: firstly, because male journalists were an 'intrusive presence' and they asked disruptive questions, and secondly, because their reporting of conference proceedings in the mainstream media was unsympathetic to the cause of women's liberation and therefore counterproductive.

Some women's centres and feminist bookstores also had explicit women-only policies. For example, in April 1976 the Coordinating Committee Group of the Melbourne Women's Liberation Centre decided that: 'no men [are] allowed in the women's centre [and] this includes schoolboys […] if they are old enough to stay at home [unsupervised] then they are too old to come to the centre'. Being commercial spaces, it was sometimes more difficult for women to enact formal women-only policies in feminist bookstores. Nonetheless, men were still actively discouraged from perusing feminist, and particularly lesbian feminist, materials. A male presence in bookstores was not often a significant problem for activists. As Lucy Delap (2016, 184) has pointed out, the woman-centred nature of feminist bookstores meant that men 'who were not actively hostile were often hesitant about entry'.

Space to Re-imagine Women: Feminist Cultural Creation

> Every woman who is a feminist in some way [gets] broken from her culture of origin. There is something very profound that happens […] you become gynocentric. (Lierre Keith WLM, USA)

The development of an oppositional women's culture during the WLM provides another lens through which to understand how movement

participation spatially structured activists' everyday lives and also issued a tangible challenge to the traditional public/private divide. Interviewee accounts suggest that the creation of a women's culture was central to the revolutionary drive of the WLM. Although several social movement scholars have theorised the development of a collective culture as a crucial part of movement-building, women's cultural creation during the WLM is nonetheless often associated with its demise.

Within the dominant narrative, the rise of what is called *cultural feminism* led directly to the petering out of radical feminist activism that directly challenged male dominance. In this version of events, cultural production produced a movement more inwardly focussed on community-building than outwardly focussed on social change. Narratives suggesting that cultural feminism depoliticised the WLM, however, often fail to recognise the creative drive that underwrites separatist practices (Enszer 2016). As I discussed above, separatism is 'more than refusal'; it is also 'an embrace of new possibilities' which emerge when women devote space and time to each other (Enszer 2016, 190). For example, regular events like the annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in the USA generated creativity because they provided women with a space from which to envision new political possibilities and ways of relating to each other (Whittier 1995, 213).

The strand of feminist cultural production associated with spirituality or goddess worship has come under the most sustained critique. Based upon the viewpoint that 'women's ways' were naturally superior to men's, this strand of women's culture emerged in the 1970s and 'increasingly emphasised women's differences from men, spirituality, unity with the earth and natural peacefulness, and focussed on celebrating women's "energy"' (Whittier 1995, 216). Goddess worship and feminist spirituality represent but one aspect of the extensive and varied women's culture that emerged during the WLM. Nonetheless, across academic disciplines, this strand is frequently held up as evidence that all radical feminist theorising and all radical feminist cultural production is essentialist, that is, based upon a belief in biologically innate difference between the sexes (see Duriesmith and Meger 2020). When used by socialist feminist scholars such as Alice Echols (1983, 441–447) and Rosemary Tong (1989) in the USA or Lynne Segal (1987, 3) in Britain, the term *cultural*

feminism is best understood as a weapon meant to disparage radical feminists (Raymond [1993] 1995, 90–92; Taylor and Rupp 1993). Janice Raymond ([1993] 1995, 91) has also made this argument, highlighting how the term *cultural feminism* signifies a plethora of 'simplifications, reductionisms, and distortions' designed by enemies of women's liberation to reduce all aspects of radical feminism to cultural feminism and critique them (see also Lienert 1996; Miriam 1998, 149–151). Consequently, feminist cultural production has come to be viewed almost in its entirety as 'a retreat from politics to "lifestyle"' (Taylor and Rupp 1993, 32), with many scholars failing to recognise the role of culture in fuelling radical feminist social transformation.

The term *cultural feminism*, then, is frequently evoked to delegitimise and demonise the groundswell of cultural and social activity that occurred alongside WLM organising. Some forms of cultural production during the WLM were certainly less politically oriented than others. Even so, it would be difficult in the current political climate—where women-only social and cultural events scarcely exist (Jeffreys 2018; Morris 2016)—to completely dismiss their relevance. Feminist spiritual practices in the WLM, for example, might not have been directly focussed on materially challenging male dominance, but nonetheless they served an important political function because they provided women with a tangible and oppositional alternative to the mainstream.[5] As Lierre Keith (WLM, USA) explained in her interview, 'some of [the cultural production was] rather silly, I will grant that, but at least it was an attempt' to produce an oppositional culture centred around women.

The WLM offered activists a plethora of women-centred cultural activities which they could attend:

> There were loads of women bands, I mean loads, and there would be discos all the time which were women-only discos […] we had a women's art centre, we had women's art, women's theatre, women's novels [and] women's poetry, which was published by the women's presses [and shared at] poetry readings. (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK)

---

[5] See Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp (1993, 41) for an account of how feminist spirituality 'sparked heated debates [but] never replaced politics' in lesbian feminist communities.

Cultural creation in the WLM provided a tangible challenge to male dominance by carving out spaces for women-centred social interaction. In the contemporary climate, conversely, 'it is almost impossible to discover a women's anything to go to in any town on the globe at this point' (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK). As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, contemporary attempts to create a women's culture or organise meeting in women-only spaces are rendered instantly vulnerable to male harassment and intrusion on social media.

It is important to note here that hostility towards the lesbian separatist tradition also underwrites much of the scholarly critique of cultural feminism (Enszer 2016; Taylor and Rupp 1993, 33). While separatism as a political practice underwrites all feminist activity in some form, 'from divorce to exclusive lesbian separatist communities, from shelters for battered women to witch covens, from women's studies programs to women's bars, from the expansion of day-care to abortion on demand' (Frye [1977] 1988, 62), it is most closely linked to lesbian feminist political theory (Hoagland 1988a). The intellectual roots of lesbian separatism were first developed in the WLM through newsletters and printed pamphlets distributed at conferences, bookstores and women's centres. These ideas developed into a vibrant political project linking theory to material practices (Enszer 2016, 193).

The women's culture of the WLM was not specifically lesbian feminist, but it did nonetheless provide 'the amniotic fluid in which lesbians and lesbian feminism could thrive and grow' (Jeffreys 2018, 34). As Jeffreys (2018, 34, 59) has explained elsewhere, the women-only spaces of the WLM not only facilitated the growth of lesbian feminism but also provided places for heterosexual women to discover lesbianism. For many WLM activists—particularly lesbians—it became possible to live their whole lives in the movement and completely revolutionise their perceptions of themselves as women. Having already cut emotional and sexual ties with men, lesbians occupied a unique social position which allowed them to dedicate themselves completely to the WLM. As interviewee Chris Sitka (WLM, AU) explained, existing 'outside the servitude system' of heterosexuality allowed lesbians to be drivers of theoretical and cultural innovation and participate in ways which were not possible for

heterosexual women who were married or had boyfriends (see also Miriam 1998, 328–329).

Contrary to accounts which depoliticise all feminist cultural production, interviewees painted a rich picture of how the social and cultural life of WLM activists related to movement development. Women socialised at women-only dances and bars and attended poetry readings and music nights, all of which created a strong sense of community and shared political commitment. It would be difficult to separate the cultural aspects of the WLM from its more clearly political elements such as protest marches or direct actions, and indeed the women I interviewed did not delineate between the two. Sandra McNeill (WLM, UK), for example, considered that spending time with other women socially and participating in activism was 'all part and parcel of the same thing'. Political conversations naturally spilled over into more socially oriented spaces. McNeill always went with other women to the pub after various meetings and she explained how dances and socials became integral aspects of conference schedules and planning: 'it was obvious that if you were going to have a conference you were going to have to have a social'. Social and political events offering women an alternative to male culture proliferated, with music, film, theatre and dances providing tangible alternatives to mainstream cultural values and mainstream entertainment venues (Jeffreys 2018).

The relationship between women's culture and the WLM was symbiotic: the ideology of the movement was reflected in the culture and similarly the culture reflected back the politics of women's liberation. Feminist cultural production fuelled women's imagination and facilitated the spread of common political ideas. A feminist culture was also politically important because it provided activists with the gumption to keep going in the face of backlash and wider cultural hostility: 'it was a way of feeding us, the music and the songs […] it was our way of strengthening ourselves and holding ourselves up as all the forces were trying to push us back into the feminine role of servitude [to men]' (Chris Sitka WLM, AU). Songs contained political ideas that summed up the ideology of women's liberation and were familiar to activists internationally. Well-known American lesbian feminist singer Alix Dobkin's tracks, for example, directly referenced movement ideas. On the track 'Talking Lesbian'

she sings: 'If we don't let MANeuvering keep us apart, if we don't let MANipulators keep us apart, if we don't let MANpower keep us apart, or MANkind keep us apart, we've won'.[6] Cultural paraphernalia also transmitted political ideas to women and generated a sense of solidarity. As Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) explained, women 'developed a sort of common language of symbols and culture' by wearing scissor earrings and labryses. At festivals and bookstores activists could purchase the iconography of women's liberation: 'there would be loads and loads of tables with bric-a-brac' for sale (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK). The availability of these materials meant that women could retreat from male cultural values in their everyday lives and create feminist, women-centred spaces in their private homes (Jeffreys 2018, 36; Taylor and Rupp 1993).

As interviewee accounts demonstrate, the development of feminist community and a women's culture was dependent upon women being together in women-only space. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) was one interviewee who made this point:

> If you are going to develop a culture you have to be able to meet together, if you are going to listen to a women's band you have to come together as women to listen to it, if it's a women's poetry reading you've got to have lots of other women there who will comment and say things about your poetry as you read them.

Prominent lesbian feminist poet Judy Grahn (2009, 315) has also described the relationship between activist mobilisation and cultural production in the WLM, noting that lesbian feminist poetry readings 'drew large, loud, engaged audiences, all women … six hundred, twelve hundred at a time'. Grahn goes on to explain that:

> These gatherings helped tell us all that we had a movement, and that it had collective power. We were ecstatic at finding each other, exploding in every direction. Our bookstores and presses, music festivals and self-help clinics

---

[6] Other examples include the Australian folk influenced group, *the Lavender Blues,* who released an album entitled *Wake Up Sister* in 1978. In New Zealand, lesbian sisters the Topp Twins also translated political ideas clearly for activists (Hall 1982). The track 'Untouchable Girls', for example, contains the lyric: 'we don't let anybody touch our brains, we will never ever plug into the mains, we are overtaking on a single lane, we're untouchable, touchable girls'.

proliferated and became the college we had always wanted, the college that would let us center ourselves as a subject, the expressed concerns of women, fully worthy of research and contemplation, of public policy and political power. We became woman-centred, seeing a vision of the hugeness of this enterprise, and its capacity as an agent of change for the whole society.

Cultural production served to spatially locate the political theory coming out of women's liberation by generating places where women could begin to put these ideas into action. In this way, the development of a women's culture made the ideas of women's liberation tangible for activists, who could begin to glimpse a life for themselves outside of male control.

While social media does allow women to sell and share their cultural wares across geographical borders, it impedes the formation of collective cultural norms because it removes the impetus for the producers of music, poetry and bric-a-brac to ever physically come together with their intended audience (Livingstone 2005). Interviewees highlighted that while social media allows women to share materials digitally, it prevents them from collectively consuming them. For example, Susan Hawthorne (WLM, AU) said: 'I don't think [social media] builds [culture]. I think it distributes it'. The collective consumption of cultural wares in physical space was crucial to the formulation of group norms and the development of a politically informed feminist culture in the WLM. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) elaborated on this process in her interview. She said that when women physically meet, then cultural forms are produced based upon the experiences women have in their collective struggle to bring about social change. For example, Jeffreys explained how poetry was written based upon the shared experiences of activists, and then that same poetry was 'reflected back upon' by women as they developed and refined their activist praxis.

For some interviewees, feminist cultural production and community-building was perceived as a natural by-product of organising efforts:

I never thought of myself as developing feminist community, I thought of myself as trying to develop a feminist movement […] community happened. (Kathy Scarborough WLM, USA)

> [Feminist community and women's culture] stemmed from activism initially. (Al Garthwaite WLM, UK)

For others, creating a women's culture was a more conscious pursuit. Via the process of critiquing male culture in consciousness-raising groups, activists had come to realise how damaging it was to women. Chris Sitka (WLM, AU), for example, said that women's culture 'grew out of that radical critique of male sexism and the patriarchal world and the knowledge that we had to start creating our own thing'. Having been told whom to love, what to wear and how and what their bodies should be and do, women began to imagine themselves outside of a male culture which had so far contained 'nothing about women [and] nothing for women in terms of valuing women or putting women at the centre of analysis' (Lynne Harne WLM, UK). The development of an alternative culture therefore became a political imperative for activists as they tried to 'fill the gap' in their lives created by their growing refusal to participate in male culture forms (Lierre Keith WLM, USA). No longer feeling at home in the male world, activists knew they 'had to make [their] own culture a different way of being, a different way of acting' (Chris Sitka WLM, AU).

Regardless of whether women's culture was a conscious pursuit or a natural by-product of organising, interviewee accounts clearly demonstrate how its visionary and creative properties were made possible via separating from the mainstream. Women came together to share, consume and create a common culture that centred women. Within the movement community, women had the free space to create their own norms, which allowed them to break with the anti-woman culture of patriarchal societies. This was about moving away from men and male culture and seeing what happened—everything about women's lives had been so circumscribed by structural oppression that activists needed space to re-imagine the social world and construct it anew. This section has focussed upon the social and cultural events that channelled activist creativity and encouraged activists to re-imagine themselves as women. The chapter now turns to discussing the prefigurative political forms that enabled WLM activists to spatially re-structure their everyday lives around living with and loving women.

Prefiguring Women's Liberation

Prefigurative politics is an attempt to enact in the present what will be possible in the future; it is a type of political action which understands the relationship between the means and the ends of achieving a political goal. Scholars such as Barbara Epstein (1991, 122) have theorised prefigurative politics as an inherent feature of revolutionary social movements:

> There is always a prefigurative element in radical politics, or at least a pull towards prefigurative politics, because without an effort to live one's values radical claims collapse into hypocrisy.

Within the WLM, political action had a dual focus: activists understood that revolution was not just dependent upon abolishing the social structures of male dominance, but also in producing change in individuals (Rosenthal 1984). WLM activists were engaged in the political project of re-imagining what women could be when they are freed from male control. Attempting to 'prefigure' this society involved 'living the revolution now' in their personal lives.

In the WLM, prefigurative forms were adapted from other movements to suit feminist ideology. The idea of 'living the revolution now' came from the male-led New Left and was commonly reinterpreted in the WLM through the well-known slogan 'the personal is political'. Prefigurative politics materialised the theory that activists had developed in consciousness-raising groups. For interviewees, the WLM's emphasis on the relationship between personal life change and structural change gave the movement its revolutionary fervour. As I will now argue, drawing on the examples of all-female households and political lesbianism, the prefigurative political forms of the WLM both issued a tangible challenge to the male social order and produced material changes in women's lives.

Squatting/Co-housing

The private home denotes another crucially important site of WLM organising that has not yet been given much attention in this chapter.

Co-housing was one of the primary ways in which WLM activists experimented with different ways of living that fundamentally shifted men's access to women. While bookstores and women's centres provided important public meeting spaces for activists, lounge rooms in women-only private households also functioned to facilitate movement growth. Lucy Delap (2016, 191) has recently described feminist bookstores in London as places which 'provided stable, recognizable nodal points, […] sites of exchange and recruitment, and spaces of physical encounters', a description that feminist historian Christine Wall (2017, 91) has argued also applies to feminist squats in London. While squatting as a large-scale feminist practice was unique to the British WLM,[7] it was also common for activists from the other English-speaking Western democracies to share houses and experiment with women-only collective living arrangements. Chris Sitka (WLM, AU), for example, spoke about living in share-houses with other lesbian feminists in Fitzroy, Melbourne. Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ) also described how 'in the early 80s, all the feminists that I was working with were aged between 20 and 30, or late 30s, and most of us lived in communal households'.[8]

Perhaps more than any other example given in this chapter, the practice of squatting and co-housing highlights how WLM activists spatially transformed their everyday lives to centre them around women. Interviewee accounts reveal the extent to which women's daily lives became inseparable from politics:

> The WLM was just this ferment of ideas, an incredible stream of intense discussions that I had with other women when we were doing the gardening, when we were doing the dishes, when we were having fun together, when we were dancing, in between dances. All the time. (Jenny Rankine WLM, NZ)

---

[7] In 1960s London, in response to the crisis in housing, women's participation in squatting practices formed a part of the broader left-libertarian and anarchist grassroots movement sweeping the city. Christine Wall (2017, 79) has documented how the practice of squatting proliferated in Britain in the late 1960s, as squatters 'reclaimed and repaired' the 23,100 abandoned dwellings in Greater London. There are only a few accounts of the women-only squatting communities in central London during the 1970s and 1980s: as Wall (2017) has explained, most work to date pays little attention to the gendered composition of households.

[8] For an account of feminist co-housing in the USA, see Judy Grahn (2009).

> We would just have a few shared households and we would be constantly in each other's houses and constantly doing things together, you know, doing actions, writing leaflets, running off the roneo things, having meetings, going to the *Women's Liberation Centre*, whatever. (Chris Sitka WLM, UK)

Since I interviewed her in 2016, Chris Sitka (2017, 69) has described how, after moving into her first share-house, her life as an activist 'matured and developed' as lesbian feminist community became 'the core' of her life. When she was not going to meetings at the Women's Liberation Centre in Melbourne, Sitka (2017, 69) 'spent all her time with a small, but growing, group of like-minded women'. For her, co-housing was experienced as a political practice with concrete outcomes, and her life was completely transformed through living with other women.

Living together generated hives of political activity that facilitated both the intellectual development of activists and regular engagement in direct actions such as spray painting and picketing events. Lynne Harne (WLM, UK) described the progression from her discovery of feminism to her complete immersion in the WLM as rapid: it was six months from the time in which she first saw a Women's Liberation demonstration on television to when she moved, with her young daughter, into a lesbian-collective share-house in Hackney. Alongside the women she lived with, Harne immediately began to organise political actions such as a protest in Trafalgar Square against the proposed withdrawal of child benefits. For Harne, living in close quarters with women facilitated activism and encouraged movement growth. Christine Wall (2017, 91) has also taken this view, arguing that women's communal squatting in London enabled feminists to engage in 'spontaneous and quickly organized' political action.

According to Janice Raymond (1986, 146), the physical spaces that groups of women have historically carved out for themselves have been a crucial determinant enabling them to live lives outside of male control. Having access to physical spaces without men provided women with tangible ways to resist participating in structures of hetero-reality and allowed them to improve their quality of life:

> Setting up households together gave women the spatial location necessary for the sharing of a rich inner and worldly existence. It enabled them to provide a home and "family" for women who came after them and were also attracted to such a companionship of equals. It helped them to conceive other structures in which they carried on their work and activities. (Raymond 1986, 146)

By living together without men, women began to create self-determined urban communities which provided an important spatial infrastructure for the WLM (Wall 2017). According to Wall (2017, 83), women's squats in London represented the 'antithesis of suburban life' because they materially demonstrated the revolutionary possibilities of collective living arrangements outside of male control.

Another reason why all-female households were integral to the success of the burgeoning WLM was because they allowed women to experiment with new ways of supporting each other economically. As Judy Grahn (2009, 313–314) has written:

> The households were the basis for economic resource sharing, through barter and distribution of goods, such as boots (we dressed like the soldiers we considered ourselves), that enabled input from working-class women, which most of us were. For the first time in our lives, economically poor women like me could devote real time to writing, thinking and acting, entirely on behalf of women.

Each house facilitated one or more movement projects, such as 'publication of a radical newsletter, a meeting place for socialist unions, or direct engagement with issues of mothering and co-mothering' (Grahn 2009, 314). The house in which Grahn lived supported the independent women's press and the women's bookstore collective and provided a space for 'volatile community meetings of up to sixty women in the oversized living room' (Grahn 2009, 314). In Grahn's (2009, 314) view, 'these [political] projects were the direct result of lesbian households and the solidarity made possible by our joint living arrangements'.

Political Lesbianism

> When you live in a lesbian only world you empower yourself in a way that is not possible out there. You come out of defence mode. So, just to be free of that for a little while allows you to go into another space. (Chris Sitka WLM, AU)

Considering the significance of place and space to the WLM also helps explain why lesbians and lesbian feminist theory were crucial to movement development. Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp (1993, 33) have defined lesbian feminism as 'a variety of beliefs and practices based upon the core assumption that a connection exists between an erotic and/or emotional commitment between women and political resistance to patriarchal domination'. As both theoretical and cultural innovators (Evans and Boyte 1986, 105), several scholars have understood lesbian feminists as pivotal to the growth of the WLM (Enke 2007; Jeffreys 2018; Thompson 1994, 175; Whittier 1995, 20). Lesbianism has been central to the project of feminist emancipation and women's self-definition. This is because lesbianism, as a sexual practice, subverts the perceived naturalness of heterosexuality, a primary mechanism through which women are kept subordinate to men.

From the early 1970s, WLM activists were beginning to critique heterosexuality and starting to develop lesbian separatist thought (Jeffreys [1990] 2011, 224). While it would be difficult to quantify how prevalent political lesbianism was across the countries considered in this study, interviewee accounts and archival materials suggest that the idea of political lesbianism, of women turning their attention away from men and towards the love of women, underwrote much of the revolutionary fervour of the WLM. For example, Al Garthwaite (WLM, UK) explained how 'a great many women ceased to identify as heterosexual and started to identify as lesbians' in the British WLM. Historian Sue Bruley (2016, 728) has also argued that a growing lesbian presence within the English WLM was noticeable by 1976–1977.

Lesbianism was commonly viewed by WLM activists as the state of women loving women and women recognising each other as fully human individuals who lack nothing (Hoagland and Penelope 1988). Many of

the women interviewed for this project are lesbians, and the relationship between political lesbianism and movement development was a frequent theme cropping up in our conversations. By political lesbianism, I refer to the specific analysis that sexuality is a socially constructed rather than biologically innate characteristic. In practice, political lesbianism refers to the theory that women can choose to leave the social institution of heterosexuality and instead devote their intimate energies to women. In the words of Janice Raymond (1986, 14), 'to be a Lesbian means to extend what has been called a "sexual preference" beyond the realm and reality of a sexual category to a state of social and political existence'. In other words, women can choose to reject heterosexuality, and, in doing so, they can begin to move physically and emotionally towards other women and away from men.

For many of the WLM activists I interviewed, becoming a lesbian was a logical extension of their involvement in the movement. Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ), for example, provided a typical account of how the development of her political ideas led her away from a heterosexual lifestyle towards lesbianism. Rankine decided to be a lesbian after a year of being involved in WLM organising. Along with her fellow activists, she had been having a series of 'intense conversations about what sex was like, and how you divide up the housework when you are living with a man'. She then began trying out different forms of heterosexuality to try to find a sexual arrangement more aligned with her politics. As she explained:

> I had had the seven-year relationship and that wasn't something I wanted to repeat, you know? It had been mixed and not violent, he was "a nice guy". But it hadn't been good in a lot of ways […] I'd tried one night stands and I'd tried various different types of heterosexuality, I was sort of walking backwards finding that there weren't many left and then I turned around and there were all the women.

Rankine's complete immersion in the WLM made a relationship with a woman an obvious choice for her next romantic partner:

> It was feminism that made me come out, you know? It wasn't that I was madly attracted to women and couldn't do anything about that even if I didn't want to be, it wasn't like that at all.

Rankine's account of deciding to live as a lesbian demonstrates the importance WLM activists afforded to aligning their political beliefs with their personal practices. It also highlights how new forms of relationships become available to women as a result of their immersion in women-only spaces.

The various spatial locations of the WLM provided multiple opportunities for women to discover lesbianism. Activists were constantly around other like-minded women, and having to travel to communicate with other women led to relationships forming:

> By having to go and be with [other activists] it strengthened our bonds for a start. Women would get off with each other, you know? It strengthened the bonds (Chris Sitka WLM, AU).

Interviewees spoke candidly about the erotic energy of the WLM, which they understood to be another important driver of movement growth. Heterosexual radical feminist scholar Susan Brownmiller (1999, 172) has described the link between political passion and eroticism in the WLM as follows:

> There is a saying that armies run on their stomachs and political movements run on sex. Romance and sexual attachments flourish in the heated cauldron of common cause; flirtation, intrigue and attraction are compelling reasons to get out of the house and go to a meeting. As a movement seeps into one's veins and takes over one's life, who else exercises any hold on one's imagination but other movement people?

For lesbian feminist Charlotte Bunch (1978, 221), the sites and processes of feminist theory production also provided hospitable sites for a burgeoning erotic energy:

> Those days of early feminist publishing were also times of channelling erotic energy. Even when women could not yet admit sexual feelings for

each other, they were there, sparking our work together around the mimeo machine. Feminist presses have always been integral to some of feminism's major tasks: bringing women together and spreading the word.

Eroticism sparked revolutionary drive; an insight clearly expressed in lesbian feminist Rita Mae Brown's (1974) famous poem *Sappho's Reply*, which stated that 'an army of lovers shall not fail'. As I will argue further in the final chapter of this book, this physical element is lacking from feminist communication on social media. This could be one contributing factor to the relative dearth of feminists choosing to live as lesbians today.

Lesbianism was understood by many WLM activists as a political 'act of resistance' to the male establishment (Clarke 1981). Activists had recognised the heterosexual couple as the foundation of male supremacy, and they developed an analysis of how heterosexuality functioned as a social institution built upon obstructing female bonding and serving to reinforce women's continued loyalty and subservience to male desires (Raymond 1986). Women therefore centred their activism around attacking heterosexuality as a pillar of male power: 'the ideas […] were remarkably radical, [we were] actually talking about heterosexuality, and how the world is ordered around the institution of heterosexuality, and how to change it' (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK). In her 1993 book, *The Lesbian Heresy*, Jeffreys described lesbianism as:

> A revolutionary political choice which, if adopted by millions of women, would lead to the destabilisation of male supremacy as men lost the foundation of their power in women's selfless and unpaid, domestic, sexual, reproductive, economic and emotional servicing (ix).

Through the expansion of lesbian feminism, the WLM issued a fundamental challenge to heterosexuality as the natural order of things.

Other scholars and activists have also described lesbianism as revolutionary. Lesbians did not have to compartmentalise their politics from their personal life in the way that was required of their heterosexual sisters. As such, they had more free space away from men to experiment with and exemplify new ways of living. Janice Raymond (1986, 14) has argued that 'Lesbian existence can provide certain patterns that can be

used by other women to break the stranglehold of hetero-relations'. WLM activist Cheryl Clarke (1981, 134) has also advanced this point of view:

> If radical lesbian-feminism purports an anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-woman-hating vision of bonding as mutual, reciprocal, as infinitely nego-tiable, as freedom from antiquated gender prescriptions and proscriptions, then all people struggling to transform the character of relationships in this culture have something to learn from lesbians.

Lesbianism functioned as a politically potent force in the WLM, not only because it fundamentally improved the lives of individual activists and posed a direct challenge to male power, but also because it provided a space for creating 'an alternative universe [comprised of] a new sexuality, a new ethics [and] a new culture' in opposition to the mainstream (Jeffreys 1993, ix). Lesbianism was both 'a challenge to what counts as fact and the beginning of a creation of a new value' (Hoagland 1988a, 5). In the remaining chapters of this book, I will discuss the difficulties that women face today in trying to both envision and enact alternative cultural forms on social media.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the significance of physical place and space to the political project of women's liberation. Alongside a focus on the relationship between spatial location and women's liberation, I have also highlighted the role that culture and prefigurative politics played in propelling the development of the WLM and producing material change in women's everyday lives. In creating the places and spaces of the WLM, women *moved*, both towards each other and away from men. The social and political '*self*-segregation' (Rich 1976, 94) of women allowed them to develop an analysis of women's oppression outside of male control. Constantly being together also drove the movement forward because it sparked critical and creative dialogue between activists. In the next chapter, I will explore how the challenges facing contemporary feminist

activists continue to be materially embedded in the politics of space. In the face of digitally enabled male violence, women are now finding it increasingly difficult to organise autonomously from men, meet in women-only physical spaces and revive a movement for women's liberation.

References

Allen, Pamela. 1970. *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*. New York: Times Change Press.

Author unknown. 1968. *Impressions of Workshops* [4 Page Typed Document]. Copy in Possession of Carol Hanisch, New Jersey, United States of America.

Baxandall, Rosalyn, and Linda Gordon. [1995] 2000. Introduction. In *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, 1–20. New York: Basic Books.

Beins, Agatha. 2017. *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Brown, Rita Mae. 1974. *The Hand that Cradles the Rock*. New York: New York University Press.

Browne, Sarah. 2014. *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Brownmiller, Susan. 1999. *In our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*. New York: The Dial Press.

Bruley, Sue. 2013. Consciousness-Raising in Clapham: Women's Liberation as 'Lived Experience' in South London in The 1970s. *Women's History Review* 22 (5): 717–738.

———. 2016. Women's Liberation at the Grass Roots: A View from Some English Towns, c.1968–1990. *Women's History Review* 25 (5): 723–740.

Bunch, Charlotte. 1978. *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Cahill, Maud, and Christine Dann, eds. 1991. *Changing our Lives: Women Working in the Women's Liberation Movement, 1970–1990*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited.

Card, Claudia. 1992. Lesbian Ethics and the Journal Lesbian Ethics: A Review. *Hypatia* 7 (4): 207–211.

Clarke, Cheryl. 1981. Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance. In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 128–137. New York: Kitchen Table Press.

Dann, Christine. 1985. *Up from Under: Women and Liberation in New Zealand 1970–1985*. Wellington: Allen and Unwin.

de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Delap, Lucy. 2016. Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974–2000. *History Workshop Journal* 81 (1): 171–196.

Delphy, Christine. [2006] 2017. Non-Mixed Spaces: A Political Necessity. *Les Mots Sont Importants*, November 24. http://lmsi.net/La-non-mixite-une-necessite

Diani, Mario. 1992. The Concept of Social Movement. *The Sociological Review* 40 (1): 1–25.

Duriesmith, David, and Sara Meger. 2020. Returning to the Root: Radical Feminist Thought and Feminist Theories of International Relations. *Review of International Studies* 46 (3): 357–375.

Echols, Alice. 1983. The New Feminism of Yin and Yang. In *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, 439–459. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Enke, Anne. 2007. *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space and Feminist Activism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Enszer, Julie R. 2016. "How to Stop Choking to Death": Rethinking Lesbian Separatism as a Vibrant Political Theory and Feminist Practice. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20 (2): 180–196.

Epstein, Barbara. 1991. *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Evans, Sara M., and Harry C. Boyte. 1986. *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America*. New York: Harper and Row.

Fraser, Nancy. 1995. Politics, Culture and the Public Sphere: Towards a Postmodern Conception. In *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, ed. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman, 287–312. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Freeman, Jo. 1973. The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement. *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (4): 792–811.

———. 1975. Political Organization in the Feminist Movement. *Acta Sociologica* 18 (2/3): 142–161.

Frye, Marilyn. [1977] 1988. Some Reflections on Separatism and Power. In *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 62–72. London: Onlywomen Press.

Gillis, Stacy, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, eds. 2004. *Third Wave Feminism*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Graham, Dee. 1994. *Loving to Survive: Sexual Terror, Men's Violence, and Women's Lives*. New York: New York University Press.

Grahn, Judy. 2009. Ground Zero: The Rise of Lesbian Feminism. In *The Judy Grahn Reader*, 312–317. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Hall, Sandi. 1982, July/August. *A Different 10 Years* [Article in Broadsheet Magazine Anniversary Special, Issue 101, page 45]. Broadsheet Collective Archive (NZMS 596, Series 2, Box 2, File 2.14). Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, Auckland, New Zealand.

Hanisch, Carol. 2010. Women's Liberation Consciousness-Raising: Then and Now. *On the Issues*, Spring. https://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2010spring/2010spring_Hanisch.php.

Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Henley, Nancy. 1977. *Body Politics: Power, Sex and Nonverbal Communication*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia. 1988a. Introduction. In *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 1–14. London: Onlywomen Press.

———. 1988b. *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Value*. Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies.

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia, and Julia Penelope, eds. 1988. *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*. London: Onlywomen Press.

Hurwitz, Heather McKee. 2017. From Ink to Web and Beyond: U.S. Women's Activism Using Traditional and New Social Media. In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, ed. Verta Taylor, Holly J. McCammon, Jo Reger, and Rachel L. Einwohner, 462–483. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jeffreys, Sheila. 1993. *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

———. [1990] 2011. *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

———. 2018. *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970–1990*. London: Routledge.

Kedgley, Sue, and Mary Varnham, eds. 1993. *Heading Nowhere in a Navy Blue Suit and Other Tales from the Feminist Revolution*. Thorndon: Daphne Brasell Associates Press.

Kohn, Margaret. 2003. *Radical Space: Building the House of the People*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group. 1981. *Love your Enemy? The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism*. London: Onlywomen Press.

Lienert, Tania. 1996. On Who is Calling Radical Feminists "Cultural Feminists" and Other Historical Sleights of Hand. In *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, ed. Diane Bell and Renate Klein, 155–168. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Livingstone, Sonia. 2005. On the Relation Between Audiences and Publics. In *Audiences and Publics: When Cultural Engagement Matters for the Public Sphere: Changing Media, Changing Europe Volume 2*, ed. Sonia Livingstone, 17–42. Bristol: Intellect.

London Women's Liberation Newsletter. 1982, June 1. *This Newsletter is Internal to the Women's Movement and is for Women Only. Please Do Not Show it to Men or Let Them Have Access to it or Use it to Advertise on Their Behalf* [Note in London Women's Liberation Newsletter, Number 270, June 1, 1982]. The Women's Library. (Papers of Sue O'Sullivan 7SUL). LSE Library, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom.

Long Breast Press, ed. 2017. *On for Young and Old: Australian Intergenerational Radical Lesbian Feminist Anthology*. Brunswick East: Long Breast Press.

Lorde, Audre. [1979] 2007. Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist's Response. In *Sister Outsider*, 72–80. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

Luxton, Meg. 2001. Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada. *Labour/Le Travail* 48: 63–88.

Mackay, Finn. 2015. *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement*. Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mackinnon, Catharine. 1989. *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Mansbridge, Jane. 1996. Using Power/Fighting Power: The Polity. In *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, 46–66. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

———. 2001. The Making of Oppositional Consciousness. In *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris, 1–19. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mansbridge, Jane, and Aldon Morris, eds. 2001. *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subject Roots of Social Protest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McFadden, Patricia. 2016. Why Women's Spaces are Critical to Feminist Autonomy. In *Female Erasure: What You Need to Know About Gender Politics' War on Women, the Female Sex and Human Rights*, ed. Ruth Barrett, 309–315. Pacific Palisades: Tidal Time Publishing.

McKinney, Cait. 2015. Newsletter Networks in the Feminist History and Archives Movement. *Feminist Theory* 16 (3): 309–328.

McLean, Jessica, and Sophia Maalsen. 2013. Destroying the Joint and Dying of Shame? A Geography of Revitalised Feminism in Social Media and Beyond. *Geographical Research* 51 (3): 243–256.

Melbourne Women's Liberation Centre Coordinating Committee Group. 1976. *General Meeting 3rd April* [Description of Policy Decision Pertaining to Men Entering the Women's Centre, Page 19]. Women's Liberation Centre Collection. (VWLLFA47, 2000.0174 Box 1/4, Sleeve 47/1/14). Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archive, Ballieu Library, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.

Mendes, Kaitlynn. 2015. *Slutwalk: Feminism, Activism and Media*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Merrifield, Andrews. 1993. Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 18 (4): 516–531.

Millett, Kate. [1969] 1972. *Sexual Politics*. London: Sphere Books Ltd.

Miriam, Kathy. 1998. *Re-thinking Radical Feminism: Opposition, Utopianism and the Moral Imagination of Feminist Theory*. PhD thesis. University of California, Santa Cruz.

Morris, Bonnie. 2016. *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Morris, Aldon, and Naomi Braine. 2001. Social Movements and Oppositional Consciousness. In *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subject Roots of Social Protest*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris, 20–37. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nicholls, Walter, Byron Miller, and Justin Beaumont, eds. 2013. *Spaces of Contention: Spatialities and Social Movements*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Penelope, Julia. 1990. *Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers' Tongues*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Phipps, Alison. 2016. Whose Personal is More Political? Experience in Contemporary Feminist Politics. *Feminist Theory* 17 (3): 303–321.

Raymond, Janice. 1986. *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection*. London: The Women's Press.

———. [1993] 1995. *Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle Over Women's Freedom*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Red Witch. 1970. *Have You Been Dissatisfied with the State of the Women's Movement in the East Bay?* [article printed in It Ain't Me Babe, Volume 1, Number 5, page 4]. Underground Newspaper Microfilm Collection. (Microfilm 77553). Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California.

Rees, Jeska. 2007. *All the Rage: Revolutionary Feminism in England, 1977–1983*. PhD thesis. School of Humanities, University of Western Australia.

———. 2010. A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978. *Women's History Review* 19 (3): 337–356.

Rich, Adrienne. 1976. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Bantam Books.

Rorty, Richard. 1990. Feminism and Pragmatism. *Conference Presentation*. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values: University of Michigan. https://tanner-lectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/r/rorty92.pdf.

Rosenthal, Naomi Braun. 1984. Consciousness Raising: From Revolution to Re-Evaluation. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 8 (4): 309–326.

Rüdig, Wolfgang, James Mitchell, Jenny Chapman, and Phillip D. Lowe. 1991. Social Movements and the Social Sciences in Britain. In *Research on Social Movements: The State of the Art in Western Europe and the USA*, ed. Dieter Rucht, 121–148. Westview Press: Boulder.

Sangster, Joan. 2015. Creating Popular Histories: Re-interpreting "Second Wave" Canadian Feminism. *Dialect Anthropol* 39: 381–404.

Sarachild, Kathie. [1968] 1970. Feminist Consciousness Raising and 'Organizing'. In *Voices From Women's Liberation*, ed. Leslie B. Tanner, 154–157. New York: Mentor.

Segal, Lynne. 1987. *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*. London: Virago.

Shugar, Dana R. 1995. *Separatism and Women's Community*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Sitka, Chris. 1989. A Radicalesbian Herstory. In *National Lesbian Feminist Conference*, Adelaide. http://users.spin.net.au/~deniset/alesfem/s1sitka.pdf.

———. 2017. Being Together. In *On for Young and Old: Australian Intergenerational Radical Lesbian Feminist Anthology*, ed. Long Breast Press, 68–77. Melbourne: Long Breast Press.

Somerville, Jennifer. 1997. Social Movement Theory, Women and the Question of Interests. *Sociology* 31 (4): 673–695.

Spender, Dale. 1980. *Man Made Language*. Sydney: Pandora.

Springer, Simon, Kean Birch, and Julie MacLeavy, eds. 2016. *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*. New York: Routledge.

Summers, Anne. 2013. *The Misogyny Factor*. Sydney: NewSouth Publishing.

Taylor, Jean. 2009. *Brazen Hussies: A Herstory of Radical Activism in the Women's Liberation Movement in Victoria 1970–1979*. Melbourne: Dyke Books Inc.

Taylor, Verta, and Leila J. Rupp. 1993. Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism. *Signs* 19 (1): 32–61.

Thompson, Denise. 1994. Defining Feminism. *Australian Feminist Studies* 9 (20): 171–192.

Tilly, Charles. 2004. *Social Movements, 1768–2004*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Tong, Rosemarie. 1989. *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Walby, Sylvia. 1990. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Wall, Christine. 2017. Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s: Feminism, Housing and Urban Change in Hackney. *History Workshop Journal* 83 (1): 79–97.

Weisman, Leslie Kanes. 1992. *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

———. [1981] 2000. Women's Environmental Rights: A Manifesto. In *Gender, Space, Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, ed. Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden, 1–5. New York: Routledge.

Whittier, Nancy. 1995. *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Women Against Violence Against Women. 1981, November. [Conference Program]. Feminist Archive North (Sandra McNeill Collection, Box 15, Folder 'First National WAVAW Conference 1981'). Brotherton Library Special Collections, Leeds University, United Kingdom.

Zimmerman, Tegan. 2017. #Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice* 38 (1): 54–70.

4

'On the internet, there is no women-only space': Male Power in Digital Networks

[Social media] is like a wide-open public platform where everyone is reading and watching, including men.
—Chris Sitka WLM, AU
It's a terrifying environment out there, I think a lot of young women today are truly, truly terrified of taking part.
—Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK
For the one woman who discovers radical feminism on the internet, there are 10,000 men watching pornography.
—Cristabel Gekas DN, AU

In the last chapter, I paid analytical attention to the significance of the women-only places and spaces of the WLM. In this chapter, I investigate the relationship between male power and digital feminist organising. From a women's liberation perspective, it is important to be analytically attuned to how the modes of communication used by feminists facilitate men's access to women. This is because men ensure their access to women in patriarchal societies as a means of maintaining male supremacy, a phenomenon Marilyn Frye ([1977] 1988) has called male parasitism.

Quote in the chapter title from Anne Billows (DN, UK).

So far, social movement studies scholars have been slow to contextualise the benefits social media provide to feminist activists within a wider social context of male dominance and female subordination. For many, social media offer new public spaces which have enabled feminism to grow:

> The proliferation of new social media has had a profound effect on feminism; this is illustrated by the explosion in the number of websites and online communities that facilitate feminist activism. (Evans and Chamberlain 2015, 405)

The claim here is that social media companies have benevolently granted women greater political power by providing them with *cyberspaces* where they can organise. Implicit in this claim is the idea that the power women have on social media is equal to men's power in digital space, and that sex no longer matters in the digital realm. Yet, as the feminist technology theorist Eileen Leonard (2003, 51) has outlined, women are an oppressed social group, and this subordinate social location necessitates that any fair assessment of their progress must be made 'vis-à-vis men at any given time'. In her book *Women, Technology and the Myth of Progress*, Leonard (2003, 3) issues a call for social scientists to 'consider more seriously who benefits from technology and in what terms we judge it as progressive'.

Unlike the autonomous physical organising spaces carved out for feminism during the WLM, the digital spaces provided to women by social media platforms are not only mixed-sex by default, but they are also owned, designed and controlled by men. The power that social media provides to women, then, is not real power.[1] Feminist speech on social media can easily be censored in line with male values, and activists are vulnerable to being suspended or banned should they step out of line. In this chapter, I demonstrate how digital space provides men with new opportunities to surveil, harass and intimidate feminists, as well as restrict

---

[1] The conception of power referred to here has nothing to do with governments, laws or material resources which can protect women; it has nothing to do with concrete power. Rather, the power spoken of in these kinds of claims translates power as *empowerment* (Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, 41). This idea will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

their physical and digital mobility. This occurs at both the platform and the user level.

As Doreen Massey (1994) has posited, in the era of time-space compression both access to, and command over, space continues to be an important political weapon. For Massey (1994, 150), the political issue is not simply one of 'unequal distribution', where some people have more mobility and more control over the means of digital production than others. Of greater concern are the ways in which the 'time-space compression of some groups can undermine the power of others' and 'weaken the leverage of the already weak' (Massey 1994, 150; see also Harvey 1989, 293–294). Massey's framework is useful for thinking through the ways in which social media has provided men with greater opportunities to disrupt feminist organising and police women's mobility in both physical and virtual space. Just as 'the homemaker has no inviolable space of her own' within the nuclear family home (Weisman [1981] 2000, 2), neither do women on social media.

It is surprising that the relationship between social media and men's increased access to feminists has not been paid more attention by social movement scholars, who have instead been more concerned with investigating how the medium destabilises the traditional public/private divide and enables women to upscale protest actions. Scholars such as Heather Hurwitz (2017, 473–473), for example, have discussed how social media has made public what used to be private conversations between activists, as well as how digital networking technology allows women to 'supersize' their activism by sharing information rapidly. Given that the relegation of women to the private sphere has been one of the principal ways in which men have kept women subordinate, it is important for feminist scholars to consider how digital self-publishing alters the traditional public/private divide and provides new opportunities for women to raise their voices in the public sphere. However, it is also important to remember that the public/private divide is a male construct created for the political purpose of marginalising women's perspectives and restricting their mobility in public space. Mainstream democracy theorists, who conceive of the public sphere as a site where citizens act out and critically debate the intricacies of political life through an open dialogue in which everyone should be free to participate and raise their

concerns (Habermas 1989), frequently fail to account for how the hierarchical system of gender structures women's experiences of both public and private life. For women, moments of mixed-sex deliberation in the public and private sphere alike are characterised by power politics. If the public sphere represents 'a site where social meanings are generated, circulated, contested and reconstructed', and where the struggle to define meaning is performed (Fraser 1995, 14), then men and male viewpoints are perceived as more rational, level-headed and logical by extension of men's dominant social status (Spender 1980, 79).

In this chapter, I contest the claim that social media provides a new deliberative forum which is useful for feminist organising. Activists interviewed for this project evaluated the political efficacy of social media communication based not upon the extent to which it blurs the traditional boundary between the public/private divide and provides new opportunities for mixed-sex deliberation, but rather upon the extent to which it is useful for carving out autonomous spaces of resistance to male dominance. In the WLM, activists intervened in public cityscapes to claim space for feminism and they also created women-only spaces in their private homes. By creating places for women to be free from harassment and intimidation where they could debate ideas robustly and autonomously, activists generated liberatory political spaces. As I argued in the last chapter, above and beyond the blurring of the public/private divide, WLM activists directly challenged men's patterns of access to women.

Social media, conversely, has expanded men's capacity to access both the strategic directions of feminism as well as individual feminist activists, making the political project of women's liberation increasingly vulnerable to male control. Here, I foreground an analysis of how social media operates as an institution of male supremacy. I conceptualise social media as an institution that constructs 'humanly designed patterns of access' (Frye [1977] 1988, 70) in ways which benefit men to the detriment of women, and I argue that social media raises new challenges for women's autonomous political organising. Digital space offers men increased opportunities to intervene in feminist debates, locate and surveil feminist activity, harass individual activists, invade women-centric spaces, share and access pornography (and other depictions of violence

against women) and consolidate aggressive masculinity. As a result, women's workload has increased: feminists must now expend considerable political energy trying to keep themselves safe from men in the digital environment.

The Internet as a Male Space

Feminist analysis has shown that on the internet—as in physical environments—men take up more space than women and they also capitulate very little. Interactions in virtual space continue to be gendered: since the early days of digital communication research, women have been found to participate less, introduce fewer topics of discussion and receive fewer public responses than men (Herring et al. 1995). More recently, women have also been found to be 'massively underrepresented' in political discussions on Twitter, as 'both women and men address men more often than women' on the platform (Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013, 303–304). On moderated news sites, men still represent 80% of commenters (Martin 2015). They also take up more space in programming language and code, a phenomenon that Brandee Easter (2018) has conceptualised as *digital manspreading*. Contrary to general claims about social media being good for democracy, in-depth feminist analysis of the internet has shown it to be a masculine space which is hostile to both women and feminism (Eisenstein 1998; Henry and Powell 2015; Herring 1996; Klein 1996, Megarry 2014; van Zoonen 2001).

Some scholars have argued that men's aggressive digital territoriality is linked to early conceptions of the internet as a final frontier—or a Wild Wild West—which framed cyberspace as a *non-place* primed for male colonisation (Hawthorne 1999, 125). Others have suggested that online social norms are the product of the hyper-masculine domination of the medium from its conception (Barak 2005; Citron 2009). Male territoriality and aggression limits women's ability to move through and occupy digital space (Megarry 2014), and men respond with hostility and anger when women try to claim digital spaces of their own (Adam 2005, 115). Even in digital spaces which are less obviously marked male, men occupy more space than women and sexually harass them to frighten

them away from participating (Jane 2017; Megarry 2014). In response to men's violent sexual imperatives in digital space, women have always spent a considerable amount of time online attempting to avoid hostile and sexually violent content. One example is that 'an important [early] women's movement on the net', webgrrls, 'had to name itself "grrls", instead of "girls" because searching on the net for "girls" mainly produces sex sites and very little relevant material for women' (van Zoonen 2001, 68). By contrast, men have successfully occupied and used digital space for their own political purposes. They have carved out entire areas of the internet where women never go. Indeed, many women remain unaware of the extensive global systems of trafficking and prostitution that men have created via digital networking technologies (see Hughes 2002; Jeffreys 2013, 59). Men have used digital space to vastly expand and strengthen their networks around and through violence against women (Salter 2017), via the sharing and purchasing of women on pornography and prostitution sites (Jeffreys 2013; Norma 2018, 6–7), and via the use of social media to grow anti-feminist movements (Nagle 2017).

Trolling

The masculine aims of the internet are clearly evidenced in the phenomenon popularly known as *trolling*. Trolling denotes a masculine form of political engagement based around insensitivity, subterfuge, parody and irony (Nagle 2017); it is a phenomenon particular to cyber conversations which involves individuals 'luring others into pointless and time-consuming discussions' (Herring et al. 2002, 372). Often, trolling is characterised by scholars as a kind of internet game wherein trolls provoke inflammatory debate for their own enjoyment, aiming to cause the greatest possible disruption to genuine online dialogue (Donath 1999). Feminist scholars, conversely, have argued that this form of 'hostile and hateful' digital engagement raises significant ethical problems in relation to democratic ideals (Jane 2014, 542).

As a form of political engagement, trolls aim to escalate digital interactions. Emma Jane (2014, 534) has explained that 'the point [of trolling] is rarely about winning an argument via the deployment of coherent

reasoning, so much as [it is] a means by which discursive volume can be increased'. Trolls aim 'to out shout everyone else' (Jane 2014, 534), and they take enjoyment from engaging unsuspecting users in argument for argument's sake. Trolls and trolling behaviours have most commonly been studied as a value-neutral form of engagement; according to Jane (2014, 539), (usually male) trolls have so far largely escaped moral reprimand from scholars, and their (usually female) victims are commonly portrayed as 'hypersensitive or humourless'. In Chap. 6, I will discuss in greater detail how an ethics of engagement based upon trolling is antithetical to feminist ideals. I will also demonstrate how the prevalence of trolling behaviour in digital space creates problems for feminism when activists new to the movement ask genuine questions that are perceived by other women to be a form of trolling.

Men's Rights Activism

The 'anti-feminist masculinist politics' that define the bulk of trolling behaviours not only thrive in digital spaces (Nagle 2017, 86), but have also led to the rise of a men's rights movement whose constituents are commonly referred to as MRAs (men's rights activists). MRAs are deeply chauvinistic, celebrate and glorify hyper-masculinity, position feminism as 'a civilizational threat' and believe that they must reclaim their traditional power base from women and other minorities who now oppress them (Nagle 2017, 93). While men's rights activism certainly existed prior to social media (see Coston and Kimmel 2013), Angela Nagle (2017, 88) has argued that, in the mid-2010s, 'a more openly hateful culture was unleashed under the conditions of anonymity and it took on a more right-wing character'. Nagle (2017, 86–100) calls the various strands of the anti-feminist internet 'the manosphere', spaces where men's increasing demands to access women for sexual purposes are fuelled by a hateful groupthink mentality. Other scholars and journalists have also recently argued that social media has been 'an accelerant' for bringing together 'disparate and often isolated men' to pursue and bond over violence against women, particularly on the platforms Reddit and 4Chan (Roose 2018; Salter 2017). A typical form of MRA mentality was

evidenced in the final YouTube video posted by Elliot Rodger, a 22-year-old who murdered 6 University of California students and injured 14 others in 2014. Rodger cited his hatred of women, who he believed unfairly refused to have sex with him, as a factor motivating his crime (Crossley 2017, 1). In the video, Rodger said: 'I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it'.

Sexual Harassment and Technology

The idea that social media could be a useful space for feminism is also puzzling when contextualised in relation to the body of work demonstrating how developments in communication technologies have historically provided men with new opportunities to both surveil and sexually harass women (Manjikian 2014). Landline telephones, for example, facilitated male access to women in their private homes, providing a means for men to anonymously intrude upon and sexually harass women via the practice of obscene phone calls (Katz 1994; Sheffield 1989). CCTV cameras then 'allowed men to zoom in on women's bodies and track their movements in public spaces, while mobile phone cameras enabled more discrete, specific, and forensic observation' (Megarry 2018, 1077). The inclusion of cameras and WIFI connection within standard mobile phone models also provided men with the means to instantly distribute images of women amongst their social media networks (Monahan 2008, 287). The high rates of violence against women present across Western democracies have proliferated in the digital realm, with social media now being used as a vehicle for tracking, surveilling, controlling and abusing women (Mason and Magnet 2012; Salter 2017). Most recently, digital 'smart' home technology such as 'internet connected locks, speakers, thermostats, lights and cameras' which are 'marketed as the newest conveniences' have provided abusive men with another 'means for harassment, monitoring, revenge and control' (Bowles 2018).

An expansion of men's capacities to enact violence against women thus underpins much of what is usually cast as technological 'progress' (Arlidge 2002). The internet emerged out of the male-dominated industries of the military and academia, but it would not have found a solid consumer

base without pornography. Consider how men's desire for access to pornography drove the development of ecommerce and increased bandwidth (Benes 2013; Lane 2001). The genesis of Facebook is also located in men's sexual consumption of women: then Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg originally designed the platform for men to share and rate photos of their female classmates (Phillips 2007). The technology enabling fake news provides another example of this pattern: it was initially developed so men could create 'deepfakes', a type of pornography which uses artificial intelligence to produce doctored and deceptive sexually explicit videos of women (Cole 2018).

Given this history, it is unsurprising that social media is being used by individual men as a new tool of coercive control in intimate relationships (Mason and Magnet 2012), and, as is my primary concern in this book, to police feminist activists through violent intimidation as well as more subtle forms of harassment and misdirection (Megarry 2018; Nakamura 2015). Social media has been interpreted as a revolutionary tool enabling marginalised groups to make their voices heard, yet it has also allowed anonymous men to abuse women in the public eye in front of an infinite audience. Female politicians, for example, have spoken out in recent years about the constant sexualised and racialised abuse they receive on social media (Dhrodia 2017). This phenomenon is particularly alarming because, in contrast to the revolutionary aims of feminists in the WLM, women entering parliament represent only a minor threat to male-controlled society (as they are attempting to participate in the state system, rather than overthrow it). Conceived in this way, the digital blurring of the public/private divide has benefitted men to the detriment of women: social media has allowed men to morph what were previously forms of 'private' intrapersonal harassment and domination into a pervasive political tool that can be used against all women. Once we consider that digital technologies have contributed to producing a situation where women cannot participate in public life without being subjected to relentless and sustained sexual abuse, the claim that social media provides women with a useful communicative tool to grow a feminist movement begins to look even more misguided.

New laws are being developed to try to deal with the expanding forms of digitally enabled violence against women, such as revenge

pornography. At present, however, the virtual sphere still remains characterised by hostility towards women. Harassers and perpetrators of sexual violence largely evade prosecution (Henry and Powell 2015, 759), and, by positioning themselves as politically neutral conduits of user-generated content, social media companies have so far proven themselves adept at circumventing domestic laws regulating the distribution of hateful, discriminatory and harassing speech (Massanari 2018). What this means for feminists is that when they are abused on social media, they are likely 'to feel publicly excoriated, because [they] have been, and there is no recourse' (Lierre Keith WLM, USA).

Revolutionising Access: Social Media as a Security Threat

[Harassment] was fairly minimal [in the WLM] compared to what you get online. (Jenny Rankine WLM, NZ)

Digital space provides a particularly hospitable climate for men to attack feminists because it renders feminist organising publicly visible by default. As Tiger Drummond (DN, UK) explained in her interview, social media 'is *public* in the sense that anyone who hates you can find you'. In this way, social media search functionality has introduced a new problem for feminists: 'invisible [male] audiences' (boyd 2010, n.p.) of whom women might not always be explicitly aware. Several feminist scholars have discussed the dangers of increased visibility for feminists, pointing out that 'being visible and accessible to others is not necessarily liberating' for women (Kingston Mann 2014, 293). In this section of the chapter, I analyse the conditions of male access to women in instances of street-based, print-based and digital-based feminist communication.

In physical spaces such as parks, cafes or town halls, sensory perception allows women to determine who is observing their conversations. It also allows them to more accurately judge the audience to which they are speaking:

> In real life we would not walk into a room of MRAs and start talking about radical feminism, we would never do that. But that's what happens on the internet, literally. (Anne Billows DN, UK)

The searchability and anonymity of digital space, conversely, enables men to surveil women's discussions, locate conversations that occurred in the past and instantly replicate them in other settings using screenshots (see boyd 2007). Interviewees spoke critically about this phenomenon and discussed how social media impedes women's ability to control 'when and how and where and to whom we expose ourselves' (Anne Billows DN, UK).

Older interviewees felt that WLM organising structures provided activists with greater autonomy because they afforded them more control over (1) the context in which women discussed their politics and (2) the audience to which they spoke. While men would have been 'aware of things that hit the news' in the WLM, they 'wouldn't have been aware of the other stuff' like social events, weekly consciousness-raising meetings or local conferences (Lynne Harne WLM, UK). According to Lynne Harne, 'men would organise to threaten [feminists] if they knew what was going on, although, they often didn't know what was going on'. Harne's impression suggests that the level of hostility feminists face today is related to the fact that men are now more aware of feminism than they were during the WLM. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) was another interviewee who felt that the women-only policies of the WLM provided a safer environment for activists: 'the average man would have no idea what was going on in feminism, he wouldn't be at the conferences which were all women-only, he wouldn't be reading the newsletters [because] he wouldn't know they exist'. Other interviewees said that most men ignored or remained ignorant of the internal debates of the WLM throughout the 1970s and 1980s, even though feminist materials were indeed circulating in the public sphere at that time. Today, digital space renders feminist materials more easily accessible and more indiscriminately searchable by *both* activists *and* their adversaries. This makes feminism a more obvious target for male aggression in the contemporary context (Banet-Weiser 2018).

Digital feminist communication provides men with greater access to individual women and it also facilitates men's access to the strategic directions of feminist organising. While face-to-face organising provided key sites of resistance to male dominance during the WLM, social media instead facilitates what Patricia McFadden (2016, 313) has called 'the surveillance of women's political consciousness'. Surveillance is a process of dominance; it involves 'watching over something in order to project control over it' (Ström 2020, 146). Social media provides a vehicle through which men can trace movement developments and begin to understand how women think. Carol Hanisch (WLM, USA) suggested that social media generates a 'security problem' for the development of women's liberation because it provides men with direct access to women's political musings. Hanisch conceptualised digital space as a danger to women's ability to develop a feminist consciousness: 'you are inviting anybody into your thoughts if you do it online'. Anne Billows (DN, UK) echoed Hanisch's assessment of the risks of using social media for feminist communication. She said that social media is effectively 'delivering radical feminist talk to men'. According to Billows, the visibility of digital feminist organising allows men to adjust aspects of male supremacy to new challenges put forward by feminists: 'once the oppressor knows what the oppressed is thinking about the oppressor it allows them to fine tune their strategies even more'.

While the mainstream media certainly did report on the WLM in a trivialising and demeaning way, digital self-publishing has enabled men to attack feminists outside of the constraints of editorial standards of decency. Older interviewees reflected on how the role of the editor in print-based media contexts offered women at least *some* protection from male abuse:

> There might [have been] some letters back and forth in a local newspaper, because you got arrested or something. But [newspapers] would never print this kind of crap [that is on social media]. It would be more reasoned, even if they didn't agree with you, at least it would be full paragraphs. And some of it was hate speech, but it was fine, it was civil enough. But this is just a completely different level. (Lierre Keith WLM, USA)

In digital space, men feel free to indulge in unchecked woman-hating because, as Emma Jane (2014, 543) has argued, misogyny is the 'lingua franca' of the internet. Finn Mackay (DN, UK) provided a succinct overview of the kinds of abuse that feminists receive:

> [I have seen] rape threats, death threats, bomb threats, stalking, publishing of private information, mining for data about family members and loved ones, publishing photos of children online, having people's faces put on to porn imagery and that [being] shared, having porn written about you and that being shared, men's rights websites publishing your place of work, [your] contact details, urging people to complain about you being in that career, urging people to complain about you having a platform, lies told about you.

Taina Bien-Aimé (DN, USA) described the abuse women receive online as 'vicious, brutal […] just misogyny in its pure form […] they want to rape you, they want to kill you, they want to maim you'. Several interviewees provided me with files they had collated of the abuse sent to them on social media. Caitlin Roper (DN, AU) had separated hers into various subfolders entitled respectively '4chan, encouragement to suicide, insults to my physical appearance, sexist slurs, unwelcome sexual comments [and] threats of rape and violence'.

If men wanted to send abuse to individual activists during the WLM, they were constrained in their ability to share information quickly, find individual women and entice others to join in. Digital space, conversely, advantages men in their ability to coordinate campaigns of harassment across geographic borders. Legal scholar Danielle Citron (2014, 53) has called this phenomenon the 'crowd-sourcing' of cyberattacks. Social media generates data on individuals via the IP address assigned to each computer and smartphone, and men use this information to trace a woman's physical location, as well as track her activity across platforms. Taina Bien-Aimé (DN, USA) described seeing a tweet written about her that encouraged other men to attack her in her home. The tweet said: 'I'm not in New York, but those of you who are, this is where she lives, you know what to do'. Caitlin Roper (DN, AU) was also a victim of crowd-sourced attacks on social media. One MRA blog, *A Voice for Men*,

published links to Roper's Twitter account as well as to her blog that described her recovery from sexual abuse. Roper explained how 'they put that up for everyone to sort of mock and pull holes in'. She panicked when MRAs started tweeting at her: 'I don't like that they know who I am, they are communicating with me, they are turning their attention to me […] that got me very anxious because these people are in Australia, they're around'.

Social media has largely destroyed the ability of feminists to have any respite from male hostility. Because the abuse of feminists during the WLM took place 'on the streets' rather than in digital space (Jenny Rankine WLM, NZ), interviewees explained that it was limited to a specific time and place when activists were directly participating in public-facing feminist activism: 'the only things you ever saw were the people in your face … going to a demonstration you might [have gotten] screaming from frat boys for an hour, but it was nothing like this kind of pile-on' (Lierre Keith WLM, USA). The abuse of feminists in the WLM was more likely to be the result of chance encounters, rather than targeted intent. Opportunistic abuse, however, was certainly a feature of activist life that interviewees had to contend with. For example, Al Garthwaite (WLM, UK) recalled an incident in the 1970s when men kicked in the glass window of a venue after watching women who looked 'like dykes' enter the bar. Today, abuse is not limited to mere chance or to a local context; men have unprecedented access to women and harassment can be incited from anywhere at any time of the day or night, ad infinitum.

Older interviewees also felt that activists were safer in the WLM because roneo machines and gestetners—the technology used to reproduce feminist materials—were devoid of the surveillance properties which characterise social media. Chris Sitka (WLM, AU), for example, said that 'if you handed out a leaflet in the street nobody could trace where we were, or you'd post something somewhere, and they would have a lot of trouble tracing you through the post […] they [also] couldn't follow us home really, […] or find out where we work'. Older respondents explained how, at the time of the WLM, they were more likely to fear government surveillance and the police force than individual men, who did not have easy access to surveillance technologies. Aware that they

were being watched by authorities, feminists changed their behaviour to make it harder for the state to track them:

> All the things we organised were really organised by word-of-mouth. I mean, we didn't even really use the telephone because we were already aware that the state was […] beginning to increase its surveillance level. (Lynne Harne WLM, UK)

> [In the WLM], we saw ourselves as revolutionary subversives and [knew] that we had to […] be careful. We had the police after us, because […] we'd been doing demonstrations and painting and stuff […] you were always trying to hide yourself from the police and the surveillance of the secret service […]. My instinct, when I became a feminist, was to hide from the police, hide from the secret police, ASIO and Special Branch. (Chris Sitka WLM, AU)

The WLM was taken seriously as a threat to the patriarchal state, and British interviewees in particular discussed how police would tap the phones of Left-wing groups and feminists.[2] Today, however, all of the women I interviewed feared surveillance and violent harassment from digitally networked men above the workings of formal state power. This demonstrates how social media advantages men as a social group to the detriment of feminism because it has provided a means for individual men to do the security work for the patriarchal state.

Activist Self-Surveillance

> I think that many women […] who are feminist-minded start out saying what they want to say, and posting what they want to post, and are worn down over time by dealing either with outright attacks or by dealing with subtle undermining. (Alanna Inserra DN, AU)

---

[2] The first book-length discussion of state surveillance of the WLM pertains to the Canadian context and includes descriptions and analysis of how authorities monitored and infiltrated activist groups (Sethna and Hewitt 2018). For a discussion of the surveillance of British WLM activists by police units, see Jeska Rees (2007, 231). For a discussion of CIA surveillance of US-based WLM groups, see Carol Hanisch ([1973] 1978, 164, footnote 162).

One particularly pernicious feature of the digital age is that it is now more difficult for women to free themselves from masculine political consciousness. Attempting to do feminism under omnipresent male surveillance encourages women to internalise male-centred norms and values. In this section, I detail how the use of social media for feminist communication systematically exposes women to male political frameworks and male subjectivity. As I explained in the last chapter, the print material that emerged from the WLM challenged male authority by elevating women to the status of knowledge processors, a task that had previously been occupied by men. In doing so, feminist presses offered a space for women to think and debate each other outside of the parameters of male-approved thinking, in a space where they did not feel constantly vulnerable to harassment and ridicule. Social media does not provide a comparably free space for movement-building: it offers no respite to women from men's opinions on feminism. In digital space, women remain enmeshed in the dominant culture and they are constantly forced to justify their arguments to men in comment threads and via @mentions (Long 2015, 149).

Several interviewees conceptualised social media surveillance as a significant political threat to women's liberation. They also discussed how social media facilitates new and troubling manifestations of men's ability to control women. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK), for example, said that social media allows 'the silencing to happen before anything can happen':

> My experience is that, on social media, a great deal of [anti-feminist] organising happens based on hatred and attempting to silence those that they don't really like. So, it's a censorship instrument, in my experience, in a very, very serious way. Rather than a way of getting [feminist] ideas out, it's a way of shutting them down.

Feminist activists feel watched by a male audience in digital space, and they also feel constantly vulnerable to male violence. This produces a climate of fear amongst activists and has the political effect of ensuring women's compliance with male-serving ideas. Some scholars have recently argued that social media surveillance is a highly effective intimidation tactic because it 'create[s] a sense of isolation in the targeted individual'

(Massanari 2018, 4). Disparate groups of men can rally together on social media as 'an undifferentiated mass [of anonymous] Twitter eggs'[3] which are then perceived by individual women as 'a massive, all-seeing, all-knowing group' (Massanari 2018, 4).

In contrast to the sense of isolation experienced by activists who are attacked on social media, when WLM activists were harassed by men on a march or at a demonstration, they were usually surrounded by other activists. This meant that not only could activists fight back as a collective, but they also had other women around to draw on for support: 'this was the thing about being physically together, we felt strong enough to stand up against an attacker' (Chris Sitka WLM, AU). Interviewees suggested that organising face-to-face enabled women to think outside male frameworks and develop the strength required to 'resist any criticism from society at large, the media, your family, your friends, even your lovers' (Chris Sitka WLM, AU) because they had the support of their fellow activists.

As several scholars have argued, power relations are enacted spatially through the body, producing both social and material power discrepancies between men and women:

Space is one of the key ways in which the body perceives power relations. The physical environment is political mythology realised, embodied, materialized. It inculcates a set of enduring dispositions that incline agents to act and react in regular ways even in the absence of any explicit rules or constraints. (Kohn 2003, 5)

Digital space has been thought to hold the potential to liberate women from oppressive sex-role stereotypes and behavioural deference to men. Despite the work of several feminist scholars who argue that social media interactions remain 'unavoidably embodied, material and spatial' (Easter 2018, 675), the idea that digital platforms denote a kind of liberating space for women has been particularly pervasive. The principal assumption underwriting much of the scholarship focussed on women and social

---

[3] The egg is the default Twitter profile picture; seeing it indicates to other users that this is a 'sketchy' account (Alba 2017).

media is the idea that the online sphere 'represents a neutral space' where women and girls can 'potentially control and resist outside or offline negative messages' (Kanai 2015, 85).

Interviewees suggested that social media is an impoverished space in which to try to revive the WLM, both because women in digital space are still constrained by sex-role stereotypes, and because they continue to self-police in line with dominant social norms. In a digital mixed-sex environment, women are not free *to* 'be cognitively, intellectually and emotionally expressive' because they are not free *from* male violence and the dominant sexist culture (Lewis et al. 2015). For this reason, attempting to advance radical feminist politics in mixed-sex digital space is untenable: women fear reprisal and they adjust their behaviour accordingly. Some younger interviewees suggested this took the form of self-censorship, as well as an outright refusal to participate:

> [Social media surveillance] makes me more scared of saying radical things basically, and it makes me censor myself. (Anne Billows DN, UK)

> I feel myself policing myself and then, ultimately, I don't post, I don't engage […]. Ultimately, I shut up. (Mariana Borges Vanin DN, USA)

Older interviewees also expressed a similar viewpoint:

> Women have to be very careful [to avoid attack] so it is likely to be a very timid feminism that emerges. (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK)

Not only do women experience anxiety over whether to post their ideas to social media, but they are also likely to agonise over whether to repost or like feminist content 'even [when] they support it' (Cristabel Gekas DN, AU). Many women fear being the next target of abuse if they step out of line. An example of this phenomenon was provided by Meghan Murphy (DN, CA), creator of the popular radical feminist blog *Feminist Current*. Murphy regularly receives emails from women who thank her for her blogging, but report that they are too scared to share her articles on their personal feeds.

Extending Heteropatriarchal Structures

> Discussion of really serious things [about] what's happening to a woman in her relationship, that can't happen on social media, it's impossible. [This] causes a lot of distress and isolation. (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK)

The logic of digital networking extends heteropatriarchal structures that function to control women's behaviour. One problem for feminism is that women are surrounded by dominant cultural messages about normative sex roles and normative sexuality every time they access their social media accounts or use a search engine. Having been coded female by algorithms, they are 'addressed and treated as such' both in advertisements and via the content that appears in their feeds (Bassett et al. 2020, 47). Algorithms are computer-driven sorting systems that structure information according to a set of rules. Zeynep Tufekci (2015, 206) has described them as 'computational processes that are used to make decisions of such complexity that inputs and outputs are neither transparent nor obvious to the casual human observer'. Algorithms determine which stories users see in their timelines, and which advertising content they are shown. Thus, they enable 'certain perspectives on reality [to be] reinforced, and others undermined' (Greenfield 2018, 212).

Alongside the algorithmic promotion of patriarchal ideology, the internet also extends heteropatriarchal structures by offering feminists a preformatted space for interaction where 'privacy is public-ized [and] publicness is privatised' (Eisenstein 1998, 9). In other words, social media introduces commercial messages into traditionally private spaces, whilst also simultaneously converting traditionally private communication between friends and family into public discussions (van Dijck and Poell 2015; Hurwitz 2017, 473–474). This means that women's participation in digital feminism is likely to be visible to non-feminist friends, co-workers and family members (Neves and Casimiro 2018). Some social media scholars have described this phenomenon as 'context collapse', highlighting how platforms impede the ability of an individual to 'differ self-presentation strategies' as they would across face-to-face contexts (Marwick and boyd 2010, 122; see also Meyrowitz 1986). Attempting to engage in activist deliberation in front of a wider audience of friends and

family generates serious new problems for feminist organising. Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU) explained how 'it's mostly family that shut [her] down' when she posts about feminism by 'making a couple of insulting jokes but being serious about it at the same time'. Gekas also described an incident where a male Facebook friend whom she had not spoken to in years had liked a derisive comment left by one of her family members under one of her political posts. This event provides an illustrative example of the 'subtle undermining' referred to by Alanna Inserra in the quote at the beginning of this section. Several interviewees explained how 'men who don't know each other' (Gekas DN, AU) work together on social media to create a sense of collective male hostility towards feminism that frightens women from sharing their ideas.

Interviewees also suggested that the surveillance properties of social media impede women's ability to critically analyse their experiences of family life, motherhood and their intimate relationships with other activists. Some described how social media operates as a censorship instrument against feminist critiques of heterosexuality:

> I think people wouldn't talk about that sort of stuff online, […] you never know what is going to happen to it. I mean, [the] very personal sort of stuff about your relationship. [Women] wouldn't want that out there online. What if someone shared it with their boyfriend, or it seems disloyal to your partner? (Finn Mackay DN, UK)

> You cannot talk about ordinary sexual behaviour [on social media]. There is no discussion out there of what it's like in ordinary relationships […]. Supposedly, in this age of extraordinary sexual freedom and this terrible pornography, […] speaking about simple things [like heterosexual intercourse] seems almost impossible. […] Despite social media, and because of it, [women are] locked into an individual sense of guilt about all of that. (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK)

Social media not only provides men with a new avenue for policing feminist discourse, but also for policing women's sexuality. The ability to screenshot and instantly share women's posts is unlikely to impede feminist discussion on relatively benign topics such as sexist advertising

or the trial of an individual rapist, but it does raise significant problems for attempting to analyse intimate personal experiences.

Both Jeffreys and Mackay believed that women would be more likely to critically analyse the intimate details of their sexual relationships in a face-to-face context. Jeffreys recalled how women discussed, laughed at, and rejected sexual labels and rape fantasies in the WLM:

> [In the WLM] we used to actually talk about sexual fantasies that were sadomasochist and say that the best way to deal with it was to laugh. We used to sit in rooms full of women […] and a woman would say, "I used to think I was a so-and-so" and women would roar with laughter.

Mackay had witnessed women speaking openly about their sexual experiences in face-to-face organising contexts. She said that she had not observed qualitatively similar conversations on social media:

> I've been in small groups where women have said "hmm, my boyfriend said this to me the other day and I'm really not sure about it". And, "I like this, this and this [sexually] but isn't that really dodgy and does anyone else think that?"

Mackay felt that digital platforms fail to provide a suitable space for women to 'talk about the contradictions' of their relationships. She believed that this 'can only happen […] in small consciousness-raising groups, where people trust each other as much as they ever can'.

Policing Patriarchal Dissent: Social Media, Transgenderism and Radical Feminism

Men who identify with both Left-leaning and conservative political ideologies use digital platforms to expand their anti-feminist networks and bond over violence against women. Lierre Keith (WLM, USA) said: 'I'll get it from the Right all the way over to the far Left'. Finn Mackay (DN, UK) also explained that, while much of the social media harassment she receives comes from conservative 'anti-feminist men', radical feminists

are also attacked by people 'advocating queer politics', 'people who identify as queer' and 'people that might align themselves with the trans lobby'. In this section, I specifically investigate the harassment of radical feminists on social media by transgender rights activists. I have chosen this case because the vast majority of my interviewees discussed how transgender rights activism has been particularly damaging for the development of feminism in digital space.

Digital technologies have facilitated the growth of transgender rights activism into a potent political force (Hurwitz 2017, 477; Jeffreys 2014, 2016, 157; Morris 2016, 104–110). Much of the abuse directed at radical feminists on social media comes from transgender rights activists who refer to them pejoratively as TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists). One blogger has collated examples of abusive tweets sent to radical feminists: 'all TERFs deserve to be shot in the head', 'destroy and kill all TERFs' and 'lemme know if ur a terf so I can beat the shit out of you'.[4] Many of these collected tweets incite violence against women, and often this violence is directed specifically at lesbians who refuse to participate in sexual activity with transgender-identified men ('terfs can choke on my girl dick'). Sheila Jeffreys (2018, 192) has recently argued that the slur TERF is used to 'vilify women, principally lesbian feminists, who refuse [male] demands and maintain that men cannot become women by act of will'. Bonnie Morris (2016, 183) has made a similar point, noting how, 'today, "man-hating" has been replaced by the label of transphobia or TERF […] as a means to discredit lesbians and/or deny a platform for articulating lived lesbian experiences'. The idea that lesbians should be open to sexual experiences with transgender-identified men (else they are transphobic) is similar to the MRA rhetoric around men's entitlement to women's bodies that I discussed earlier in this chapter: it contests women's ability to declare sexual boundaries. Alicen Grey (DN, USA) said that the rhetoric of transgender activists frightens lesbians, and functions to create a political climate where 'all the work that [was] done [in the WLM] around helping lesbians to be confident in stating "I am a lesbian" is now being undone […] today, you have to like dick, or you are transphobic'.

---

[4] See www.terfisaslur.com

Interviewees characterised the rise of transgenderism as a serious impediment to reviving the WLM. They highlighted the ways in which social media enables transgender activists to organise against feminism, both by intervening in women's digital discussions which express an oppositional viewpoint, and by using social media to protest women-only initiatives. Debates regarding whether transgender-identified men should have access to autonomous feminist organising spaces largely play out on social media. This issue is currently so contentious that feminists now fear publicly advertising women-only meetings (Evans 2015; Jeffreys 2014; Lewis et al. 2015; Mackay 2015; Phipps 2016). While social movement studies scholars have suggested that there is currently 'little support' for 'women-born-women-only spaces' by feminists (i.e., spaces that exclude transgender-identified men) (Evans 2015, 121), I suggest here that a more accurate reading would acknowledge that many women aligned with radical feminism are too scared to openly contest transgender ideology, having witnessed how those who do so are publicly punished on social media.[5] Living under male dominance, it is both easier and rational for women to support men who want to self-identify as woman as a means of avoiding male violence.[6] Nonetheless, scholarship in this area often fails to consider how women who support transgenderism generate cultural capital by aligning themselves publicly with malestream ideology (cf. Phipps 2016). As I have argued elsewhere, women 'are profiled and engineered to behave in a male-friendly manner on social media, even when they are trying to challenge male power' (Megarry 2018, 1079).

There are now several examples of women who have been fired from their jobs for expressing a trans-critical perspective on social media (Bowcott 2019). Other women, such as interviewee Linda Bellos (WLM, UK), have had legal cases brought against them.[7] Speaking in her interview

---

[5] For an account of contemporary Leftist 'call out' culture and its early digital origins, see Angela Nagle (2017, 68–85).

[6] For an account of the various survival strategies that women enact under male dominance, see Hoagland (1988, 69–113) and Graham (1994).

[7] Bellos was interviewed under caution by the Crown Prosecution service in relation to a hate crime (Duffy 2018). The matter was dropped, but Bellos subsequently had a private prosecution brought against her by a trans activist, which was also unsuccessful (2HareCourt 2019).

prior to these events, Caitlin Roper (DN, AU) explained how she is fearful of posting critically about transgenderism:

> Something that I am actually scared to be critical of is […] the gender identity stuff. Because I think, these men, they don't mess around. […] So, I am pretty scared about posting stuff. And I feel like […] it's quite a reasonable debate to be had: […] if all you have to do is identify as women to be granted entry to women's spaces, what does that mean? […] You say anything: "die in a fire TERF". Everyone says you're transphobic and then once again the silencing happens: "she is a hateful bigot". And you can't ask questions, you can't have critical analysis anymore. […] There are things [that] I'm actually scared to put out there, and I sort of dip my toe in the water, but […] I know these people will turn on me and destroy me if they find me.

Meghan Murphy (DN, CA) also felt that women self-censor when discussing transgender issues:

> I think that some women live in fear, it's like "oh if I don't go along with this then [the transgender lobby are] going to turn on me" because they've seen them do that to everyone else and because they probably will, cause that's how they control the conversation […] people are scared of that, people are scared of being isolated, people are scared of being attacked.

Alongside concerns for their personal safety, interviewees also feared grave implications for their livelihoods if they were to publicly critique transgender ideology on social media. Academic Finn Mackay (DN, UK), for example, said: 'I cannot afford to say something off the cuff that could be construed as transphobic and then never get invited to a conference'.

While transgender rights activists have used social media to successfully create a cultural and political climate in which women are scared to express dissent, feminists, conversely, have struggled to advance their own critical analysis of gender identity politics in digital space. This is perhaps unsurprising: transgenderism is ideologically aligned with the commercial interests of social media companies in that it provides a hospitable base for the pornified consumer culture of transgenderism. As

Sheila Jeffreys (2014, 186) has explained, transgender-identified individuals have used social media as a space of 'empowered consumerism'. The transgender community uses social media to trade tips on beauty practices, to share advice pertaining to the best products to buy to enact both social (i.e., breast binding and penis tucking) and medical (i.e., puberty blockers and hormonal therapies) transitions, and to create and share pedagogical YouTube videos and Tumblr posts detailing the process of transition (Cannon et al. 2017, 76; Evans et al. 2017, 134; Haimson et al. 2019). Transgender-identified men also post videos of individual transition timetables that clearly lay out the steps involved in both superficially and surgically altering one's appearance and body. These videos are often graphic in their depiction of medical interventions. Many promote an objectified and highly pornographic vision of womanhood (Jeffreys 2016).

Social media has also provided a hospitable base for the recruitment of actual numbers of transgender-identified individuals. On digital forums hosted by groups such as 4thWaveNow, parents have 'describe[d] a process of immersion in social media, such as "binge-watching" Youtube transition videos and excessive use of Tumblr, immediately preceding their child becoming gender dysphoric' (Littman 2018; see also Brunskell-Evans and Moore 2018). In relation to the growing number of young women transitioning to men, journalist Jo Bartosch (2018, n.p.) has reported that:

> A Tumblr-inspired trend, [transgenderism] is tearing apart the youth lesbian community. Researchers estimate that 95–100 percent of the girls who identify as boys would otherwise grow up to be *lesbian*. […] Many are turning online to make sense of their feelings, and a dearth of information about female same-sex attraction is leading girls to conceptualise their discomfort in their growing bodies as evidence of being transgender.

Interviewees discussed how social media functions as a recruitment tool for transgenderism. Susan Hawthorne (WLM, AU), for example, felt that, '20 or 30 years ago', transgender-identifying individuals would have 'come out as lesbians or as gay men'. Today, however, they are more likely to 'see discussion around transitioning' (Susan Hawthorne WLM, AU)

online than find lesbian feminist content. The dominance of transgender ideology on social media poses a significant problem for reigniting the WLM. Increasing numbers of men are now absorbing the ideology that they have an innate right to participate in feminist organising *as women.* Young lesbians are also being encouraged to medically and socially transition into adopting the persona of heterosexual males and are thus being steered away from exploring a lesbian identity that is oppositional to male culture.

Platform-Led Intervention

The ideology of transgenderism is reinforced and valorised by social media companies at the platform level. Twitter, for example, has recently intervened in the debate between transgender activists and radical feminists, instating policies which see radical feminists algorithmically punished, suspended or permanently banned for expressing criticism of transgender ideology (interviewee Meghan Murphy is one of the most high-profile feminists to have been permanently banned under these policies).[8] In this section, I provide a brief overview of the history of Twitter's governance choices, drawing attention to how the platform has consistently favoured male interests to the detriment of feminism. Trying to grow a feminist movement on a male-owned digital platform leaves individual women vulnerable to being banned. It also severely impacts women's ability to articulate radical feminist theory and concepts.

Intervention in feminism at the platform level is a contemporary manifestation of the war on women now being conducted outside of the state, by private social media companies. In an article published in the inaugural issue of the journal *Social Media + Society*, Tarleton Gillespie argued that scholars have not paid enough attention to the actors who are either

---

[8] In December 2018, feminist activist Raquel Rosario Sánchez drew attention to the politics behind Twitter's anti-feminist governance choices. She tweeted that, while the company still allows accounts that 'glorify gory abuse and white supremacist's erotization of male violence against black women', it has nonetheless chosen to ban '#MeghanMurphy, founder and editor of @feministcurrent, Canada's leading feminist platform', for advancing a feminist critique of transgenderism.

banned from social media, or those who never participate out of fear they will be 'deemed unacceptable':

> Social media platforms don't just guide, distort, and facilitate social activity—they also delete some of it. They don't just link users together; they also suspend them. They don't just circulate our images and posts, they also algorithmically promote some over others. Platforms pick and choose. (Gillespie 2015, 1)

Explicitly conceptualising how platforms 'pick and choose' is useful for developing an analysis of how the terms of digital engagement between men and women are shaped by both platform policies and platform design.

Twitter, at its inception, did not instil any rules or policies to protect women from sexist slurs or sexual harassment, and nor did it place any boundaries around men's access to women in the form of digital pile-ons (e.g., tagging a woman relentlessly via @mentions). Once stories of the orchestrated harassment of women by men on Twitter became more widely known, the company bowed to public pressure and began to emphasise its duty to protect its female users (Jeong 2016). In the name of protecting women from harassment, Twitter chose to actively intervene in a debate between two marginalised social groups: it afforded protection to transgender-identifying individuals and their supporters, and in doing so, negatively impacted upon women's ability to openly express their political ideas, opinions and critiques.[9] To protect transgender-identified men, Twitter issued policies against *deadnaming* and *misgendering*. Deadnaming refers to the practice of calling an individual by the name that they used before transitioning. According to this policy, it is prohibited to ever mention that the celebrity Caitlin Jenner was once known as Bruce. Misgendering, on the other hand, is when an individual is referred to as he/him or she/her in accordance with their biological sex rather than their chosen gender identity. Twitter policies now denote instances of misgendering and deadnaming as hate speech against transgender-identified persons. This has had a significant negative impact

---

[9] My account of Twitter's active intervention in feminism was co-developed with Dr Holly Lawford-Smith, for another research paper. I am indebted to Holly for our conversations.

upon the development of radical feminism in digital space. Policies against deadnaming and misgendering make it difficult for activists (and feminist academics) to, for example, discuss important issues such as the rise of transgenderism as a phenomenon, or to make accurate claims around rates of violence against women. As Chris Sitka (WLM, AU) said in her interview, it is difficult to understand how women can revive a WLM on social media when they are forced 'to write within the acceptable bounds' of male culture.

Twitter has also taken to *deboosting* feminist accounts that contravene platform policies. Deboosting is a practice engaged in by both Facebook and Twitter: it involves platforms algorithmically hiding content or failing to notify followers of new posts (Rantilla 2020). Deboosting practices are not transparent to users of the platform. This means that a woman who searches for radical feminist content might be algorithmically blocked from finding anything (and is likely to think this is because her views are not shared by other women, rather than recognising the intervention).

Alongside the threat posed to feminism by deboosting practices, women's political speech is also vulnerable to retrospective editing or removal based upon continually evolving terms and conditions statements. For example, in 2018, the blogging platform Wordpress deleted sites such as *Gender Trender* and *Gender Identity Watch* (both run by women who speak critically of transgenderism), on the basis that the authors had deadnamed transgender-identified individuals. In November of 2018, Wordpress altered its terms of service and then notified users that they had already deleted or altered posts deemed guilty of deadnaming (see Ray 2018).[10] By prohibiting the articulation of biological sex and critical analyses of transgenderism, companies such as Twitter and Wordpress are playing an active role in perpetuating the demonisation and vilification of radical and lesbian feminists on social media.

---

[10] Shortly after I first read journalist William Ray's (2018) article, 'The Tranish Inquisition Clearly Shows the Orwellian Nature of Our Electronic Agora', the blog hosting site *Medium* removed it, citing that 'this post is under investigation or was found in violation of the Medium rules'.

User-Led Intervention

In combination with platform-led interventions, social media functionality has also enabled male interference in feminism at the user level. Transgender rights activists network across digital platforms to technologically police dissent. Before Twitter banned misgendering at the platform level, transgender activists created bots (algorithmically generated computer processes) that could scan digital content and issue an automated reply to certain tweets, such as berating users when they referred to a transgender person as *he* or *she* contrary to that person's self-identification (Drewery 2015). Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ) explained how this type of pronoun policing enables an intervention in feminism that is unique to digital space:

> It is facilitated by social media, that sort of stuff, because you can sort of do a scan, you can have a little bot that scans for a particular phrase, and then you can do a zap into that particular discussion, and you can say "this is transphobic!"

Bots and digital search functionality allow individual men to immediately insert a male perspective into feminist conversations. Transgender activists have also used social media functionality to police feminist dissent through the creation of algorithms that block individual feminists. For example, as of March 2020, @TERFblocklist had compiled a list of 13, 541 Twitter users deemed TERFs. Individuals that subscribe to this list and download the software can use Twitter as normal, but any posts made by feminists on the blocklist are filtered out.

Digitally Policing Women's Physical Mobility

Whereas the communication infrastructure of the WLM facilitated the spatial location of feminism, social media has severely impeded women's ability to convene in both private and commercial spaces in a

women-only capacity. This has had a stifling impact upon movement-building. Finding a suitable venue to host private women-only meetings is a significant problem for contemporary feminists: women's centres and feminist bookstores largely no longer exist, and digitally advertising a women's liberation meeting in a private home is dangerous because 'something could go out about it, and these very, very angry men could do attack dog behaviour' (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK). Sheila Jeffreys recalled how British women could openly organise face-to-face meetings in WLM newsletters. She said that 'back in the 70s, I had my address of the flat in Putney, and my phone number in the *London Women's Liberation Newsletter,* and I would have meetings in my house'.

Publicly posting details of a radical feminist meeting that includes a residential address is unthinkable in the age of social media. Several feminist events have come under attack in recent years, with transgender activists using social media to threaten conference venues in an attempt to shut down feminist organising and silence women who speak critically about transgender ideology (Turner 2018b). Bonnie Morris (2016, 105–112) has closely documented how the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival—an annual, week-long lesbian feminist event that ran between 1976 and 2015 and at one time incorporated nearly 9000 campers and 600 crew—was eventually forced to shut its gates due to pressure from transgender activists. Morris (2016, 105) described social media as a weapon that was used to connect 'all those hostile' to the woman-only policy of the festival. Although transgender rights activists had begun a small protest outside the festival gates in the 1990s, developments in digital technology in the twenty-first century enabled 'critics to circulate both well-written campaigns and outright falsehoods at the touch of a button' (Morris 2016, 105). As Morris (2016, 67) has pointed out, much of the digital commentary pertaining to the issue of transgender-identified men attending the festival was written by journalists with no experience of women-only or lesbian-only space. Similarly, 'young activists relying on up-to-the-minute news feeds from online political organizations and blogs were more likely to learn about Michigan from critical posts than to attend a festival as part of their own coming-out experience' (Morris 2016, 105). The festival and festival goers were thus placed in a defensive position, and a lesbian feminist event 'that had once represented the

ultimate in radical awakening to female identity was now recast as the pathetic refuge of "TERFs"', complete with escalating threats of violence against the festival (Morris 2016, 105–106).

Some women are now too fearful to advertise a women-only public gathering in their hometown, lest transgender activists physically turn up to harass them. Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU) described how her Melbourne-based feminist collective opted to cultivate a social media presence instead of organise face-to-face meetings because they feared violent backlash in relation to their women-only politics. Publicly advertising group meetings was perceived as a risky endeavour which could expose the group to physical violence, thus trying to build a movement in digital space was viewed by Gekas' group as a safer option. It is worth noting that Gekas' fear of violent retribution is not unfounded. In 2017, for example, a transgender rights activist was convicted of assaulting a 60-year old feminist at Hyde Park Corner in London (Turner 2018b). Women were waiting to learn the secret location of a meeting to discuss proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act, which would have allowed men to change their legal status from men to women based on self-identification (Turner 2018a). Their existing booking at a community hall had been cancelled the previous day, with the venue citing health and safety concerns (Turner 2017).

Even though social media spaces are hostile to feminism, the difficulty women now face in publicly advertising and planning women-only events contributes to keeping women's participation in feminism confined to digital engagement. An irreconcilable tension emerges here, because women remain reliant on using the very technology that is enabling men to surveil and control them. The Hyde Park Corner example described above also demonstrates the difficulties associated with relying on commercial spaces for feminism. Not only are they costly, but there is no guarantee that the booking will be honoured if the venue comes under attack from transgender activists. Several interviewees described the last-minute loss of venues due to social media campaigning by transgender activists, which left women stranded without a conference venue after months of planning.

Attempting Autonomous Digital Organising

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss how women are spending considerable energy trying to carve out spaces for feminist discussion on social media and keep themselves safe from male abuse. New technologies—despite being marketed under the guise of alleviating women's workload and saving them time when performing domestic duties—often increase women's labour. This is because the wider social context of male dominance and female subordination actively shapes how they are used (Huws [1982] 1984; Leonard 2003; Wajcman 1991). Household technologies such as vacuums, washing machines and freezers, for example, failed to produce a more equitable division of labour, and instead made women's domestic responsibilities more onerous:

> Women have assumed new tasks, new expectations, new standards of cleanliness which effectively eroded any extra time the technology may have permitted. (Leonard 2003, 165)

My interviewees suggested that using digital space for feminist organising has created a new kind of work for women who must now expend considerable energy devising new ways to protect themselves from male violence. Some scholars are now referring to these tactics as 'mediated abuse management strategies' (Mendes et al. 2019). Others are paying increasing attention to the gendered aspects of this digital labour (Jarrett 2016).

To try to minimise male interference in digital feminism and protect themselves from male violence, interviewees adopted three main tactics: creating anonymous profiles, forming closed/private Facebook groups[11] and moderating abusive comments left by men. In this section I argue that, regardless of the tactics that women employ to try to minimise male interference in feminism, digital space can only provide a pale imitation of the women-only spaces of the WLM. Moderating comments,

---

[11] *Private* groups do not show up in Facebook's search function; women need to be specifically invited to join by the group moderator or another approved user. *Closed* groups, on the other hand, can be found via the Facebook search function, but users still need to be approved by a group moderator before they can join.

maintaining anonymous profiles and attempting to keep closed/private Facebook groups secure from infiltrators are both time-consuming and distracting tasks for activists. The labour of trying to keep safe on social media has a politically insidious function: it upholds male dominance by diverting women's energies away from building a movement for women's liberation. Using social media for feminist organising encourages women to adopt a siege mentality, as their attention is always on men. Anne Billows (DN, UK) explained this new manifestation of male dominance. She said: 'what happens on the internet is that you are constantly under attack and so, so much energy is spent responding to these attacks rather than building positive things between women'.

While interviewees did characterise some social media platforms as more hospitable to feminism than others, they ultimately experienced all social media platforms as hostile spaces. Twitter was widely considered to be the least useful platform for feminist movement-building, and interviewees linked this assessment to its publicly oriented architecture. Caitlin Roper (DN, AU), for example, described Twitter as a masculine space characterised by aggression: 'I wasn't on Twitter for a while because it just scared the hell out of me'. Academics such as Michael Salter (2017) have discussed how Twitter's publicly oriented interface makes it particularly conducive to abusive practices. On Twitter, 'individual users can be subject to mass targeting and abuse' which they are powerless to remove or delete (Salter 2017, 14).

The activists interviewed in this study used Twitter primarily for information sharing and career advancement rather than as a platform for feminist deliberation or relationship-building between feminists. Most considered Facebook to be more useful for feminism based upon its closed/private groups' functions. Nonetheless, recognising that platforms are still ultimately controlled by men, interviewees also challenged recent interpretations of closed/private Facebook groups as 'safe spaces' for women (Edwards 2015; Clark-Parsons 2018). Samantha Berg (DN, USA), for example, said that 'someone has the key to my [digital] forum, always, and it's easy to forget how vulnerable you are'. Even though Facebook was perceived by interviewees as a *more* hospitable space for feminist organising than Twitter, they also indicated that there is *no* space on social media where women are truly autonomous.

Closed/Private Facebook Groups

Creating 'super private secret groups [and] super small groups' (Meghan Murphy DN, CA) is the most common way in which the women interviewed for this project tried to carve a digital space for feminism free from male interference. Without access to the material places of the WLM, they explained how Facebook has become the principal site of communication for radical feminist activists today:

> Nothing exists anymore except Facebook. So, if you want to participate at all, that is kind of your option. (Lierre Keith WLM, USA)

> It's like radical feminist diaspora. No one is [meeting face-to-face]. It's just become Facebook. Even [amongst] the old hat, Facebook has become their way of communicating. (Cristabel Gekas DN, AU)[12]

Many younger interviewees characterised closed/private Facebook groups as a valuable reprieve from the hostility they experience on publicly accessible pages. Meghan Murphy (DN, CA), for example, explained how they provide her with a space to 'sort out ideas that I'm thinking about or confused about' and 'ask those questions and have those conversations I would never want to have publicly'. Alicen Grey (DN, USA) also said that she valued closed/private Facebook groups because they provide a more suitable space for activists to discuss their 'awful trauma at the hands of men'.

Nonetheless, my interview data reveals a tension between women speaking positively about closed/private Facebook groups, and their concurrent awareness that digital space can only offer an imitation of women-only physical space. Two younger interviewees characterised closed/private Facebook groups as a hybrid realm existing somewhere between public social media space and women-only physical space. Anne Billows (DN, UK), for example, said that 'women-only forums and Facebook groups [are] in between', while Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU) described social media as a 'quasi face-to-face meeting' between women.

---

[12] By 'old hat' Gekas is referring to older radical feminist activists.

Alicen Grey (DN, USA) appreciated closed Facebook groups because they were the closest thing to women-only space available to many women today: 'I think there should be more [women-only] spaces in person as well, but if what we have right now is just online spaces then that is so valuable'. Tiger Drummond (DN, UK) said that Facebook groups could not compare to the 'human effects' of the 'physical reality of women together' that she remembered 'so clearly' from her first experience of women-only space at a feminist festival in 2014. In the absence of face-to-face contact with other women, Drummond valued being a part of women-only Facebook groups, but she did not believe that they generate the same political effects as being together with other women in the same room: 'women-only spaces can't be an internet thing, you know? You can make a [digital] women-only group, but [you cannot have] the physical reality of women together'.

Interviewees described how they sometimes refrained from participating in closed/private Facebook groups based upon the fear that their words could be screenshot and reposted elsewhere, possibly damaging their reputation or careers. This suggests that even within 'private' digital spaces, women continue to self-police due to fear of reprisal. It also demonstrates how women's attention remains focussed upon external threat. The secrecy surrounding radical feminist Facebook groups is necessary because of the hostility of the social media environment, but this also means that no public recruitment is possible. Closed/private Facebook groups create barriers to women getting involved in feminist organising: 'the whole point of [them] is to be secret and closed' (Cristabel Gekas DN, AU). Often, women seeking radical feminist community do not even know that these Facebook groups exist, and as I will explain further in Chap. 6, newcomers are frequently treated with suspicion when they do get in. The political efficacy of organising in closed/private Facebook groups is also diminished because, despite complicated vetting processes, these groups remain vulnerable to infiltration: 'you do have people infiltrating these groups […] there are people out there who are willing to get in contact with [group moderators] and infiltrate and see what is going on with radical feminism, [find out] what they are posting' (Grey DN, USA).

Anonymity and Pseudonyms

Another primary tactic feminists' use to try to keep themselves safe from male abuse is to adopt a digital pseudonym. In the WLM, some activists used pseudonyms in movement publications when they wanted to avoid being perceived as seeking individual accolades for ideas that were produced collectively in consciousness-raising groups (Beins 2017, 89; Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, 143). Today, women's anonymous participation on social media has little to do with a feminist ethic of collective-based organising, and is instead related to their individual safety concerns:

> The reason [feminists] have pseudonyms is for our own safety. (Cristabel Gekas DN, AU)

> I know that the reasons women give now for anonymity is not because they don't want a star system, it's for their security'. (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK)

In this section, I argue that digital anonymity has specific gendered connotations. While there is now more recognition of the labour involved in feminist abuse management and content moderation strategies, the gendered labour of maintaining digital anonymity or pseudonymity has received significantly less academic attention.[13]

Contrary to feminist groups that conceptualise digital anonymity as a 'great political tool' for activists (see, e.g., the Fembot Collective 2015), women interviewed for this project suggested that the use of pseudonyms in digital space impedes feminist movement-building because maintaining anonymity takes up a significant amount of time and energy. Digital anonymity can also limit activist mobility in physical space because the practice binds women further to digital participation. In other words, a trade-off exists between maintaining digital anonymity and being able to meet face-to-face with other women. Julia Long (DN, UK) felt that maintaining digital anonymity had 'got[ten] to the point of paranoia' amongst feminists. Long explained how some women do not want their

---

[13] In physical space, women also attempt to make themselves anonymous or invisible as a tactic to protect themselves from male violence. For a discussion of the deleterious effects this has on women, see Weisman (1992, 69).

real identities disclosed at conferences, and so they now refuse to turn up in person, or else request special security measures. Anne Billows (DN, UK) also suggested that maintaining anonymity is shaping contemporary organising strategies. For five years, Billows edited a blog collectively with other anonymous activists based in the USA. In order to preserve anonymity amongst the collective, women refused to discuss issues verbally via video conferencing platforms such as Skype, and instead insisted on text-based communication over email.

From a women's liberation perspective, the idea that it is politically useful for women to use social media anonymously is circumspect. Firstly, digital anonymity is ineffective as a means for protecting feminists from male violence and surveillance because the use of a pseudonym can only provide women with an illusion of safety. In an article submitted to the Leeds-based *Revolutionary/Radical Feminist Newsletter* in 1980, Sheila Jeffreys argued against the logic of the claim that women should try to keep their movement identities separate from their 'real' lives for safety reasons. While she acknowledged that feminists writing 'explosive' papers were likely to be surveilled by police, Jeffreys stated that women who consistently use one pseudonym can be tracked in the same manner as women who use their real names. Thus, pseudonyms do not stop authorities from building files on individual women. Other WLM interviewees offered a similar analysis of the limitations of digital anonymity. Susan Hawthorne (WLM AU) said that: 'I can see why sometimes women might choose to use a pseudonym, but I think it's a fake security because you can easily have your pseudonym hacked'. Chris Sitka (WLM, UK) also believed that 'there is no guaranteed anonymity if those men's rights activists want to get you'.

Secondly, adopting an anonymous profile does not necessarily make it easier for women to participate in digital feminism because anonymity does little to reduce women's fear of male violence. Younger interviewees who had used a pseudonym in digital space experienced severe anxiety at the thought that they would be next to be doxed, publicly vilified or fired from their jobs. For example, Anne Billows (DN, UK), who blogged anonymously for five years, was greatly distressed at the thought of her identity being exposed: 'I feared for my life, literally I was terrified. And so, ironically, anonymity did not protect me from being terrified'. Caitlin

Roper (DN, AU), conversely, said she was grateful that she had never adopted a pseudonym. Although she receives constant abuse from men on social media as a result of her campaigning against sexism in advertising, speaking under her own name has allowed Roper to avoid the fear of being publicly exposed against her will: 'I almost feel like there is some relief in not having to worry about that, I'm already out there'.

The practice of digital anonymity is also questionable from a women's liberation perspective because it does not pose a challenge to wider power structures. Historically, anonymity has been enforced on subordinate groups to further entrench social and political inequality: women 'have either been forced to work anonymously or else have been rendered anonymous' by those in power (Sarachild 1978, 53). Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) expanded on the historical link between pseudonyms and oppressed groups:

> Not having names has been used against women in the past. Women, when they get married, lose their names in the way that slaves lose their names and gain the names of their owners. So, for women, having your name and having it on the historical record, having your thoughts attached to it has been almost impossible historically anyway. I can't even find my school friends! They don't exist. Because they are all married to some man and they don't have names.

Writing at the time of the WLM, Kathie Sarachild (1978, 53) also argued that anonymity functions to bolster the power of dominant groups because it undermines the ability of subordinates to both gain access to, and trace the source of, political ideas: 'when names are withheld without need, the people lose political knowledge, and knowledge of themselves'.

Some women interviewed for this project characterised digital anonymity as an individualistic solution to male violence that does little to advance the collective status of women: 'I can't see how [anonymity] builds a feminist movement, [it] protects that woman. But I don't know what that does to stop male dominance' (Lierre Keith WLM, USA). Others, such as Alicen Grey (DN, USA), discussed how pseudonyms can perpetuate existing systems of oppression along the axes of sex, race and class. For example, women can choose to adopt names that sound more

masculine, ethnically whiter or more sophisticated in an attempt to garner more digital traction for their writing. Grey expressed regret that her own choice of a pseudonym obfuscates her ethnic background.

Another problem with digital anonymity is that it creates a separation between women and their political work. Some interviewees who had adopted anonymous digital personas were remorseful that their decision to write under a pseudonym undermined their ability to claim authorship of their ideas. Anne Billows (DN, UK) said that 'basically, my work doesn't belong to me, [anonymity] makes me dispossessed of my own work'. She explained how, when she set up her anonymous blog, she 'was just so scared of being discovered as a radical feminist that [she] was just really relieved that people wouldn't be able to see [that it was her] writing'. At the time of our interview, however, Billows said: 'it's really annoying that [...] I've basically been writing for several years and it just doesn't count for anything [...] there is no legitimacy; I can't quote my own work anywhere'.

Anonymity also reinforces male supremacy by facilitating men's access to women-centric digital spaces. Examples of this abound. For instance, in 2016, Australian man Lindor Jonuzi set up a fake female Facebook profile to access the women-only closed group Melbourne Soul Sisters, from which he stole nude photos and then reposted them in a men's group (The Age 2016). Men have also impersonated lesbians to infiltrate women-centric spaces online (Cochrane 2011). Zillah Eisenstein (1998, 91) has described how digital anonymity facilitates long-established patterns of male territorialism and access to women:

> Some men gender-bend on the net, saying they are women, not in order to hook a woman, but rather to interact with women in a new way. They say they like the intimacy between women, an intimacy which they do not have access to as men. Posing as a woman allows for "an ecstatic dream of disembodiment". One could also just say this is a new-old form of voyeurism.

Seeing pseudonyms in closed/private groups generates anxiety amongst feminists. Linda Bellos (WLM, UK) explained that this was because women 'have no idea whether a chap is the person who is [anonymous]'.

While it would also have been possible for a man writing under a female-sounding pseudonym to be published in a WLM newsletter, if he presented physically at a meeting or conference, it would have been more difficult for him to escape detection. In this way, face-to-face organising provides an important security measure for feminists that is difficult to recreate on social media.

Moderating Content

The third tactic used by interviewees to try to limit male interference in feminism was to screen comments left by men before making them publicly visible. Interviewees felt responsible for editing abusive or derailing comments because they placed value in trying to create a woman-centred digital environment. For example, Alanna Inserra (DN, AU), the founding member of Hollaback! Melbourne, explained how her collective would delete men's comments that they deemed 'unproductive'. To allow women's feelings to be 'welcomed and heard', Hollaback! Melbourne's core organising team decided that 'men's reactions to [women's] feelings and experiences weren't going to be prioritised' on their blog.

Taking the time to assess the value of every male contribution and decide what to make publicly visible is hugely devouring of activist energy, especially when blogs receive a lot of traffic. For example, Meghan Murphy's (DN, CA) blog, *Feminist Current*, received more than 10,000 visitors a day as of 2016. As Murphy explained: 'most of what I do on the website is moderating comments and editing'. Both the time-consuming nature of moderation and the psychological effects of being consistently exposed to sexualised harassment and abuse call into question the political efficacy of using social media for feminist organising. Psychologists who have examined the effects of online harassment have linked continual exposure to conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anorexia nervosa and depression (Citron 2014, 10). Several interviewees discussed periods of depression and anxiety following sustained exposure to digital harassment.

The individual strategies which activists pursue to try to avoid male violence can have negative flow on effects for movement-building. Some

women try to reduce the labour of content moderation by only listing upcoming events for short periods. When Lynne Harne (WLM, UK) publicly advertises meetings of the London-based Lesbian History Group on Facebook, the event page receives 'constant abuse from men and constant attacks' in the form of pornographic comments which are 'hard to get rid of and hard to manage'. For this reason, Harne said that the event details page 'has to be constantly monitored or taken down quickly'. This example highlights the difficulties feminists face when using social media for even basic event promotion. Creating Facebook event pages not only places responsibility on women to manage male hostility before their event has even occurred, but it also gives men ample opportunity to organise to have feminist events shut down.

Having recognised the workload required to simply exist on social media platforms, some interviewees used social media principally for information sharing rather than for discussion. For example, Vancouver Rape Relief, a collective that Hilla Kerner (DN, CA) belongs to, does not host public comments. Kerner explained that:

> We are intentional in not having [provided a space] for comments on our website. We don't want to give a platform to our enemies, not on our turf, and we cannot spend time monitoring and deciding what [to make visible], we just don't have this ability.

Opting to disable comments in response to male interference might allow women to feel safer when visiting various social media spaces, but this option also significantly reduces any potential the medium holds for facilitating community-building between women. In this way, social media puts women in a double-bind situation: if they offer a space for comments then they expose themselves to male violence. Not providing a space for comments, however, reduces the utility of social media to simple information sharing, and minimises any potential of collaboration and relationship-building that exists.

Conclusion

Activists in the digital environment remain externally focussed on self-protection from men instead of internally focussed on collective-based movement-building with women. This poses a significant barrier to reviving the WLM. In this chapter, I have argued that social media is a limited tool for advancing the political project of women's liberation. This is because digital space *expands,* rather than *reduces,* men's access to women. Social media platforms are violent spaces where women are surveilled and policed; they are spaces that are both hostile to, and inhospitable for, feminist organising. As I will argue in more depth in the remaining chapters of this book, organising on social media constricts feminism's potential because it interrupts the possibility of women building connections with each other outside of male control. In the next chapter, I specifically investigate women's ability to do consciousness-raising and develop feminist theory on social media.

References

2HareCourt. 2019. Gudrun Young Successfully Defends Leading Feminist & Anti-Racist Campaigner Linda Bellos OBE in Private Prosecution. *2HareCourt*, November 30. https://www.2harecourt.com/2018/11/30/gudrun-young-successfully-defends-leading-feminist-anti-racist-campaigner-linda-bellos-obe/

Adam, Alison. 2005. *Gender, Ethics and Information Technology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Alba, Davey. 2017. Twitter (Finally!) Takes Aim at Anonymous Egg Accounts. *Wired*, January 1. https://www.wired.com/2017/03/twitter-abuse-tools/

Arlidge, John. 2002. The Dirty Secret that Drives New Technology: It's Porn. *The Guardian*, March 3. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2002/mar/03/internetnews.observerfocus

Ausserhofer, Julian, and Axel Maireder. 2013. National Politics on Twitter: Structures and Topics of a Networked Public Sphere. *Information, Communication and Society* 16 (3): 291–314.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2018. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Barak, Azy. 2005. Sexual Harassment on the Internet. *Social Science Computer Review* 23 (1): 77–92.

Bartosch, Jo. 2018. What Really Happened with Lesbian Protestors at Pride London Yesterday? *Conatus News*, July 8. https://conatusnews.com/pride-london-lesbian-activism/

Bassett, Caroline, Sarah Kember, and Kate O'Riordan. 2020. *Furious: Technological Feminism and Digital Futures*. London: Pluto Press.

Beins, Agatha. 2017. *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Benes, Ross. 2013. Porn: The Hidden Engine that Drives Innovation in Tech. *Business Insider*, July 6. https://www.businessinsider.com.au/how-porn-drives-innovation-in-tech-2013-7?r=US&IR=T

Bowcott, Owen. 2019. *Judge Rules Against Researcher Who Lost Job Over Transgender Tweets*, 19. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/dec/18/judge-rules-against-charity-worker-who-lost-job-over-transgender-tweets

Bowles, Nellie. 2018. Thermostats, Locks and Lights: Digital Tools of Domestic Abuse. *New York Times*, June 23. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/23/technology/smart-home-devices-domestic-abuse.html

boyd, danah. 2007. Social Network Sites: Public, Private, or What? *Knowledge Tree*, 13.

———. 2010. Privacy, Publicity, and Visibility. Microsoft Tech Fest, Redmond. http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/2010/TechFest2010.html.

Brunskell-Evans, Heather, and Michael Moore, eds. 2018. *Transgender Children and Young People: Born in Your Own Body*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Cannon, Yuliya, Stacy Speedlin, Joe Avera, Derek Robertson, Mercedes Ingram, and Ashely Prado. 2017. Transition Connection Disconnection and Social Media: Examining the Digital Lived Experiences of Transgender Individuals. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* 11 (2): 68–87.

Citron, Danielle. 2009. Law's Expressive Value in Combating Cyber Gender Harassment. *Michigan Law Review* 108: 373–415.

———. 2014. *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Clark-Parsons, Rosemary. 2018. Building a Digital Girl Army: The Cultivation of Feminist Safe Spaces Online. *New Media and Society* 20 (6): 2125–2144.

Cochrane, Kira. 2011. The Weird World of the Lesbian Hoaxers. *The Guardian*, June 15. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/14/weird-world-lesbian-hoaxers

Cole, Samantha. 2018. Deepfakes Were Created as a Way to Own Women's Bodies—We Can't Forget That. *Broadly*, June 19. https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/nekqmd/deepfake-porn-origins-sexism-reddit-v25n2.

Coston, Bethany M., and Michael Kimmel. 2013. White Men as the New Victims: Reverse Discrimination Cases and the Men's Rights Movement. *Nevada Law Journal* 13: 368–385.

Crossley, Alison Dahl. 2017. *Finding Feminism: Millennial Activists and the Unfinished Gender Revolution* [Electronic Book]. New York: New York University Press.

Dhrodia, Azmina. 2017. Unsocial Media: Tracking Twitter Abuse Against Women MPs. *Medium*, September 3. https://medium.com/@AmnestyInsights/unsocial-media-tracking-twitter-abuse-against-women-mps-fc28aeca498a.

Donath, Judith. 1999. Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community. In *Communities in Cyberspace*, ed. Mark A. Smith and Peter Kollock, 29–59. London: Routledge.

Drewery, Caitlin. 2015. I Created the Caitlyn Jenner Bot @She_Not_He. This Is What I Learned. *Washington Post*. June 2.

Duffy, Nick. 2018. Police Probe Radical Feminist Linda Bellos over Alleged Threat to 'Thump' Trans Women. *Pink News*, May 1. https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/05/01/police-probe-radical-feminist-linda-bellos-over-alleged-threat-to-thump-trans-women/

Easter, Brandee. 2018. "Feminist_Brevity_in_Light_of_Masculine_Long-Windedness:" Code, Space, and Online Misogyny. *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (4): 675–685.

Edwards, Kasey. 2015. The Secret Facebook Groups that are Safe Spaces for Women on the Internet. *Daily Life*, September 1. http://www.dailylife.com.au/news-and-views/dl-opinion/the-secret-facebook-groups-that-are-safe-spaces-for-women-on-the-internet-20150831-gjbob9.html

Eisenstein, Zillah. 1998. *Global Obscenities: Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Lure of Cyberfantasy*. New York: New York University Press.

Evans, Elizabeth. 2015. *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms: Neoliberalism, Intersectionality, and the State in Britain and the UK*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Evans, Elizabeth, and Prudence Chamberlain. 2015. Critical Waves: Exploring Feminist Identity, Discourse and Praxis in Western Feminism. *Social Movement Studies* 14 (4): 396–409.

Evans, Yolanda N., Samantha J. Grindley, Julia Crouch, Alicia Wang, Megan A. Moreno, Kym Ahrens, and David J. Breland. 2017. Understanding Online Resource Use by Transgender Youth and Caregivers: A Qualitative Study. *Transgender Health* 2 (1): 129–139.

Fembot Collective. 2015. Anonymous Activism/Tor for Feminists. *Fembot Collective blog*, May 6.

Fraser, Nancy. 1995. Politics, Culture and the Public Sphere: Towards a Postmodern Conception. In *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, ed. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman, 287–312. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Frye, Marilyn. [1977] 1988. Some Reflections on Separatism and Power. In *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 62–72. London: Onlywomen Press.

Gillespie, Tarleton. 2015. Platforms Intervene. *Social Media + Society* 1 (1): 1–2.

Graham, Dee. 1994. *Loving to Survive: Sexual Terror, Men's Violence, and Women's Lives*. New York: New York University Press.

Greenfield, Adam. 2018. *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*. Brooklyn: Verso.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Haimson, Oliver L., Avery Dame-Griff, Elias Capello and Zahari Richter. 2019. Tumblr was a Trans Technology: The Meaning, Importance, History, and Future of Trans Technologies. *Feminist Media Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1678505.

Hanisch, Carol. [1973] 1978. The Liberal Takeover of the Women's Liberation Movement. In *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, 163–167. New York: Random House.

Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hawthorne, Susan. 1999. Connectivity: Cultural Practices of the Powerful or Subversion from the Margins? In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, ed. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, 119–136. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Henry, Nicola, and Anastasia Powell. 2015. Embodied Harms: Gender, Shame, and Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence. *Violence Against Women* 21 (6): 758–779.

Herring, Susan. 1996. Gender Differences in CMC: Bringing Familiar Baggage to the New Frontier. In *CyberReader*, ed. Victor Vitanza, 144–154. Boston: Ally & Bacon.

Herring, Susan, Deborah Johnson, and Tamra DiBenedetto. 1995. 'This Discussion is Going Too Far!' Male Resistance to Female Participation on the Internet. In *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*, ed. Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, 67–96. New York: Routledge.

Herring, Susan, Kirk Job-Sluder, Rebecca Scheckler, and Sasha Barab. 2002. Searching for Safety Online: Managing 'Trolling' in a Feminist Forum. *Information Society* 18 (5): 371–384.

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia. 1988. *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Value*. Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies.

Hughes, Donna. 2002. The Use of New Communications and Information Technologies for Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children. *Hastings Women's Law Journal* 13 (1): 129–222.

Hurwitz, Heather McKee. 2017. From Ink to Web and Beyond: U.S. Women's Activism Using Traditional and New Social Media. In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, ed. Verta Taylor, Holly J. McCammon, Jo Reger, and Rachel L. Einwohner, 462–483. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Huws, Ursula. [1982] 1984. Domestic Technology—Liberation or Enslavery? In *Sweeping Statements: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1981–83*, ed. Hannah Kantor, Sarah Lefanu, Shaila Shah and Carole Spedding, 76–80. London: the Women's Press.

Jane, Emma. 2014. 'You're a Ugly, Whorish, Slut': Understanding E-Bile. *Feminist Media Studies* 14 (4): 531–546.

———. 2017. *Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History*. London: SAGE.

Jarrett, Kylie. 2016. *Feminism, Labour and Digital Media*. New York: Routledge.

Jeffreys, Sheila. 1980. *Pseudonyms* [Article printed in Revolutionary/Radical Feminist Newsletter, No. 4, 6 pages]. Copy in possession of Sandra McNeill, Leeds, United Kingdom.

———. 2013. The 'Agency' of Men: Male Buyers in the Global Sex Industry. In *Rethinking Transnational Men: Beyond, Between and Within Nations*, ed. Jeff Hearn, Marina Blagojevic, and Katherine Harrison, 59–75. New York: Routledge.

———. 2014. *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism*. London: Routledge.

———. 2016. Transgender Pornography: The Bimbofication of Women. In *The Sexualized Body and the Medical Authority of Pornography*, ed. Heather Brunskell-Evans, 155–174. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

———. 2018. *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970–1990*. London: Routledge.

Jeong, Sarah. 2016. The History of Twitter's Rules. *Vice*, January 15. https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/z43xw3/the-history-of-twitters-rules

Kanai, Akane. 2015. Thinking Beyond the Internet as a Tool: Girls' Online Spaces as Postfeminist Structures of Surveillance. In *eGirls, eCitizens*, ed. Jane Bailey and Valerie Steeves, 83–106. Ottowa: University of Ottowa Press.

Katz, James E. 1994. Empirical and Theoretical Dimensions of Obscene Phone Calls to Women in the United States. *Human Communication Research* 21 (2): 155–182.

Kingston Mann, Larisa. 2014. What Can Feminism Learn from New Media? *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11 (3): 293–297.

Kitzinger, Celia, and Rachel Perkins. 1993. *Changing Our Minds: Lesbian Feminism and Psychology*. London: Onlywomen Press.

Klein, Renate. 1996. (Dead) Bodies Floating in Cyberspace: Post-Modernism and the Dismemberment of Women. In *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, ed. Diane Bell and Renate Kleim, 346–358. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Kohn, Margaret. 2003. *Radical Space: Building the House of the People*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Lane, Frederick S. 2001. *Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age*. New York: Routledge.

Leonard, Eileen B. 2003. *Women, Technology, and the Myth of Progress*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Lewis, Ruth, Elizabeth Sharp, Jenni Remnant, and Rhiannon Redpath. 2015. 'Safe Spaces': Experiences of Feminist Women-Only Space. *Sociological Research Online* 20 (4): 1–14.

Littman, Lisa. 2018. Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Young Adults: A Study of Parental Reports. *PloS ONE* 13 (8): 1–41.

Long, Julia. 2015. The Oppression That Dare Not Speak its Name? Silences Around Heterosexuality in Contemporary Feminism. In *The Freedom Fallacy: The Limits of Liberal Feminism*, ed. Miranda Kiraly and Meagan Tyler, 145–152. Ballarat: Connor Court.

Mackay, Finn. 2015. *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Manjikian, Mary. 2014. Becoming Unmanned. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16 (1): 48–65.

Martin, Fiona. 2015. Women Are Silenced Online, Just as in Real Life. It Will Take More than Twitter to Change That. *The Guardian*, April 23. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/23/women-are-silenced-online-just-as-in-real-life-it-will-take-more-than-twitter-to-change-that

Marwick, Alice, and danah boyd. 2010. I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience. *New Media & Society* 13 (1): 114–133.

Mason, Corinne, and Shoshana Magnet. 2012. Surveillance Studies and Violence Against Women. *Surveillance and Society* 10 (2): 105–118.

Massanari, Adrienne L. 2018. Rethinking Research Ethics, Power, and the Risk of Visibility in the Era of the 'Alt-Right' Gaze. *Social Media + Society* 4 (2): 1–9.

Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McFadden, Patricia. 2016. Why Women's Spaces Are Critical to Feminist Autonomy. In *Female Erasure: What You Need to Know About Gender Politics' War on Women, the Female Sex and Human Rights*, ed. Ruth Barrett, 309–315. Pacific Palisades: Tidal Time Publishing.

Megarry, Jessica. 2014. Online Incivility or Sexual Harassment? Conceptualising Women's Experiences in the Digital Age. *Women's Studies International Forum* 47: 46–55.

———. 2018. Under the Watchful Eyes of Men: Theorising the Implications of Male Surveillance Practices for Feminist Activism on Social Media. *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (6): 1070–1085.

Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalyn Keller. 2019. *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meyrowitz, Joshua. 1986. *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Monahan, Torin. 2008. Dreams of Control at a Distance: Gender, Surveillance, and Social Control. *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies* 9 (2): 286–305.

Morris, Bonnie. 2016. *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Nagle, Angela. 2017. *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*. Winchester: Zero Books.

Nakamura, Lisa. 2015. Blaming, Shaming, and the Feminisation of Social Media. In *Feminist Surveillance Studies*, ed. Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana A. Magnet, 221–228. Durham: Duke University Press.

Neves, Barbara Barbosa, and Cláudia Casimiro, eds. 2018. *Connecting Families: Information and Communication Technologies, Generations and the Life Course*. Bristol: Polity Press.

Norma, Caroline. 2018. Globalization and Prostitution. In *Global Encyclopaedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, ed. Ali Farazmand, 1–14. Switzerland: Springer.

Phillips, Sarah. 2007. A Brief History of Facebook. *The Guardian*, July 25. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2007/jul/25/media.newmedia

Phipps, Alison. 2016. Whose Personal Is More Political? Experience in Contemporary Feminist Politics. *Feminist Theory* 17 (3): 303–321.

Rantilla, Kelly. 2020. Social Media and Monopoly. *Ohio Northern University Law Review* 46: 161–179.

Ray, William. 2018. The Tranish Inquisition Clearly Shows the Orwellian Nature of Our Electronic Agora. *Medium*, December 3. https://t.co/Cexu5bVjsp

Rees, Jeska. 2007. *All the Rage: Revolutionary Feminism in England, 1977–1983*. PhD thesis. School of Humanities, University of Western Australia.

Roose, Joshua. 2018. Are Men's Movements a New Form of Terrorism? *ABC News*, November 25. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-25/incel-alt-right-mens-movement-masculanism-proudboys-milo/10482032

Rosario Sánchez, Raquel. 2018. In 2018, @Twitter banned #MeghanMurphy, Founder and Editor of @FeministCurrent, Canada's Leading Feminist Platform, but Still Allows Accounts that Glorify Gory Abuse and White Supremacist's Erotization of Male Violence against Black Women. And No, I Will Not Shut Up About This. Tweet, December 2, 12.59am. https://twitter.com/8RosarioSanchez/status/1068867188864532481

Salter, Michael. 2017. From Geek Masculinity to Gamergate: The Technological Rationality of Online Abuse. *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* 14 (2): 247–264.

Sarachild, Kathie. 1978. Who Are We? The Redstockings Position on Names. In *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, 53–55. New York: Random House.

Sethna, Christabelle, and Steve Hewitt. 2018. *Just Watch Us: RCMP Surveillance of the Women's Liberation Movement in Cold War Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Sheffield, Carol J. 1989. The Invisible Intruder: Women's Experiences of Obscene Phone Calls. *Gender and Society* 3 (4): 483–488.

Spender, Dale. 1980. *Man Made Language*. Sydney: Pandora.

Ström, Timothy Erik. 2020. *Globalization & Surveillance*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

The Age. 2016. Facebook Trade in Naked Photos of Melbourne Women Revealed. *The Age*, March 16. http://www.theage.com.au/technology/technology-news/facebook-trade-in-naked-photos-of-melbourne-women-revealed-20160316-gnkfmf.html

Tufekci, Zeynep. 2015. Algorithmic Harms Beyond Facebook and Google: Emergent Challenges of Computational Agency. *Colorado Technology Law Journal* 13 (2): 203–218.

Turner, Janice. 2017. The Battle Over Gender has Turned Bloody. *The Times*, September 16. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-battle-over-gender-has-turned-bloody-2wpkmnqhh

———. 2018a. This Gender Battle Is Harder to Solve Than Brexit. *The Guardian*, June 30. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/this-gender-battle-is-harder-to-solve-than-brexit-0jc0pn867

———. 2018b. Trans Activists Think Debate Is Hate Speech. *The Times*, April 14. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/trans-activists-think-debate-is-hate-speech-hsh7vpmzt

van Dijck, José, and Thomas Poell. 2015. Social Media and the Transformation of Public Space. *Social Media + Society* 1 (2): 1–5.

van Zoonen, Liesbet. 2001. Feminist Internet Studies. *Feminist Media Studies* 1 (1): 67–72.

Wajcman, Judy. 1991. *Feminism Confronts Technology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Weisman, Leslie Kanes. [1981] 2000. Women's Environmental Rights: A Manifesto. In *Gender, Space, Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, ed. Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden, 1–5. New York: Routledge.

———. 1992. *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

5

'I don't see any strategy really, I see more […] personal venting': Consciousness-Raising, Theory-Building and Activism in Digital Space

> *The second wave was an engine house for the production of groundbreaking, radical political theory, which is still relevant and powerful today, and which is still being used today. And I'm not sure what groundbreaking theory we, in this generation, are producing now.*
> —Finn Mackay DN, UK
>
> *From what I have read of second-wave literature, it was very analytical, it was very much […] thinking about the world and assigning interpretations to social phenomena. […] I appreciate that about the second wave, it's theory-based, and it's all about trying to ask questions and trying to answer those questions. Which, unfortunately, I don't see a lot of anymore!*
> —Alicen Grey DN, USA

In the last chapter, I argued that social media is a dangerous medium for feminism because it provides men with new opportunities to control women's speech and police their behaviour. In this chapter, I am concerned with what social movement scholar Kathleen Blee (2012, 139) has called 'the intellectual work of activism'. Specifically, I investigate the political efficacy of attempting to do consciousness-raising and develop

---

Quote in the chapter title from Alicen Grey (DN, USA).

feminist theory in digital space. I also analyse how social media shapes the kind of activism that women engage in. As is suggested in the quotes above, and as I have briefly touched on in the first chapter of this book, WLM activists produced ground-breaking feminist theory via sustained face-to-face communication and using print-based media. Surprisingly, the question of what opportunities social media provides for 'the intellectual work of activism' has not been afforded significant academic attention by feminists. It is now well established that the use of social media to discuss, deliberate and decide on actions represents one of the core motivations for activists using the technology (Cammaerts 2015, 5), but little attention has been paid to whether a fast-paced and evanescent digital environment operates as an aid or a hindrance to women's ability to raise their consciousness and develop a theory of male dominance. Social media operates according to an entirely different temporal logic than earlier media forms (Kaun 2017; Klinger and Svensson 2014), and, in asking women to engage in debates whilst physically separated from each other, it also denotes a significant spatial shift. Some scholars have suggested that social media has been revolutionary for feminists based upon its cost effectiveness and time-saving qualities (Crossley 2017, 98), which have been understood to enable a form of mass-societal consciousness-raising via hashtagging and blogging practices (Hurwitz 2017, 472; Keller 2017). From a women's liberation perspective, however, it is necessary to further investigate whether the social media logic of fast and condensed evanescent communication enhances or limits women's capacity to make connections between diverse issues, formulate a feminist consciousness and push theory forwards to attend to new challenges.

Using social media for feminist communication has *temporally* transformed how feminists relate to the intellectual work of movement-building. In contrast to the dominant cultural narrative, the primary claim of this chapter is that social media has not saved activists' time in ways which are useful. This is because, as Lierre Keith (WLM, USA) explained in her interview, organising for women's liberation *takes time*:

> The things that I have to talk to people about require long, intensive conversations. I can't do it in 140 characters, and I can't even do it in five

minutes. I need so much more time to really explain. First, you've got to start way back [with the basics of feminist theory], and then you've got to bring them with you, if they are going to come. But you are going to have a discussion. You can't do that on a Facebook post, there is no way to get to that level of depth with anyone.

As Keith's quote suggests, liberating women from male dominance requires that women spend time unpacking and demystifying patriarchal structures. In the social media environment, however, a gap exists between 'the different temporalities of media practices, on the one hand, and political practices [like consciousness-raising], on the other' (Kaun 2017, 2). Using face-to-face communication combined with print-based media, WLM activists 'developed highly complex interpretative frameworks' (Whittier 1995, 93) *over time* which provided them with the intellectual tools to apply analytical frameworks to daily situations and collectively strategise about the most efficacious ways forward as a movement. Today, women can easily become involved in digital activism prior to doing this intellectual work. This raises key questions surrounding whether social media immediacy functions to aid or hinder feminist organising.

I argue here that using social media for feminist communication impedes the liberatory potential of the consciousness-raising and theory-building processes developed in the WLM. Action becomes easily divorced from theory in the digital environment, and this is having deleterious effects on women's ability to tangibly challenge male dominance. This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I establish time as a political resource. In the second section, I analyse the relationship between consciousness-raising, theory-building and activism in the WLM, with reference to women's use of print-based media. This discussion provides a historical reference point for the final section, where I consider how social media temporality has altered the tasks of consciousness-raising, theory-building and activism in turn.

The Politics of Time

> A room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter *and plenty of time.* (Lorde [1981] 2007a, 116, emphasis added)

> With Facebook there is no end or beginning, and so, it still has a lot of patriarchal qualities to it. (Anne Billows DN, UK)

> Women waste a lot of time on social media, you can be up all night on it. (Lynne Harne WLM, UK)

The time-space compression produced by neoliberal capitalism has had profound consequences for politics, the economy and daily life (Harvey 1989; Hassan 2009, 2012). According to Robert Hassan (2012, xiv), 'in our accelerated society […] the demands of the digital network press in on our experiences of time'. This makes a sense of the past and the future 'more difficult to retrieve and project—because we have less and less time to indulge ourselves in our own time' (Hassan 2012, xiv; see also Harvey 1989, 291; Motta et al. 2011, 2). Drawing on the work of Hartmut Rosa, Anne Kaun (2017, 5) has described this problem as a 'desynchronisation between media time and political time':

> In the context of increasing social acceleration […] there emerges a desynchronization. The political system of democracy that is based on the aggregation and articulation of collective interests remains time-intensive and can only be accelerated to a certain degree.

Several interviewees highlighted how social media poses a temporal problem for the development of women's liberation. Before analysing the specific ways in which social media temporality impedes the intellectual work of feminism, it is first necessary to establish time as a political resource. While the WLM first tried to break down the isolation of women and then strove to clarify their collective condition (Sarachild 1978b, 63), social media platforms, conversely, ask women to debate ideas from separate, geographically diverse locations. Platforms establish

specific temporal logics based around the demand for immediate response and new content (Klinger and Svensson 2014; van Dijck and Poell 2015, 3). As corporate entities, they are also driven by a financial imperative to encourage users to spend *as much time as possible* producing and consuming content.

Time, like space, functions as a political resource in male-dominated societies. Nancy Henley (1977) has explained how women's time, like women's space, is that which is most easily violable. Not only is women's free time more constricted than men's due to the demands of paid work combined with the greater expectation that they perform housework (Leonard 2003), childrearing tasks (Mies [1986] 1998) and beauty practices (Jeffreys [2005] 2015), but women's time is also more easily invaded than men's. According to Henley (1977, 52), 'mother's time, like mother's space, can always be interrupted', and women are often expected to add extra work to their already busy schedules. Women themselves are not immune from the perception that women's time is less valuable than men's, and they also frequently make invasive demands on other women's time (Henley 1977, 53). Since women's work is less valued than men's, women are frequently perceived to be '"not doing anything" in the first place' (Henley 1977, 53).

Henley's conception of time as a political resource raises important questions around the political efficacy of women's use of social media for feminist communication. Social media provides an invasive intrusion into the limited amount of free time that women already have. One way this occurs is through tags, citations and mentions (van Dijck and Poell 2015, 3) which interrupt women and direct their attention consistently back to digital platforms via smartphone alerts.[1] According to some theo-

---

[1] The marketing claim that new smart technologies like Google Home *save women time* by affording them more control over their homes is also particularly insidious: in reality, smart technologies, like social media companies, are driven to monopolise women's time (and shape their desires) according to their own concerns. Caroline Bassett, Sarah Kember and Kate O'Riordan (2020, 5) have explained how smart technologies shape 'the new sexual contract' between men and women, one in which the woman performs the traditional submissive homemaker role, only now with extra demands placed upon her. In the kitchen, for example, 'speech-enabled translucent kitchen worktop[s] ask her if she'd like help with her baking', while in the bathroom 'an augmented reality […] mirror […] displays a punishing schedule of meetings before she has brushed her teeth' (Bassett et al. 2020, 5). Of particular concern for feminists, smart technologies also promote a process of unlearning, detachment and increasing reliance on algorithmic prediction. As Bassett

rists, for many Western individuals today, time itself has now 'been diced into the segments between notifications' (Greenfield 2018, 309). Henley (1977, 49) has pointed to the ability to 'annex' the time of others as a marker of power relations:

> There is a limited amount of time, as there is of space, and only one 24-hour period is given to all of us each day, not separate packages of 24-hours each. Some people have the power to annex other people's time, and the more they can annex, the more powerful they become; the more powerful they are, the more of other's time they can annex.

If (as I shall argue in more depth below) time is a political resource crucial to the reflective process involved in critical discussion and theory-building, and women generally have less of it already in male-dominated societies, then this suggests that feminists' use of social media is contributing to the maintenance of women's oppression rather than challenging it. To make this case, I first consider the link between consciousness-raising, theory-building and action in the WLM.

The Feedback Loop of the WLM

While social movement studies scholars have been preoccupied with the question of how activist groups translate political frames to the wider public, much less is known about how groups collectively develop a shared worldview (Blee 2012, 82). Theory-building, or developing an ideology,[2] is a crucial task for any political movement. This is because, as Blee (2012, 82) has argued, the type of activism that grassroots groups

---

et al. (2020, 5) state, using smart technologies she 'unlearns to write, courtesy of predictive texts and voice-recognition software that promises to say it all for her'.

[2] Ideology refers to the belief system of a social movement. Although the concept of ideology is often used in a pejorative sense, the term first 'arose in a revolutionary era from politics and the study of politics' (Oliver and Johnston 2000, 42). In a non-pejorative sense, political scientists have used it to distinguish people with 'well-structured rational belief systems from those with inconsistent or illogical belief systems' (Oliver and Johnston 2000, 42). When I speak of the importance of constructing the ideology of women's liberation, I use the concept of ideology to refer to 'coherent systems of ideas which provide theories of society coupled with value commitments and normative implications for promoting or resisting social change' (Oliver and Johnston 2000, 37).

engage in is intricately related to the ideological framework that they develop:

> How groups define a problem, even provisionally, shapes how they act and how they see themselves and the social world. Defining the problem, in other words, is an aspect of how activist groups create an ideological character.

WLM interviewees expressed a similar view: they argued that the process of consciousness-raising enabled WLM activists to develop a theory of male dominance which was then used to structure the type of political action that activists engaged in.

Consciousness-raising—the political process of women talking about their lives in a space away from men and abstracting common threads from their diverse experiences—was the cornerstone intellectual activity of the WLM which made theory-building possible. Consciousness-raising in small groups 'provided a way and a place for women to name their common plight' (Chesler [1972] 1997, 265), which allowed activists to develop a feminist way of seeing. This was politically important, because women, as an oppressed group, have often not been fully aware of their oppression, nor had a language through which to express it (Mansbridge and Morris 2001; Millett [1969] 1972). Consciousness-raising and theory-production were therefore essential precursors to WLM activists deciding to act for social change.

Based upon discussions in consciousness-raising groups, activists developed a theory of women's oppression which was then used as a basis for strategising to carry out political action. According to Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK), what this meant was that 'the placard' in the WLM was 'the last point, not the first point':

> I think one of the differences today is that activism does not come out of consciousness-raising and theory. And my firm understanding from then, and from now, is that activism is the third point, you do consciousness-raising first, from consciousness-raising comes theory, and from theory comes activism. You don't just all come together to learn to do a placard and then think "where should we put it?"

As understood by WLM activists, if activism was to achieve tangible outcomes for women, then this was dependent upon the difficult—and necessarily prior—work of consciousness-raising followed by theory-building. Theory provided a crucial framework for assessing the revolutionary potential of feminist actions, and even smaller campaigns or protests in the WLM aimed to be politically congruent with the larger goal of women's liberation. In attempting to ensure that they were, activists spent a considerable amount of time debating with other women in small groups, reading feminist theory, writing position papers and justifying their motivations for participating in certain kinds of actions to other movement women. As expressed in movement literature, WLM activists considered calls to action made prior to the work of consciousness-raising and theory-building to be counterproductive to the revolutionary potential of feminist protest (see, e.g., Radical Lesbian Front [1981] 1988; Sarachild 1978a, 149).

Agatha Beins (2017, 68) has usefully conceptualised the relationship between theory and practice in the WLM as a 'feedback loop'. Most commonly, this 'feedback loop' is discussed in academic literature in terms of feminist praxis; or the idea that, in working towards women's liberation, there should be a relationship between political theory and the kind of action that activists engage in. For example, in the case of feminist publishing, it was important for WLM activists not only to produce a feminist newsletter, but to also ensure that its production was infused with and exemplified feminist values of collective-based organising (Beins 2017, 68).

Interviewees were careful to note that theory was not static in the WLM; women would continually refine their theorisations of the workings of male dominance after each action and as they gathered new empirical evidence in consciousness-raising sessions. In this way, the political technique of consciousness-raising was also used to analyse the efficacy of an action once it had been completed. Janice Raymond (1986, 214) has argued that feminist theory-building is inseparable from activism, as 'the unity of the two is necessary to the integrity of each':

> Many have focussed on the necessity to move from theory to action. Far fewer have emphasized that it is equally important to move back to theory

once having acted or during acting. The integrity of theory and practice will always generate tension, but tension and separation should not be equated.

After each action, women would discuss at their next meeting what was effective and what was ineffective. This process of constant re-strategising allowed women to refine feminist theory to ensure it was aligned with the long-term goals of women's liberation:

> We would do the action and then at the next meeting we would say, "okay, what worked and what didn't, what's our strategy?" And we would go back to the strategy and say, "was it effective, did that lead us in the right direction, or should we change the strategy?" (Jenny Rankine WLM, NZ)

Via this process of consciousness-raising, leading to theory production, leading to activism, leading back to a re-evaluation of strategy through consciousness-raising, activists created an intellectual process for trying to ensure that both their theory of male dominance and their activism for women's liberation remained dynamically attuned to the realities of women's lives.

Feminist Spiralling

One of the most comprehensive articulations of the process of feminist knowledge production that I have described above is feminist philosopher Mary Daly's (1978, 1993) theory of feminist *spiralling*. Daly has argued that politically effective feminist praxis is best understood as a form of *spiralling* in which women retain a sense of the past as they gather momentum and move the political project of women's liberation *forward*. WLM activist and author Robin Morgan (1977, 14) has also described the feminist intellectual process as an 'upward spiral' that pushes the movement forward as women learn from their past mistakes: 'each time we reevaluate a position or place we've been before, we do so from a new perspective'. According to these scholars, the feminist process of

knowledge production is cyclical rather than circular; it moves forward into the future whilst also retaining a sense of the past.

The feedback loop of the WLM was never envisioned as circular, repetitive or static, rather, it acknowledges that a politically informed and efficacious movement is dependent upon awareness of past lessons. Retaining knowledge of the past is important politically, because it saves activists from constantly having to reinvent the wheel (see Whittier 1995, 240). It was important to WLM activists that the lessons learned by one group were documented for the benefit of other movement women. For example, Carol Hanisch, who came up with the idea to protest the *Miss America Pageant* in 1968 (Brownmiller 1999, 35), wrote a detailed critique a few months later of everything that went wrong so that other activists could learn from past mistakes (Hanisch [1968] 2000). Through the written word, and perhaps best exemplified through feminist newsletter production, the organising structure of the WLM enabled a common conversation which functioned to centralise and preserve movement knowledge for future activists (as I will explain further below).

In her book *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly (1978, xiii–xiv) described how *spinning* and *weaving* the disparate threads of patriarchal domination together is integral to the process of feminist *spiralling*. Feminists need to make sense of the patterns that emerge from women's diverse experiences to develop a class consciousness; and spinning and weaving can produce a 'unity of consciousness' which holds the potential to break through the 'mind-binding combinations' of patriarchal lies (Daly 1978, 386). According to Daly, women's oppression has been maintained via a process of obfuscation designed to perpetuate their ignorance of their own subordination. Thus, women must recover broken links if they are to overthrow male supremacy; their oppression is perpetuated when they remain ignorant of their situation. Put simply, women must understand how male dominance works before they can pose an effective challenge to it.

For some scholars, the feminist intellectual process that I have described above has been interpreted as innately suited to digital networking technologies, which are seen to offer the potential to electronically facilitate connections between women and between feminist ideas. Seduced by the revolutionary potential of the internet (see van Zoonen 2001, 68), several influential feminist scholars have positioned digital technology as

inherently suited to women, collective-based organising and feminist ways of communicating (Haraway [1984] 2000; Plant 1998). Dale Spender (1995, 229), for example, wrote in the 1990s that cyberspace 'holds the potential to be egalitarian, to bring everyone into a network arrangement'. Digital connectivity has also been seen to enable a form of feminist *spiralling*, with metaphors of *spinning* and *weaving* often being transposed onto feminist visions of the network society. For example, Elizabeth Friedman (2007, 809) has argued that 'Latin American lesbians are weaving a homespun web' online, and Cait McKinney (2015, 314) has suggested that women's use of digital technology should be interpreted as a continuation of early lesbian feminist newsletter projects which aimed to weave feminist webs 'from within isolated patriarchal nodes'. For McKinney (2015, 320), then, 'the web is not an event or turning point for feminist social movements; rather, it extends existing media infrastructures of networked communications'.

This vision of digital connection is a *phallacy* because it translates deep engagement as technological function. Social media participation itself is now often seen as a form of collaboration and community-building, where electronic links stand in for human connection. A feminist vision of connectivity, conversely, is concerned with female bonding outside of male control (Mackinnon 1987, 77; Thompson 1994); it is a vision of connectivity as feminist community, rather than connectivity as a function of technology (i.e., connectivity recast as modem speed or unfettered access to people and content). Writing long before the emergence of social media, Mary Daly (1978, 391) also cautioned that 'the power of Spinning cannot be reduced to the technological'.

The task for feminists, then, is not to move quickly through digital spaces and 'connect' immediately with ideas and each other, but rather to understand the commonalities between diverse threads of male dominance and recognise other women outside of patriarchal frameworks. Hyperlinks and algorithmic predictions can provide women with 'travel recommendations' and 'virtual pathways' which allow them to click or scroll immediately through to the next post (Friedman 2007, 809), but they do not, in themselves, provide any mechanism for helping women to comprehend or critically analyse the information they are viewing. Digital technologies present infinite possibilities for interpretation: each

woman might read the same information, but she does so in a different order, and develops a different 'associational context' (Hawthorne 1999, 388). Print material, on the other hand, embeds ideas in a particular context read in a sequence crafted by the author. Writing before the emergence of social media, Susan Hawthorne (1999, 388) explained that 'the potentially endless web of interconnections can confuse rather than elucidate the text, and although there is an exciting edge to this endless weave […] the excitement is theoretical rather than practical'. While feminists have always sought to plot the connections between diverse issues and experiences, the primary motive of this first step of the consciousness-raising process was to achieve theoretical clarity, not to lose oneself in endless complexity (see Allen 1970).

Printing Women's Liberation

> As a people, [feminist publishing] is our looking back and going forward in the written word. (Bunch 1978, 221)

Without access to resources that promote stability and longevity, digital feminism is limited in its ability to engage in the kind of reflective theorising described above. A key element of the intellectual process of the WLM was the documenting, printing and dissemination of feminist ideas by women-owned presses. This was crucial, because, as Charlotte Bunch (1978, 218) has explained, a 'lack of access to the printed word has characterised most oppressed groups'. In the 1970s, it was cheaper for feminists to produce written material autonomously, whereas television and radio content remained subject to male control (Bunch 1978). Producing print material was also a strategic move because it provided a material basis for feminism that could not easily be erased (Beins 2017, 55).

Written materials such as newsletters, books and position papers grounded feminism not only materially, but also in time (Beins 2017, 43). Newsletters, for example, provided material continuity—what Agatha Beins calls an 'enduring presence' for feminism—as well as a sense of seriality 'that allowed activists to experience a vibrant presence moment,

a sense of the movement's past, and a vision for its future' (Beins 2017, 46, 55–56). In so doing, print material facilitated Mary Daly's vision of feminist spiralling. Interviewee Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) said that theory-building is an intellectual process that benefits from material resources such as 'pamphlets and books […] those things [that stay] around'. She believed materiality is important because 'women need to be able to answer them to develop the ideas'.

Beins' understanding of the significance of the print material of the WLM to movement growth draws on the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), who distinguished conceptually between tactical and strategic actions. De Certeau (1984, 35) argued that strategic action is dependent upon access to resources such as time and the stable occupation of place. By contrast, tactical actions are characterised by spatial and temporal instability; they momentarily interrupt the status quo, but not in a way that easily leads to social change or facilitates the building of a strategic vision:

> [Tactical action] has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansion, and secure independence with respect to its circumstances'. (de Certeau 1984, 35)

Echoing de Certeau's conclusions, Beins also argued that 'social movements […] need resources to make themselves sustainable; they require labor that gives them a presence *through* time, not just as a spectacle at a specific time, or they limit their ability to transform oppressive systems' (Beins 2017, 55; see also Raymond 1986, 237). This is significant for thinking about the limitations of using social media for feminist communication, as posting social media content only *temporarily* provides a movement with a place to exist (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 19–24).

As well as materially locating feminism, the print culture of the WLM produced what Anne Kaun (2017, 3) has called a 'simultaneity of experiences'. WLM respondents described how WLM organising structures produced a common conversation amongst activists. They also explained how small group organising enabled activists to ensure that the women they were working alongside had access to and had read the same movement materials as them:

> We had all read the same books, and there was a general conversation therefore, because those ideas were in our heads. And the [position] papers that we wrote, although we never referenced anything, probably contained those ideas that we had got from those books, and we were developing those ideas. (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK)

> When we were together it was one group moving forward, with dissension within the group, but interacting and moving forward as a movement. (Chris Sitka WLM, AU)

'Debates were had at a much slower pace' (Finn Mackay DN, UK), but regular newsletters and conferences ensured that activists could access the same content in their local areas. For example, WLM activists wrote position papers based upon the ideas which came out of consciousness-raising, and they often presented them at local, regional or national movement conferences. Even if individual women could not attend every conference, feminist newsletters printed summaries of the main discussion points put forward. Position papers were often circulated amongst activists beforehand, so that women could reflect on them prior to the conference day. Conferences, position papers and newsletters provided activists with spaces in which they could both debate ideas and trace their historical development. As I will argue further in the next chapter, this was a more democratic and collective form of engagement than platform architecture permits. I now turn to analysing women's ability to do consciousness-raising, build feminist theory and advance theoretically informed praxis in digital space.

Attempting Digital Consciousness-Raising

> I think [consciousness-raising] can only be done in a physical space, in a women-only physical space. (Hilla Kerner DN, CA)

In the last chapter, I discussed how women in mixed-sex environments are likely to defer to male authority and feel constrained by sex-role stereotypes (Mackinnon 1989; Mansbridge and Morris 2001). I also argued

that social media offers women a communicative space in which they are continually forced to interact with, and be reminded of, their oppressors. It is difficult to understand why some scholars continue to overlook the significance of autonomous spaces of resistance for oppressed social groups. Many frame digital discussions as a contemporary form of the consciousness-raising process developed in the WLM (see Crossley 2017, 14, 263; Hurwitz 2017, 472; Keller 2017). So far, little theoretical justification has been provided for this claim. This is a particularly significant oversight given that the properties of digital space are markedly different from the spatial conditions which have so far been theorised as crucial for facilitating consciousness-raising.

Sociologist Eric Hirsch (1990, 245) has argued that, if it is to promote liberation from oppressive ideologies, consciousness-raising must be 'facilitated in nonhierarchical, loosely structured, face-to-face settings that are isolated from persons in power'. Catharine Mackinnon (1989, 95) has also argued that the revolutionary nature of the consciousness-raising process is predicated on the gathering of oppressed peoples in close physical proximity:

> Consciousness raising is a face-to-face social experience that strikes at the fabric of meaning of social relations between and among women and men by calling their givenness into question and reconstituting their meaning in a transformed and critical way.

Interviewees expressed similar viewpoints. Some, such as Lierre Keith (WLM, USA), suggested that social media provides very little space for facilitating deep connections between women and expanding women's capacity to interpret and analyse diverse patriarchal phenomena:

> [Facebook posts are] very short, you can only do very, very short things, short time spans and short replies, that is all you can ever get. And I don't know how anyone thinks this is going to lead to deep political or philosophical understandings or connections between people, it breaks them.

Other interviewees believed that feminist consciousness can only be developed via 'personal connection' and that 'social media is not actually

changing women's minds' about political phenomena (Lynne Harne WLM, UK). Hilla Kerner (DN, CA) said digital participation is unlikely to facilitate consciousness-raising, rather it is more likely to reinforce the worldview women already have: '[Social media] allows for reinforcement and support of women's [individualised] thinking: it cannot replace action and group action'.

Applying Daly's theory of feminist intellectual spiralling to feminist organising praxis, spiralling *forward* as a movement necessitates that women engage each other both analytically and critically. Interviewees spoke about the difficulties of trying to critically discuss personal experiences on social media, and they described how digital debates often end in women blocking each other or whole groups disbanding. As I will explain further in the next chapter, there is little impetus for individual women to have to do the difficult work of self-reflection inherent to the processes of consciousness-raising and theory-building in digital space. The political danger is that social media offers particular solutions for dispute resolution that are not useful for moving forward collectively, such as blocking women or deleting content. The aim of consciousness-raising in the WLM was to enable activists to generate data on women's lives from which they could produce a collective theory of women's oppression. This did not mean that the articulation of individual experiences was the primary goal; it was simply the first step in the process of collective theory-building (see Allen 1970). The point, for WLM activists, was to interrogate individual accounts amongst trusted women in order to develop a feminist ideology.

Activists participating in closed/secret Facebook groups are also given little impetus to develop the broad-based political consciousness enabled via the small group process. This is because digital space facilitates isolated conversations: 'if abortion is your thing, you can hide in that, and live in that, and that is possible online. You can create your own little world' (Samantha Berg DN, USA). Women's ability to leave challenging groups or deflect political critique reinforces individualised thinking amongst activists. For example, women can unite politically over single-issue topics without ever having to challenge their broader worldview or consider how different issues are interrelated. Finn Mackay (DN, UK) said that digital space encourages women to compartmentalise and view

issues in isolation: women can campaign on social media against pornography and objectification, whilst continuing to wear make-up and attend pole dancing classes in their daily lives.

Some scholars have argued that social media sharing functionalities are unable to capture the 'depth and subtlety' of face-to-face interaction (Tarrow 2013, 210), impeding women's ability to developing trusting relationships. Establishing trust was crucial to the success of consciousness-raising in the WLM, and it was common for groups to close ranks to preserve cohesion and limit disruption (Allen 1970, 18–19). New recruits were often encouraged to form their own groups because introducing new members, or not being certain of a woman's level of commitment to the group, made others more hesitant to share their feelings and be honest about their intimate experiences (Allen 1970, 19; Bruley 2013; 721). A lack of physical and verbal cues can pose a barrier to the development of trust between women in digital space, limiting their ability to access the revolutionary potential of consciousness-raising. Interviewee Alanna Inserra (DN, AUS) felt that social media communication 'doesn't encourage empathy and dialogue, [and that women] lose so much when [they] can't hear someone's tone of voice and their facial expression'. Al Garthwaite (WLM, UK) also suggested that face-to-face interaction is crucial to women's ability to deeply understand one another and develop trust. Garthwaite said: 'I don't mean you need to have a meeting […] every night in order to organise something […] but to have met each other to start with, [to have] got the measure of each other […] there is so much that you learn from body language that you can't get from even Skype'.

The Feminist Critique of Therapy

The feminist critique of therapy and self-help provides a useful framework through which to further interrogate the claim that social media can facilitate consciousness-raising. Feminist activists and academics alike have analysed how the consciousness-raising process was co-opted in the 1980s and 1990s via the influence of the growing self-help and therapy industries that promoted a depoliticised vision of liberation through

self-introspection and self-acceptance. Celia Kitzinger and Rachel Perkins (1993, 5–6) have argued that:

> Whatever it pretends, psychology is never "apolitical". It always serves to obscure larger social and political issues (sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism), converting them into individual pathologies by an insistent focus on the personal.

Rather than placing women's experiences within a political context and working to change structural conditions, therapy encourages women to focus their attention inwards towards self-examination, instead of outwards towards challenging wider social structures (Bruley 2013; Kitzinger and Perkins 1993; Whittier 1995, 237). Some WLM activists and scholars considered the ideology of therapy and self-help to be incongruent with feminism (Cardea 1985; Kitzinger and Perkins 1993; Raymond 1986). This critique is not well-known amongst younger radical feminist activists today (see Happonen 2017).

The self-help movement gained rapid visibility during the 1980s and 1990s, and, in targeting mainly women and trading off the feminist slogan 'the personal is political', profoundly impacted the growth of the WLM (Whittier 1995, 180–184). In the early 1970s, interviewee Carol Hanisch ([1973] 1978a, 166) critiqued how *therapism*[3] had 'perverted the original purpose' of consciousness-raising, noting that many feminist groups had essentially become a space for self-help: 'social gathering places where women get and give support for their immediate problems and try to "develop" themselves'. In her famous essay entitled 'The Personal is Political', Hanisch (1978b, 204) explained the dangers of combining therapy with feminist politics:

> The very word "therapy" is obviously a misnomer if carried to its logical conclusion. Therapy assumes that someone is sick and that there is a cure, e.g., a personal solution. I am greatly offended that I or any other woman

---

[3] Janice Raymond (1986, 155) has conceptualised the ideology of 'therapy as a way of life' as *therapism*. She uses the concept therapism not only to refer to the practice of women entering therapy and remaining in it for long periods, but also to convey how women come to construct their relationships with other women from within a therapeutic framework.

is thought to need therapy in the first place. Women are messed over, not messed up! We need to change the objective conditions, not adjust to them. Therapy is adjusting to your bad personal narrative.

Writing in the early 1990s, Kitzinger and Perkins (1993, 5) highlighted how the self-improvement goals of 'raising one's self esteem, loving one's inner child [and] surviving one's toxic family' took over 'from the political goals of radical lesbian and feminist politics' characteristic of the early WLM. According to these scholars, self-help programmes impeded women's ability to see how their individual behaviours were a result of their social conditioning under male dominance (see also Bruley 2013).

Consciousness-raising groups provided a political setting that enabled women 'to challenge […] the patriarchal context and create […] a new ground of meaning from which [they could] develop different perspectives about [their] interactions (Hoagland 1988, 134). It is not clear how social media in any way facilitates a similar political process for women. Within a wider culture of confessionalism where self-help and self-exposure are positioned as intrinsically good, social media companies trade on getting people to reveal more and more of themselves online. This ideology is evident in the continual calls for women to contribute their individual stories to the newest feminist hashtag (#mencallmethings in 2011, #beenrapedneverreported and #yesallwomen in 2014, #metoo in 2017). The much discussed #metoo phenomenon clearly highlights the limitations of this kind of tactical action, which contains no enduring presence (de Certeau 1984). Despite sparking some high-profile activism by celebrities and garnering mainstream media attention, the hashtag activism engaged in by countless women across the Western world has hardly resulted in the production of material organising structures in local contexts, or the tangible advancement of a collective feminist vision for social change (Megarry 2017). Some scholars have recently characterised #metoo as a distress signal that could—*but is yet to*—build a new solidarity between women (Bassett et al. 2020, 8). Referring to an earlier (but conceptually similar) hashtag called #yesallwomen, interviewee Hilla Kerner (DN, CA) expressed a similar view. She said: 'it was fantastic to see how English-speaking women all over the world' were contributing their stories to the hashtag, but they 'just put it out there and nothing

happens with that'. According to Kerner, hashtag participation can be discouraging for women who 'thought there would be an earthquake but are left sitting alone in front of a computer'.

Digital feminist organisations also often promote the ideology of therapism. For example, the international anti-street harassment organisation Hollaback! encourages women to upload their individual stories of abuse to Twitter, Facebook and blogs as a way to process and try to *move past* their experiences of harassment. In the Hollaback! 2014–2015 Annual Report, the authors wrote:

> Everyday people submit their narratives to Hollaback!, continuing the movement with their willingness to speak up about their personal experiences. When people share their stories on our website or through our app, they're welcomed into a community of supporters. Storytelling provides an opportunity for people to let go of their feelings of anger, fear and/or disgust and find out that they are not alone and harassment is not their fault. It brings healing, awareness, and validation to the storyteller and brings comfort to others who have experienced harassment. (Hollaback! 2015, 12)

The ideology of therapy and self-help underwrites the focus on personal revelation encouraged by social media. This denotes a troubling convergence between digital feminist protest tactics and the business model of Silicon Valley executives.

Social Media and Personal Narrative

> People glorify individual experience online; it is seen as a source of truth. (Jenny Rankine WLM, NZ)

As epitomised in the slogan 'the personal is political', the use of first-person narrative to garner political traction is a feminist mobilising strategy with a lengthy history. For example, the technique of using personal narrative to shift mainstream opinion was adopted by feminist campaigns against rape, battery, child abuse and sexual harassment throughout the 1970s, to great effect. The sharing of personal stories in small face-to-face consciousness-raising groups, however, is a qualitatively different

phenomenon to the kind of individualised sharing that occurs in digital space. Social media users create an individual profile through which they are constantly encouraged to upload personal information, publicly display their allegiances, and post in a confessional and testimonial style about the minutiae of their daily lives. As popular writers such as Andrew Keen (2007, 17) have argued, digital self-publishing has contributed to 'shattering the world into a billion personalized truths, each seemingly equally valid and worthwhile'. Social media promotes the view that everyone has the right to speak, and that every perspective and experience is equally valid and inherently true. In so doing, it reduces the possibility of collective-based political organising.

Several social movement scholars have argued that collective mobilisation in the contemporary period is dependent upon deeper forms of communication than was necessary under Fordism (Funke and Wolfson 2014; Tarrow 2013). Developing a class consciousness is harder today than it was for participants of the social movements of the late 1960s, when access to labour security and social welfare 'ensured a degree of uniformity in experiences of oppression' (Firth and Robinson 2016, 344). Furthermore, the speeding up of communicative pace has produced increasingly condensed political messages that impede the ability of an oppressed class to recognise commonalities between their experiences (Tarrow 2013, 207–208). Individuals must now work harder to deconstruct 'the real but superficial surface expressions of dissimilar living and working conditions' (Funke and Wolfson 2014, 353). Some feminist scholars have suggested that something is now 'lacking' in the 'discursive construction' of feminist knowledge, and that activist narratives are frequently individualised (Firth and Robinson 2016, 343). Interviewees agreed with this assessment, and explained that while 'social media is just […] a mirror to [this], it's not the cause', digital space nonetheless fuels 'the promotion of individualism [that] really undermines [women's] fight for solidarity' (Hilla Kerner DN, CA).

Interviewees positioned the individualism promoted by social media as an impediment to consciousness-raising, and they described how an emphasis on individual expression leads to self-promotion in a manner which eclipses the possibility of collective-based knowledge formulation and 'kills the feminist movement' (Carol Hanisch WLM, USA). The

most successful (i.e., widely used, shared and seen) hashtags are those that operationalise individualised interpretative frames (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). Political philosopher Jodi Dean (2019, 334) has argued that an incessant focus on the individual is an integral aspect of communicative capitalism:

> Communicative capitalism has overburdened the individual form to such as extent that individuality is commanded: be unique, be different, find yourself, care for yourself, be your own best self. The injunctions to be this individual alert us to capitalism's interest in individuals: alone, we are disempowered, able only to consume.

Dean (2016, 4) has also called this phenomenon the 'moment of collective de-subjectivation': 'asserting ourselves as individuals, we become individuation, concerned first with our own particular preoccupations'. The problem with attempting to do feminist consciousness-raising in digital space is that social media encourages women to focus on sharing their own individual narratives, often at the expense of working to tease out connections between their diverse material experiences. Social media contains no built-in mechanism that prompts a shift from the sharing of individual experiences to analysis or abstraction of data, two intellectual processes that were originally envisioned as central to consciousness-raising (see Allen 1970). The personal remains personal in the digital environment, rather than being a vehicle through which to develop political theory and launch collective action. Julia Long (DN, UK) said that social media individualism has 'eliminat[ed] the chance of having a political discussion, [social media is] all about "don't upset me as an individual", or, "you've got to think about me as an individual" before you open your mouth'. Alanna Inserra (DN, AUS) agreed with this view. She felt that social media promotes a form of political engagement that is 'about looking internally and thinking about yourself, it's a very atomistic vision of the world that does not lend itself to a structural analysis of the patriarchy and of women's issues'. Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ) is another interviewee who said that digital space is not conducive to 'discussing a strategy where [women] can collaborate on an overarching issue that affects all of us'. For Rankine, this is because 'the language on social media

is incredibly personalised […] it is focused on individuals, and on debates between individuals'.

Social media is not a political space created by women in pursuit of their liberation; rather, it is a space designed by men where women are relentlessly encouraged to share personal information that is then sold to advertisers for profit. As early as 1978, Michel Foucault identified how confession had become 'one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth' (63). People are put under 'an obligation to confess', and the pressure to do so is so ubiquitous that 'we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary it seems that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, "demands" only to surface' (Foucault 1978, 60). Several feminist scholars have documented how the rise of the 'confessional' society correlates personal narrative and truth in a manner which adversely impacts the political project of women's liberation (Kitzinger and Perkins 1993; Miriam 1998, 168–170; Raymond 1986). Janice Raymond (1986, 156), for example, has argued that personal disclosure in modern society is rarely based upon genuine insight into the self, but rather takes the form of an unexamined and relentless outpouring of emotional response.

According to Susan Brownmiller (1999, 109), the sharing of individual stories lost its edge as a tactic of feminist mobilisation when the practice was taken outside of the politicised context of WLM consciousness-raising groups and became a 'gimmicky staple of the afternoon television shows'. Writing in the 1970s, Phyllis Chesler ([1972] 1997, 17) expressed a similar view:

> Daytime TV programs are the heirs of early feminist consciousness-raising groups—but without a political perspective. This missing dimension should not be underestimated.

Outside of a feminist context, personal narrative, in and of itself, contains no mechanism for facilitating the political process of consciousness-raising, or, as I will discuss further below, prompting women to act to change their material circumstances. Transposed from the politicised space of feminist consciousness-raising groups, the sharing of personalised truths loses its revolutionary potency. Women are consistently

encouraged to confess and share personal experiences on social media, but there is no impetus for them to engage with the stories of others or attempt to synthesise accounts in this environment. By creating an environment that transposes the sharing stage of the consciousness-raising process from a political to a commercial context, social media advances the logic of therapy.

Digital Expression and Empowerment

Contemporary protest culture is geared around visibility in the network. In this context, success is evaluated not in terms of material outcomes, but in terms of visibility via likes and retweets (Dean 2005; Tufekci 2013). Interviewee Alicen Grey (DN, USA) explained this ideology: 'a lot of activism now is showing up to a demo with a cardboard sign and yelling, taking a picture of yourself doing it, posting that, getting likes, and then you feel like you're a real activist'. By encouraging women to focus on their individual situation and then algorithmically reflecting their individual worldview back to them, the individualised confessional style of interaction promoted by social media trades off a similar conception of empowerment that is sold to women by the self-help industry. Kitzinger and Perkins (1993, 44) have explained the difference between therapeutic empowerment and political power:

> "Empowerment" […] means redefining the word "power" in such a way that we get to feel we have some of it. It attempts to create in women a certain state of mind (feeling powerful, competent, worthy of esteem, able to make free choices and influence their world), *while leaving structural conditions unchanged.*

Like the self-help industry, social media recasts power as personal expression, creating the impression that attaining power is within each woman's grasp if she only raises her voice and contributes her data. Thus, in digital space, participation itself becomes the revolutionary act (Levina 2012). From a women's liberation perspective this is politically alarming, because, as Marina Levina (2012, 23) has explained, 'network power operates

through incorporation of dividend elements'. Women's tweets and Facebook posts expand the power and reach of the male-owned network. Social media platforms promise salvation through self-exposure, but this exchange can be more accurately conceptualised as 'a form of capture' of women's political energy (Bassett et al. 2020, 8).

Interviewees suggested that the conflation of digital visibility with feminist success has generated a significant problem for reviving the WLM. Hilla Kerner (DN, CA) said that a protest culture geared around digital visibility instils a 'false satisfaction' in women by 'let[ting] them think they are making change when they are not'. Other interviewees expressed similar perspectives:

> For a lot of people [this is] feminist activism now […] you read these blogs, you post these comments, you like things on Facebook and that is really the extent of it, you don't realise no structural power has been shifted by you doing this. (Lierre Keith WLM, USA)

> [On social media] people can delude themselves into thinking that they have done something when all they have done is expressed themselves publicly. (Susan Hawthorne WLM, AU)

Social media might make women feel 'less downtrodden' (Alicen Grey DN, USA) but, in trading off narratives of empowerment, it reinforces, rather than undermines, male dominance. Engaging in digital space, women are not encouraged to act in the here-and-now for their liberation. Activists contribute their data to social media platforms, but they do so without putting structures in place for facilitating further interactions between women. Here, the possibility of future collective action is precluded: users share stories, but without a clear goal in mind. The data itself is believed to lead to liberation, but neither scholars nor activists have yet made clear how individual digital content contribution will congeal into a critical mass which sparks a resurgence of feminism that sees women beginning to act collectively to alter future possibilities. Nor is it apparent who will actually do the difficult work of drawing out connections between diverse stories.

The Role of Collective Rage

Social media provides a place for women to seek support from each other, but it also promotes individual catharsis over the building of collective rage. It is not in the interest of male-dominated societies to provide spaces for feminists to develop a sense of collective rage. While rage can be both a mobilising and demobilising political force,[4] collective anger plays a crucial role in overthrowing oppressive social systems (Lorde [1981] 2007b; Miriam 1998). According to Kathy Miriam (1998, 192):

> Rage, a collective feminist emotion is political/ethical and discursive—it expresses and inscribes a moral/political shift from victim to activist, and a shift in interpretations of experience from shame to rage, from "it happened to me" to "it happened to us".

Rage is integral to feminist mobilisation, because it can help women shift focus from consciousness-raising activities to participating in direct actions. For this reason, Miriam (1998, 191) has argued for 'shifting tactics of speaking out from testimonials of suffering (addressed to an audience that includes men) as rites of female vulnerability, to testimonials of militancy and outrage'. Interviewees such as Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU) felt that feminist anger is not effectively generated in digital space, and that reading online content does not have the same effect as 'your best friend [who] you are [sitting] in a room [with] saying, "I've just been raped"'. Gekas was 'glad' that women can share their experiences on social media, but she was concerned that 'the next step [to taking action] isn't there' because the individual story 'just becomes another news article that you are seeing, another face, another person [posting] on male violence'. Gekas' account suggests that the digital spaces provided by social

---

[4] Kathy Miriam (1998, 233) has noted that all social movements contain elements of productive and unproductive rage. She distinguished between the two as follows: 'the criteria for distinction would flow from a social movement context in which inscribing pain in the social text (through testimonies, legislation and various actions) is not its own end but a *component* of justice. Such rage would then be essential to imagining/loving rather than averting from and loathing freedom'. This distinction makes clear the political problem that social media confessionalism poses for feminism: recast from the first step of the feminist intellectual process to the only step, confessing/sharing loses its potency as a mobilising force.

media denote the most recent manifestation of the patriarchal tradition that Miriam (1998, 192) has called 'the domestication' of women's rage 'through historically specific social mechanisms which have re-produced feminist speech as victim discourse'.

Miriam (1998, 182) has argued that when the act of 'breaking the silence' is fetishised in activist discourse, women can bequeath responsibility for any further participation after they have revealed their personal story. Diluting women's anger through confessionalism means that they are less likely to go to a face-to-face feminist meeting or engage in future organising because the urgency of the situation is alleviated. Some interviewees said that communicating on social media keeps women focussed upon assisting each other to survive male dominance (instead of challenging it), thus promoting a form of therapeutic, rather than political, engagement:

> I see women being supportive of each other [on social media], but not in a moving forward kind of sense. (Tiger Drummond DN, UK)

> When someone does post a personal experience, you'll get someone responding, showing sympathy and stuff like that, but I don't think you've got the level of intimacy [of a face-to-face group], that obviously isn't there. (Cristabel Gekas DN, AU)

Women share distressing stories of abuse on social media, but it is very difficult for them to act when they are socially isolated from the women they are communicating with. Networks of atomised individuals cannot easily be translated into group confrontations with a woman's rapist when women's support networks are stretched across international borders, for example.

Immateriality, Temporality and Theory-Building

I have argued above that, unlike the common conversation created through the print culture of the WLM, social media promotes a fragmented and individualised worldview by making content algorithmically visible according to each women's preferences, likes and existing digital connections (Klinger and Svensson 2014, 1245). Activists working in the social media environment are unlikely to have seen or read the same movement material because 'automated feed editing' promotes 'some messages or users over others', dependent upon a user's previous activity (Baym 2013, n.p.). The reverse chronological appearance of social media posts, as well as the opaque influence of algorithms (Greenfield 2018, 252; Tufekci 2015, 206) also severely impedes women's ability to follow the historical development of a discussion in digital space. In this section, I discuss the barriers to feminist theory-building in digital space.

Interviewees felt that platform architecture impedes theory-building and productive debate because it is very difficult for women to ensure that they have read all the relevant contextual information regarding the topic at hand. Posts that garner the most traction (positive or negative) remain at the top of timelines, rather than the most recently posted or the most relevant contribution. Some comments also get hidden (or nested), and on Facebook users have to click 'see comments' to view the entirety of a thread. Lierre Kieth (WLM, USA) found Facebook discussions difficult to follow because 'there are nested comments that you don't even see […] you can scroll for 10 minutes and not find the thing you are looking for, and then when you find it you are not even sure you have read all the comments'. Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ) also said that digital discussion easily gets 'skewed' because women 'react immediately to what's in front of them […] they just go off on tangents and the original issue gets lost quickly'. The sharing functionalities of social media provide a further impediment to the process of theory-building. Words can easily be taken out of context and enforced spatial limits also encourage women to dilute entire bodies of work into 280 character soundbites. Activists can tag other women in Facebook posts, or reblog and retweet articles

without limit, but these functions offer few interpretative cues. Reposting, for example, could signal either agreement or disagreement with the sentiment of an article. Alanna Inserra (DN, AUS) explained that liking a post 'can mean that you are wholeheartedly behind [the sentiment of an article], it can mean you want opinions on it, it can mean you agree with part of it, or identify with it personally but don't believe it applies to others […] it's hard to know the intention'. The sheer bulk of content on social media also makes it difficult for women to have any knowledge of the intellectual development of the women they are interacting with, and they cannot be sure that she has read the contributions of other women in the group. This lack of basic background information raises the question of whether Facebook groups or Twitter networks are too disparate for facilitating serious analysis and debate. Social media promotes an ideology based upon strength in numbers and visibility, and feminist Facebook groups now often have hundreds of members. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, the Facebook group structure facilitates exponential growth, which raises key issues surrounding activist accountability (Clark-Parsons 2018, 2130).

Fast-paced social media temporality can inhibit the process of critical reflection that was so integral to the feedback loop of the WLM. Scholars such as Robert Hassan (2009, 160–163) have highlighted the crucial role that the availability of spare time has historically played in intellectual processes such as reflection, critical analysis and the working through of political problems. To remain dynamic, social media demands the constant production and sharing of content by users. Finn Mackay (DN, UK) described this as an incessant privileging of 'freshness and newness' on platforms. For individual users, this means they must cope with trying to process large and constantly shifting volumes of information quickly. This problem is now receiving increasing mainstream attention, with writers beginning to highlight the flow on problems of dependence on digital media, such as 'less attention and time [being] allocated to slower, time-demanding deep reading processes, like inference, critical analysis and empathy, all of which are indispensable to learning at any age' (Wolf 2018).

Interviewees were concerned that activists' ability to do what Lierre Keith (WLM, USA) called 'long form thinking' is diminishing. Keith

said that social media constantly interrupts women and pulls them in different directions:

> You are not getting a living community [on social media], but also part of what that entails is a relationship with yourself, a life of the mind. [Women] can't have that with something that is so ephemeral and so constantly distracting.

> Chris Sitka (WLM, AU) offered a similar analysis:

> That kind of fragmentary "blah, blah, blah, blah, blah", how do you go into depth? […] I know my life of activism has been about chewing ideas over, thinking about them in depth, talking about them in depth, so that they can develop. And I can't really do that if I am fragmented.

Sitka only follows a few Facebook pages because she finds it counterproductive to spend her 'whole day flicking through all this stuff that is coming up'. She said that keeping on top of social media newsfeeds made her 'lose focus' and restricted her ability to 'develop campaigns'. Younger interviewees such as Meghan Murphy (DN, CA) also conceptualised social media as a distracting space that impedes long-form thinking. Murphy felt that 'attention spans are smaller than they used to be'. She said: 'I count myself as having a very short attention span and a lot of that has to do with how we read and engage online, and just the amount of time we have'.

Critical internet scholars have also argued that social media promotes passivity in users because it facilitates the sharing and liking of content above critical engagement (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 13; van Dijck and Poell 2015, 3). This was a commonly held perception amongst interviewees. For example, Chris Sitka (WLM, AU) said:

> I send something to someone [online] to read, and they write back and they say, "oh yeah, that was good", but by the time I see them [in person] again, we've moved on. We don't have time to discuss what actually inspires us.

As I explained in Chap. 3, the excitement of women together in a room functioned to push ideas forward and inspire activists. Older interviewees did not use the same emotive language to describe their social media engagements. Sitka, for example, said that WLM conferences were 'incredibly exciting, because women would stand up and make impassioned speeches about ideas and you'd go "oh, yes!"'. By contrast, she said that 'some exchange is happening on the internet', but ideas are not 'being pushed very far', with women largely 'just monitoring what is going on'. Susan Hawthorn (WLM, AU) was of a similar opinion, highlighting that without the back-and-forth immediacy and excitement of a face-to-face discussion, she was likely to 'just have some half-baked idea and put it on a Facebook page and just leave it at that, [not] go anywhere else with it'.

Interviewees also linked the evanescence of social media content to the decline in analytical rigour that they had perceived in some digital feminist writing. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) suggested that social media is theoretically stagnant in comparison to WLM publications. Jeffreys pointed to the immateriality of digital content when justifying this view:

> [Blog posts] always seem to go over the same old ground, I do not see very exciting ideas being developed there, I really don't, and anyway you can't because a blog post disappears the next day after a few comments on it.

Kathy Scarborough (WLM, USA) said that while women do produce 'some really good, well-reasoned, well-argued pieces' on digital platforms, she believed that digital content can be more accurately characterised as filler material because bloggers post 'too often for the material that they have'. Scarborough described how, when she tried to raise the issue of frequent posting producing lacklustre content in one of the feminist groups she is involved in, she was told that posting five times a day was necessary, else the group became invisible in timelines. Carol Hanisch (WLM, USA) also said that 'the blogs are very thin', and that while digital self-publishing had removed some editorial barriers, the trade-off is that women 'get clobbered with so much stuff'.

These above impressions demonstrate how organising in digital space binds women to social media logic, a phenomenon Geert Lovink and

Ned Rossiter ([2018](#), 15) have called 'working for the timeline'. Al Garthwaite (WLM, UK) also suggested that 'in the days where paper was our only written medium, women would write at greater length, and more analytically'. This perspective was also supported by younger interviewees, who highlighted how the pressure to constantly post affected their ability to commit to a period of reflection before writing:

> If I think of a great hashtag, or a great way of putting something, I'm like, get it out there, quickly, quickly, get it out as quickly as possible! […] I suppose the medium encourages you to do that because the turnover is so fast. (Finn Mackay DN, UK)

For some activists, constant posting is not only time-consuming, but also 'exhausting' (Rachel Long DN, USA). The burden of frequent posting creates unnecessary and additional work for activists, which can have deleterious effects on theory-building. Of particular concern is how working for the timeline *takes time away* from other activist pursuits. As Scarborough (WLM, USA) said: 'I do kinda wonder, when the good things are wading in all these other secondary or worse quality pieces, are we really doing ourselves a favour?'

Individualised Versus Collective Theory-Building

> Women talking together is really where [ideas] are created, in the movement, women talking. And it isn't women on their own pondering. And I don't think it ever could be with something like [developing feminist theory]. (Tiger Drummond DN, UK)

Older interviewee respondents described how working in small groups enabled WLM activists to build critical analysis into the process of thinking and writing. In this way, women could collectively debate the relative advantages and disadvantages of choosing particular phrases and advancing particular ideas, and critical feedback was expected. Linda Bellos (WLM, UK) said that it was unusual for WLM activists to write position papers without testing their ideas out with other movement women: 'I cannot recall anybody simply writing a paper off the top of their head,

without discussing'. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) also said that, in the WLM, activists 'would have held a workshop' or 'put out a paper' to float new ideas. According to Jeffreys, face-to-face organising provided a useful way of quelling rogue perspectives before they were widely spread amongst other movement women.

On social media, conversely, off the cuff opinions carry more weight than they do in face-to-face deliberative settings: they can go viral before being subjected to critical interrogation by other movement women. Interviewees perceived collective-based theory-building to be more difficult in digital space, and they suggested that one reason for this was that individual women control their own pages or sites and are under no obligation to respond to critiques. In other words, a blogger never has to defend her thesis. Some interviewees characterised blogs as sites of 'one-sided dialogue': 'an author publish[es] something [and] commenters engage in the comment section [but] it's largely up to the author of the piece to what extent they engage' (Alanna Inserra DN, AUS). Samantha Berg (DN, USA) also described blogs as 'very top down'. These perceptions reflect the findings of critical internet scholars who have argued that blogs are more hierarchical than collaborative, functioning to foreclose rather than promote contestation: 'with the blog, you can comment but you cannot post [and] your comments might even be taken down' (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 40).

Archiving Digital Feminism

> Not having a historical understanding of a political movement is a recipe for disaster. (Susan Hawthorne WLM, AUS)

The immateriality of social media content instils a new barrier between women and their ability to access their own political history. In contrast to the sense of seriality produced through the production of feminist newsletters (Beins 2017), digital activists struggle to compare their ideas with those documented in tweets written only the week before. Not only does social media temporality impede women's ability to develop feminist theory, but it also means that the work done on social media is not

being preserved for future feminist generations. As Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ) said: 'Facebook has no history'. Interviewees pointed to a lack of historical awareness that they had observed amongst digital feminism. Linda Bellos (WLM, UK) was of the opinion that feminist ideas today are 'not predicated on what went before' and that often women 'seem utterly ignorant' of movement history. Susan Hawthorne (WLM, AU) also believed that 'one of the big problems today' with digital organising 'is the trashing of anything that happened more than 10 minutes ago'.

It is difficult to understand how social media is a useful medium for advancing feminism when women are prevented from accessing their own history and have very limited means through which to preserve their intellectual work. Social media event pages are distinct from older communicative forms such as posters: they are designed to disappear as soon as the event is over. Some scholars have conceptualised tweets, Facebook posts and digital event pages as 'ephemeral ephemeras':

> Once these events are over, the messages linked to them disappear into the electronic dustbin and become of interest only to the researcher or the abnormally curious, not to mention very difficult to retrieve. (Gerbaudo 2012, 166)

When advertised in material publications such as WLM newsletters, event notices and position papers could be preserved so long as women kept copies. Social media, conversely, actively obliterates the past, and the preservation and archiving of what now comprises over ten years of digital feminist work is no longer under women's control.

Records of digital feminism are owned and controlled by male-owned corporations, making the preservation of feminist ideas dependent upon both the functional working of digital servers, and male benevolence. Although not visible to the average user, past tweets do remain in Twitter's archive. Men can now sell feminist content back to women at a considerable price (see Terranova and Donovan 2013, 308–309). Given that women are not as economically secure as men, and nor are they as technologically proficient (Hurwitz 2017; Wajcman 2000), trying to maintain a digital feminist archive is a significant new problem for activists

(Withers 2015). Interviewees explained how the preservation of feminist ideas is extremely difficult in digital space. Finn Mackay (DN, UK) said: 'you can't physically save these records […] when someone puts something really well in a tweet, or someone posts a blog and you think "oh that's a good way of explaining that", it's very hard to save those things'.

Another problem is that social media discourages women from sharpening their organising skills outside of the parameters of engagement set by platforms. The immateriality of social media spaces also places entire feminist networks under male control. Even though digital content is vulnerable to being deleted by platform or group moderators, many activists do not develop the skills to maintain their own records. As social movement scholar Joan Donovan (2013, n.p.) has explained:

> While automating information collection and network building leads to increased productivity, efficiency and a larger reach, it also produces a false sense of information security which stalls some activists from sharpening basic skills of organizing.

In this way, social media lulls women into a false sense of security: it facilitates quick connections and the building of large networks, but women become less willing to do the hard work associated with collecting contact details and maintaining autonomous organising lists (Donovan 2013). Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter (2018, 161) have also made this point: social media users might be 'hyper-informed', but most have 'no clue about the basics of self-organization'.

Problems for Feminist Action

I have argued throughout this chapter that the qualitative shift in how temporality is produced and experienced in the era of time-space compression has been detrimental to women's ability to organise for their liberation. Interviewees suggested that social media holds limited potential for reviving the WLM because the medium encourages women to bypass the process of consciousness-raising and theory-building and participate in immediate and often reactionary forms of action. In direct

contrast to this view, social media has been conceptualised as a revolutionary technology based upon its potential to quickly facilitate tactical over strategic actions, such as the rapid mobilisation of diverse individuals in public spaces (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Castells 2012; Mendes 2015; Sancho 2014). Yet the rapid mobilisation of diverse groups of women, in and of itself, does not necessitate that they have done the intellectual work crucial to movement-building. Neither does it mean that they will begin to build a common agenda across differences and find ways to move forward collectively from having participated in a protest march.

As I explained in Chap. 3, WLM activists were not only shoulder-to-shoulder at occasional protest events, but they were also constantly around each other whilst engaged in the daily tasks of movement-building. Getting women to the picket line, in other words, was only one small part of the WLM. It might have happened at a slower pace, but, prior to the emergence of digital networks, WLM activists had already developed 'effective […] ways of getting [the word] out' (Al Garthwaite WLM, UK). Al Garthwaite described how WLM activists used phone trees to mobilise women:

> A share house […] with a number of feminists would be at the top of the tree, because the chances [were] that someone would be [home] if somebody rang in with the message that there was a demonstration coming up on Saturday. And then the top of the tree would then ring two other houses, that maybe had two women on the phones. They would then ring others and so it would go down […] everyone would probably be ringing two people, and there would be women living on their own. And at that time, [the phone] didn't go through to voicemail, so you would have to keep trying.

Women also endeavoured to reach activists without access to a phone: 'for women who were not on the phone, someone living nearby would go and put a note under their door' (Al Garthwaite WLM, UK). According to Garthwaite, this meant that, in the end, everyone in the activist network would be informed about the upcoming event. Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ) also praised phone trees for their efficiency. In comparison

with postering, which Rankine conceptualised as a 'geographically bound' form of event promotion, phone trees in New Zealand enabled WLM activists to reach geographically dispersed and regionally based women. Rankine felt that using social media to try to mobilise women does not provide 'the same sense of interaction and collectivity that you get if you have regular meetings and a phone tree'. She said: 'with a phone tree at least you are actually talking to someone else. And you can have a discussion on the phone about things, if you miss the meeting'.

Several interviewees suggested that social media has not created a space in which feminist theory and practice can easily co-exist. They said that when women do act today, they have often bypassed the processes of consciousness-raising and theory-building. Some activist groups in the WLM wrote critically about what they termed 'a cult of spontaneity' within the movement (Radical Lesbian Front [1981] 1988, 475). For example, a French group called the Radical Lesbian Front ([1981] 1988) were concerned that some women were prioritising immediate response over strategic action. Interviewees expressed similar concerns. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) described digital feminism as 'a weedy plant' without a theoretical basis. She said: 'if women [on social media] are anti-porn, they are just sort of anti-porn, there are no reasons why they are, there is no development of theory around that'. According to Jeffreys, social media produces 'a colourless activism' divorced from considerations of theory. She said: 'a lot of women, […] particularly today, they do activism without the press release […] there is no point in that, everybody has to know exactly why you're doing it, and it has to fit in [theoretically], you know?'

In contrast to the problem of taking immediate action that is divorced from theoretical considerations, other interviewees highlighted the issue of activists engaging in perpetual digital conversations without ever acting. Some women drew on the metaphor of a constantly moving spinning top to describe this phenomenon. Tiger Drummond (DN, UK) said that social media promotes conversation that goes 'round and round and round' without any impetus for women to draw conclusions from their discussions. Distinct from my account of feminist spiralling outlined earlier in the chapter, interviewees suggested that social media pulls women into a constantly spinning conversational orbit that produces a

sense of paralysis, what Anne Kaun (2017, 5) has called 'frenetic stand-still'. Julia Long (DN, UK) said that digital feminist debates are characterised by a kind of reactive circularity that disrupts the possibility of forward momentum. She explained how, whenever someone famous says something about feminism or women, major online media platforms instantly respond. Feminist bloggers then scramble to write blog posts critiquing each other's interpretations of the mainstream media reporting, endless streams of comments appear under the blogs and women then share and dissect screenshots of these conversations in closed/private Facebook groups. Long said that this reactive behaviour causes a problem for movement-building in that it creates 'little whirlpools' of distraction which absorb activist energy: 'before you know it, this one little comment [from a celebrity] has generated all this […] hot air and no one is reading [radical feminist theorists] Kate Millett or Marilyn Frye or anything with any depth'. Long's account provides an evocative example of how social media participation is geared around reaction to patriarchal society, rather than women working to set their own agenda. Caitlin Roper (DN, AU), who works for a feminist organisation that campaigns against the objectification of women in advertising, also characterised feminist social media engagement as reactive: 'most of the time it is just like, forget strategy, we are just trying to stay on top of things'.

Social media temporality also complicates feminist decision-making processes. Writing at the time of the WLM, activist Pamela Allen (1970, 18) discussed the political importance of placing temporal boundaries around discussions, outlining clear tasks and setting goals for meetings. While the dominant ideology conceives of social media as a facilitator of instant conversations, instantaneity remains dependent upon human, rather than technological factors. As interviewees explained, social media can take more time than face-to-face conversations because women must keep checking back to see if they have received a reply. Anne Billows (DN, UK) discussed how there is a gap between posting a question or comment and waiting for other women in the group to respond. She argued that this incites addictive behaviours that further bind women to social media:

[There is] that addictive quality: the separation from, like, you say something, and you have to wait for a response, so you lose so much time, you know? Answering to each other, there is nothing immediate about it, and so, [social media is] really addictive.

Women waiting for a response are likely to keep checking their accounts, and this can produce a sense of addiction that results in them spending more and more time on social media. The mode of engagement that Billows described above is distinct from that which occurs in face-to-face meetings, where women can more easily control temporal boundaries and consensus can be achieved in the room. In a face-to-face setting, if an organising issue is raised, women are compelled to discuss it then and there. Billows explained this difference: 'you go [to the meeting] at a given time, and so from 6–8 pm you have this meeting, and you prepare for it [and] it has restricted time, [women] know what we are meeting for and we know what we are going to discuss'. According to Billows, the temporal boundaries produced by face-to-face conversations make women feel more secure than they do on social media: in physical space, there is a conversational endpoint. Billows believed that 'endless debates' in Facebook groups are not politically productive because they 'suck up a lot of time' and women are 'less likely to stay after a while [because they] lose interest or [they] move on'.

Another problem social media has caused for feminism is that, even when women do come together in women-only spaces today, the logic of digital networking continues to shape their praxis. The impetus to post constant digital updates annexes their time and redirects their attention towards engaging with a wider (male) audience. For example, women participating in protest marches simultaneously produce and post social media content (Chamberlain 2016, 463; Mendes 2015), and it is now popular for activists to live stream or live tweet meetings and conferences. Feminist speakers also frequently include a Twitter handle on presentation slides and provide audience members with pre-determined hashtags. Some social movement scholars have argued that it is this dynamic between the simultaneous use of social media for feminism in conjunction with 'embodied activism' that is definitive of the so-called fourth-wave moment (Chamberlain 2016, 463). The contemporary activist

practice of live broadcasting feminist events exists in stark contrast to the importance allocated to women-only organising during the WLM, and the push to consistently engage with a wider (male) audience on social media makes it more difficult for women to access the revolutionary properties of women-only space. This is because their focus and their time is annexed towards producing synchronous mediatised accounts of their embodied experiences, which result in further profits for male-owned companies as well as questionable benefits for feminism.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that women's use of social media for feminist organising contributes to fuelling, rather than challenging, the dominant social order that makes women time-poor. Given that the obstruction of women's free time is a political resource crucial to maintaining male dominance (Henley 1977), this raises serious questions about the political efficacy of women's participation in digital feminism. I have also highlighted the negative effects of using social media as a space for theory-building, consciousness-raising and planning for action. The drive to digitally share increasingly personal truths produces a distortion of feminist thought and theory; the personal remains personal, rather than being analysed as a vehicle for moving to collective-based theorising or to launch collective action. The bulk of content on social media also dulls rather than sparks women's anger; it encourages passive engagement with ideas rather than active movement-building. In the next chapter, I investigate further the limitations of using social media for movement-building, from the standpoint of feminist ethics.

References

Allen, Pamela. 1970. *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*. New York: Times Change Press.
Bassett, Caroline, Sarah Kember, and Kate O'Riordan. 2020. *Furious: Technological Feminism and Digital Futures*. London: Pluto Press.

Baym, Nancy K. 2013. Data Not Seen: The Uses and Shortcomings of Social Media Metrics. *First Monday* 18 (10): n.p.

Beins, Agatha. 2017. *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Bennett, W. Lance, and Alexandra Segerberg. 2012. The Logic of Connective Action. *Information, Communication and Society* 15 (5): 739–768.

Blee, Kathleen. 2012. *Democracy in the Making: How Activist Groups Form*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brownmiller, Susan. 1999. *In our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*. New York: The Dial Press.

Bruley, Sue. 2013. Consciousness-Raising in Clapham: Women's Liberation as 'Lived Experience' in South London in The 1970s. *Women's History Review* 22 (5): 717–738.

Bunch, Charlotte. 1978. *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Cammaerts, Bart. 2015. Social Media and Activism. In *The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society*, ed. Robin Mansell and Peng Hwa Ang, 1027–1034. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Cardea, Caryatis. 1985. The Lesbian Revolution and The 50-Minute Hour: A Working Class Look at Therapy and the Movement. In *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures*, ed. Jeffner Allen, 193–218. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Castells, Manuel. 2012. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Chamberlain, Prudence. 2016. Affective Temporality: Towards a Fourth Wave. *Gender and Education* 28 (3): 458–464.

Chesler, Phyllis. [1972] 1997. *Women and Madness*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.

Clark-Parsons, Rosemary. 2018. Building a Digital Girl Army: The Cultivation of Feminist Safe Spaces Online. *New Media and Society* 20 (6): 2125–2144.

Crossley, Alison Dahl. 2017. *Finding Feminism: Millennial Activists and the Unfinished Gender Revolution [Electronic Book]*. New York: New York University Press.

Daly, Mary. 1978. *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press.

———. 1993. *Outercourse: The Bedazzling Voyage*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Dean, Jodi. 2005. Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics. *Cultural Politics* 1 (1): 51–74.

———. 2016. *Crowds and Party*. London: Verso.

———. 2019. Communicative Capitalism and Revolutionary Form. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47 (3): 326–340.

de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Donovan, Joan. 2013. Occupy 3.0—A Slow Network Movement. *Waging Nonviolence*, September 18. https://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/occupy-3-0-slow-network-movement/

Firth, Rhiannon, and Andrew Robinson. 2016. For a Revival of Feminist Consciousness-Raising: Horizontal Transformation of Epistemologies and Transgression of Neoliberal TimeSpace. *Gender and Education* 28 (3): 343–358.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.

Friedman, Elisabeth Jay. 2007. Lesbians in (Cyber)Space: The Politics of the Internet in Latin American On- and Off-Line Communities. *Media, Culture and Society* 29 (5): 790–811.

Funke, Peter Nikolaus, and Todd Wolfson. 2014. Class In-Formation: The Intersection of Old and New Media in Contemporary Urban Social Movements. *Social Movement Studies* 13 (3): 349–364.

Gerbaudo, Paolo. 2012. *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Greenfield, Adam. 2018. *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*. Brooklyn: Verso.

Hanisch, Carol. [1968] 2000. A Critique of the Miss America Pagent. In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow. New York: New York University Press.

———. [1973] 1978a. The Liberal Takeover of the Women's Liberation Movement. In *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, 163–167. New York: Random House.

———. 1978b. The Personal is Political. In *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, 204–205. New York: Random House.

Happonen, Tove. 2017. Making the Political Personal: How Psychology Undermines Feminist Activism. *Feminist Current*, December 21. https://www.feministcurrent.com/2017/12/21/making-political-personal-psychology-undermines-feminist-activism/

Haraway, Donna. [1984] 2000. A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, 291–324. London: Routledge.

Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hassan, Robert. 2009. *Empires of Speed: Time and the Acceleration of Politics and Society*. Lieden: Brill.

———. 2012. *The Age of Distraction: Reading, Writing, and Politics in a High-Speed Networked Economy*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Hawthorne, Susan. 1999. Unstopped Mouths, and Infinite Appetites: Developing a Hypertext of Lesbian Culture. In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, ed. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, 384–405. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Henley, Nancy. 1977. *Body Politics: Power, Sex and Nonverbal Communication*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Hirsch, Eric L. 1990. Sacrifice for the Cause: Group Processes, Recruitment, and Commitment in a Student Social Movement. *American Sociological Review* 55 (2): 243–254.

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia. 1988. *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Value*. Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies.

Hollaback! 2015. Annual Report 2014–2015. https://www.ihollaback.org/app/uploads/2016/12/HollabackStateoftheStreets2015-compressed.pdf.

Hurwitz, Heather McKee. 2017. From Ink to Web and Beyond: U.S. Women's Activism Using Traditional and New Social Media. In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, ed. Verta Taylor, Holly J. McCammon, Jo Reger, and Rachel L. Einwohner, 462–483. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jeffreys, Sheila. [2005] 2015. *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*. London: Routledge.

Kaun, Anne. 2017. Our Time to Act Has Come: Desynchronization, Social Media Time and Protest Movements. *Media, Culture and Society* 39 (4): 469–486.

Keen, Andrew. 2007. *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture and Assaulting Our Economy*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Keller, Jessalyn Marie. 2017. #MeToo Campaign Brings Conversation of Rape to the Mainstream. *The Conversation*, October 25. https://theconversation.com/metoo-campaign-brings-conversation-of-rape-to-the-mainstream-85875

Kitzinger, Celia, and Rachel Perkins. 1993. *Changing Our Minds: Lesbian Feminism and Psychology*. London: Onlywomen Press.

Klinger, Ulrike, and Jakob Svensson. 2014. The Emergence of Network Media Logic in Political Communication: A Theoretical Approach. *New Media and Society* 17 (8): 1241–1257.

Leonard, Eileen B. 2003. *Women, Technology, and the Myth of Progress*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Levina, Marina. 2012. Our Data, Ourselves: Feminist Narratives of Empowerment in Health 2.0 Discourse. In *Cyberfeminism 2.0*, ed. Radhika Gajjala and Oh. Yeon Ju, 13–28. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Lorde, Audre. [1981] 2007a. Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference. In *Sister Outsider*, 114–123. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

———. [1981] 2007b. The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism. In *Sister Outsider*, 124–133. Berkeley: Crossing Press

Lovink, Geert, and Ned Rossiter. 2018. *Organization After Social Media*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia.

Mackinnon, Catharine. 1987. *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses On Life And Law*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

———. 1989. *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Mansbridge, Jane, and Aldon Morris, eds. 2001. *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subject Roots of Social Protest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McKinney, Cait. 2015. Newsletter Networks in the Feminist History and Archives Movement. *Feminist Theory* 16 (3): 309–328.

Megarry, Jessica. 2017. Why #metoo is an Impoverished Form of Feminist Activism, Unlikely to Spark Social Change. *The Conversation*, October 30. https://theconversation.com/why-metoo-is-an-impoverished-form-of-feminist-activism-unlikely-to-spark-social-change-86455

Mendes, Kaitlynn. 2015. *Slutwalk: Feminism, Activism and Media*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mies, Maria. [1986] 1998. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Millett, Kate. [1969] 1972. *Sexual Politics*. London: Sphere Books Ltd.

Miriam, Kathy. 1998. *Re-thinking Radical Feminism: Opposition, Utopianism and the Moral Imagination of Feminist Theory*. PhD thesis. University of California, Santa Cruz.

Morgan, Robin. 1977. *Going too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist*. New York: Random House.

Motta, Sara, Cristina Flesher Fominaya, Catherine Eschle, and Laurence Cox. 2011. Feminism, Women's Movements and Women in Movement. *Interface: A Journal For and About Social Movements* 3 (2): 1–32.

Oliver, Pamela E., and Hank Johnston. 2000. What a Good Idea! Ideologies and Frames in Social Movement Research. *Mobilization* 4 (1): 37–54.

Plant, Sadie. 1998. *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture*. London: Fourth Estate.

Radical Lesbian Front. [1981] 1988. Feminism and Radical Lesbianism. In *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 472–484. London: Onlywomen Press.

Raymond, Janice. 1986. *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection*. London: The Women's Press.

Sancho, Guiomar Rovira. 2014. Networks, Insurgencies and Prefigurative Politics: A Cycle of Global Indignation. *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 20 (4): 387–401.

Sarachild, Kathie. 1978a. Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon. In *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, 144–150. New York: Random House.

———. 1978b. Psychological Terrorism. In *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, 57–61. New York: Random House.

Spender, Dale. 1995. *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Tarrow, Sidney. 2013. *The Language of Contention Revolutions in Words, 1688–2012*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Terranova, Tiziano, and Joan Donovan. 2013. Occupy Social Networks: The Paradoxes of Using Corporate Social Media in Networked Movements. In *Unlike Us Reader: Social Media Monopolies and their Alternatives*, ed. Geert Lovink and Miriam Rasch, 296–311. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.

Thompson, Denise. 1994. Defining Feminism. *Australian Feminist Studies* 9 (20): 171–192.

Tufekci, Zeynep. 2013. 'Not this One': Social Movements, the Attention Economy, and Microcelebrity Networked Activism. *American Behavioral Scientist* 57 (7): 848–870.

———. 2015. Algorithmic Harms Beyond Facebook and Google: Emergent Challenges of Computational Agency. *Colorado Technology Law Journal* 13 (2): 203–218.

van Dijck, José, and Thomas Poell. 2015. Social Media and the Transformation of Public Space. *Social Media + Society* 1 (2): 1–5.

van Zoonen, Liesbet. 2001. Feminist Internet Studies. *Feminist Media Studies* 1 (1): 67–72.

Wajcman, Judy. 2000. Reflections on Gender and Technology Studies: In What State Is the Art? *Social Studies of Science* 30 (3): 447–464.

Whittier, Nancy. 1995. *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Withers, Deborah. 2015. *Feminism, Digital Culture and the Poltics of Transmission: Theory, Practice and Cultural Heritage*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Wolf, Maryanne. 2018. Skim Reading Is the New Normal. The Effect on Society is Profound. *The Guardian*, August 25. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/25/skim-reading-new-normal-maryanne-wolf

6

'It doesn't feel as transparent and accountable': Social Media and Feminist Ethics

> *[We need to have] philosophical and practical and ideological discussions*
> *about how we get to where we want to be.*
> —Linda Bellos WLM, UK

Radical feminist theory is both oppositional and utopian (Miriam 1998; Raymond 1986): oppositional in the sense that it must identify social reality and critique it, and utopian in the sense that it must also advance a moral imagination that envisions how the world *could be* once women are liberated from male dominance. From a radical feminist perspective, certain actions and behaviours can be judged as unethical if they perpetuate the oppression of women and shore up male supremacy (Thompson 1994, 173). In the pursuit of prefiguring a feminist world, WLM activists engaged in heated debates pertaining to the politics of the personal. Based upon their recognition that revolution was not only dependent upon the dismantling of male social structures, but also upon women's rejection of relations of dominance within feminist communities (Hoagland 1988, 22), activists developed 'codes of ethics and ways of behaving towards

---

Quote in chapter title from Linda Bellos (WLM, UK)

each other' to 'live the revolution now' and try to ensure that women's personal lives were congruent with their political theorisations (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK). In this chapter, I consider whether the moral values embedded in social media are compatible with women's liberation. To do so, I draw upon the body of primarily lesbian feminist theoretical work pertaining to feminist ethics that entered some US-based feminist philosophy departments during the 1980s and 1990s.[1] This scholarship provides the framework through which I critically investigate the recent claim that social media facilitates feminist community-building and non-hierarchical, collective-based organising practices (Crossley 2017; Evans and Chamberlain 2015, 406; Shaw 2012; Zimmerman 2017).

Lesbians were often the drivers of the politics of the personal in the WLM. Existing outside of the institution of heterosexuality made 'the lesbian perspective' particularly amenable to the task of both envisioning and actioning alternative social forms (Penelope 1992, 39; see also Miriam 1998, 272–274). Not all women in the WLM became lesbians, but lesbian feminists were crucial to instigating a 'radical social experiment […] designed to create a new world view based upon equality, cooperation and sisterhood' (Jeffreys 2018, 86–87). The development of a (lesbian) feminist ethic was considered fundamental to WLM organising, with both activists and scholars theorising a strong connection between ethics and politics (Card 1995, 71). I argue here that this connection between ethics and politics has been lost in contemporary forms of digital organising, which often fail to uphold key principles of a (lesbian) feminist ethic.

While some feminist social movement scholars remain largely positive about the possibility of egalitarian feminist community-building in digital space, others have suggested that the platforms reproduce divisive power dynamics between women (especially between white women and women of colour) (Risam 2015; Singh and Sharma 2019). Within the

---

[1] In the 1980s and 1990s, US-based lesbian feminist scholars such as Claudia Card (1991, 1995), Sarah Hoagland (1988, 1992), Julia Penelope (1992) and Janice Raymond (1986) drew on their activist experiences in the WLM to advance visions of lesbian ethics in an academic context. In the UK, feminists struggled to incorporate these ideas into philosophy departments, and debates about ethical issues such as lesbian sexuality and lesbian relationships were instead conducted in the pages of lesbian feminist journals such as *Gossip* (Jeffreys 2018, 87, 93).

discipline of critical internet studies, the idea that social media has promoted horizontal over hierarchical organising practices and facilitated deep connection between individuals has been more rigorously contested in recent years (Fuchs 2017; Lovink and Rossiter 2018). From this perspective, social media is not so much a technological accomplishment. Rather, platforms denote a specific arrangement of roles and responsibilities wherein interactions and connections between individuals are coordinated by both the platform architecture and the moral values of the society from which they emerged (Gillespie 2015, 2018; van Dijck 2013).

From a radical feminist perspective, the idea that social media coordinates relationships between users in specific ways suggests that the feminist community-building potential of digital space is likely to be limited.[2] As Chris Sitka (WLM, AU) pointed out in her interview, this is because communicating on social media binds women to modes of interaction which are directly derived from male-centric, rather than feminist, forms of engagement:

> All these mediums are run by these right wing, alpha male, young men. […] Young men are running the world, they are creating the technology. And they have no concept of how women see and experience the world. No empathy, and things like that. [Women] are using a form that is driven by these […] males!

According to critical geography scholars, just as social relations determine how individuals behave in a space, so too do spatial relations contribute to structuring social relations (Massey 1994; Weisman 1992). This suggests that the spaces that women use for feminist movement-building

---

[2] I do not attempt to define the concept of community in this chapter. Following Sarah Hoagland (1988, 3), I have chosen to be 'purposefully vague'. As Hoagland has explained, 'what I am calling lesbian community is not a specific entity; it is a ground of our be-ing; and it exists because we are here and move on it now'. In other words, feminist and lesbian feminist community does not exist because it has walls and can be enclosed and defined, it exists whenever and wherever women begin to relate to each other outside of male frameworks. As I will explain further below, feminist and lesbian feminist community provides women with 'a place of reference' for producing 'a source of meaning' that is oppositional to male culture (Hoagland 1992, 199). It is this space—or community—that makes the production of a feminist ethic possible. Social media impedes the possibility of women relating to each other outside of male frameworks and thus does not offer a suitable space for (lesbian) feminist community-building.

matter, because they play a role in shaping how women behave towards each other.

WLM activists strove to create a politically informed value system based upon principles of collectivity that could create space for women to recognise each other outside of male frameworks and begin to see each other as sources of inspiration, intellectual stimulation and potential romantic attachment (Card 1995; Hoagland 1988, 1992; Lorde [1978] 2007; Penelope 1992; Raymond 1986). These ideas were most commonly expressed through the discourse of sisterhood:

> Sisterhood came to be defined through independence from men as well as a relationship of horizontality amongst women, which was manifest in the efforts of feminists to work collectively and non-hierarchically (Beins 2010, 304).

The concept of sisterhood referred to both an organising praxis and an ethos of engagement between women based upon the values of cooperation and equality. By coming together and doing consciousness-raising, women realised that, despite their diverse experiences of male dominance, they shared a common oppression. They also realised that feminism started 'among the women' (Rowland and Klein 1996, 13) and that female bonding was crucial to women's liberation (Raymond 1986, 13). As I explained in Chap. 3, male dominance has been significantly upheld by the atomisation of women in the private sphere. It is for this reason that female friendship and feminist community-building are in themselves revolutionary pursuits.

Conversely, the use of social media does not denote a revolutionary pursuit for women. Platforms reward a combative and competitive style of interaction underwritten by male-centric culture, rather than genuine engagement based upon a feminist ethic of sisterhood. According to the women interviewed for this project, digital space does not facilitate the building of sisterhood in the same way that is possible in face-to-face organising contexts:

> I find the clarity of [face-to-face organising] kind of refreshing. Because most of the time, online, I don't feel that. I think there is a false pretence at

sisterhood that involves us compromising some really, really fundamental principles. (Julia Long DN, UK)

In contrast to the experiences of WLM activists—for whom participation in feminism often meant that they no longer felt at home in the male world, and as a result they were driven to create a new and oppositional organising culture—activists on social media remain firmly entrenched in male social norms. In this chapter, I make the claim that the use of social media for activist communication does feminism a disservice: it binds women to male culture and male modes of interaction. Communicating in digital space also restricts women's ability to advance a feminist ethic of engagement and access the revolutionary potential of female friendship. Whereas face-to-face communication and the use of print-based media enabled WLM activists to advance a culture and a politics that were both inseparable and intertwined, the value system promoted by social media is incompatible with feminist organising.

Feminist Utopia Is a Contested Vision

Before going any further, it is first necessary to make a caveat. In arguing that social media encourages women to interact with each other in ways that undermine, rather than promote, feminist community-building, I do not mean to imply that friendship and sisterhood were inherently easy ventures in the WLM. The task of imagining a world beyond hetero-reality is one that is inherently characterised by contestation (Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, 147; Miriam 1998, 196). Based upon its critique of existing social institutions and power relations, radical feminism dares to envision and put into practice new ways of life which promote women's liberation. Women have different ideas on the best way to achieve this. Activists came to the WLM from a variety of experiences and backgrounds (Taylor and Rupp 1993, 34), and, just as they had different ideas about the most politically effective organising methods, so too did they have competing visions of what feminist community and feminist modes of engagement should look like.

As several interviewees attested, significant gaps existed between the ideals of sisterhood and the behaviour of individual activists in the WLM. The process of building community was both exhilarating and emotionally fraught, and serious mistakes were made:

> [WLM activists] were really putting their politics where their mouths were […] they lived [their politics], with all the intensity, and fallings-out, and bitter hurt that came from that, and along with all the laughs and joys which also came from it. (Finn Mackay DN, UK)

Struggling together against male tyranny in autonomous face-to-face settings did not mean that all WLM activists became friends.[3] Even when women do come together without men, obstacles to female friendship are not instantly overcome (Hoagland 1988; Raymond 1986). One problem is that many women, even those who call themselves feminists, assume that there is little to be gained from female friendship (Raymond 1986). Women are socialised in male-dominated societies to distrust other women and to look to men for emotional fulfilment (Jeffreys 2018, 82; Raymond 1986, 151–153). Additionally, the subject of women loving women has been silenced historically (Jeffreys 1985, 103), which means that women have few role models from which to build an ethic of engagement between women based upon the values of sisterhood (Raymond 1986).

To be clear, my argument here is not that face-to-face interactions can implicitly facilitate harmonious sisterly relations between women, but, rather, that using social media for feminist communication creates an additional obstacle to pursuing female friendship and feminist community-building that women must now work through. Interviewees

---

[3] Many women withdrew from feminism in the WLM because other activists had so severely disappointed them. This experience does not negate the revolutionary possibility of female friendship, but it does highlight how severe the obstacles are. It is important to note that sisterhood is not premised on the idea that all women must become friends. According to Janice Raymond (1986, 173) such a notion 'violates all common sense' because, 'if all women can be friends, then no women are really friends'. Women need to develop the capacity to judge whether other women are potential friends, and to be discerning about where to invest their time and energy (Raymond 1986). As I argue in this chapter, women can best do this by learning to critically engage with one another in women-only physical space.

suggested that the ethical debates of the WLM have all but disappeared in the age of social media, where an ethos of individualism is promoted over collectivity:

> [In the WLM] there were ideas about being sisterly and supportive, and creating a reasonably warm community. Now I'm not sure that any of that exists, and how could it? There is no community now, everybody is out for themselves. And there are not these common understandings [around feminist ethics], there simply aren't. (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK)

If feminism is both a political and ethical project, then these perceptions raise important questions surrounding whether the WLM could be revived on social media.

Sisterhood Is a Revolutionary Pursuit

Relationships between women—or the ability of women to move towards each other—are fundamental to women's liberation. As I explained in Chap. 3, the atomisation of women in the private sphere has been a key historical factor underwriting their oppression. In her book, *A Passion for Friends*, Janice Raymond (1986, 13–14) argued that hetero-relational understandings of feminism obscure the 'necessity of female friendship as a foundation for and a consequence of feminism' because they frame feminism as a political movement that understands women only in relation to men and 'male definitions of equality':

> The origins of female friendship are the origins of radical feminism […] when women cease believing in the primacy and primordiality of hetero-relations, they will see that the first goal of feminism is not to bring women and men together but to bring women together. (Raymond 1986, 39)

Raymond (1986, 28) suggested that friendship between women 'invests the idea and reality of feminist community-building with a "moreness"' that has revolutionary potential. She called the movement of women

towards women *gyn/affection*. This idea was often expressed in activist literature as woman-identification (see Radicalesbians [1970] 1988).

The task of becoming woman-identified is prefigurative, because, as Raymond (1986, 240–241) has explained, if women turn their gaze away from men and towards other women, then they can stop fixating on men, and begin to create themselves for themselves. Until women do that, they will continue to be invisible to each other in hetero-relational society. Raymond (1986, 28) has argued that gyn/affection 'augments' organising processes and fuels movement development. Without gyn/affection, defined as deep understanding and bonding between women, '[feminist] politics and political struggles remain superficial and more easily short-circuited' (Raymond 1986, 29). Audre Lorde ([1978] 2007, 56) has made a similar point, arguing that women are powerful when they bond over a common pursuit and share joy. Sharing deeply 'forms a bridge between the sharers which can be used as a basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them and lessens the threat of their difference' (Lorde [1978] 2007, 56).

The idea that bonding between women provides the glue which makes feminism a social and political reality has also been reinforced by social movement scholars who have argued that feminist community-building is central to sustaining activist mobilisation, particularly in periods of wider cultural hostility (Friedman 2007, 793; Taylor and Rupp 1993). Lorde ([1978] 2007, 59) has also explained the relationship between feminist community-building and mobilisation:

> As a Black lesbian feminist, I have particular feeling, knowledge, and understanding for those sisters with whom I have danced hard, played, or even fought. This deep participation has often been the forerunner for joint concerted actions not possible before.

As I argued in Chap. 3, the creation of lesbian feminist community and culture was crucial to both political mobilisation and the development of oppositional cultural forms in the WLM. Gyn/affection, then, provides a crucial basis for the formation of feminist community and the political advancement of women's liberation through collective action.

Gyn/Affection and Digital Space: The Problem of Weak Ties

> Networks foster and reproduce loose relationships—and it's better to face this fact straight in the eye. (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 36)

> Even being a millennial, I think there is something missing without the face-to-face connection. (Mariana Borges Vanin DN, USA)

Radical feminist theory that foregrounds the revolutionary potential of female friendship provides a useful lens for critically analysing the limitations of trying to build feminist community on social media. Interviewees spoke passionately about their different experiences of face-to-face versus online communication. Several explained that one of the principal pitfalls of trying to organise in digital space is that women do not form lasting bonds which can be used as a basis for future mobilisations. Samantha Berg (DN, USA), for example, said: 'I've started to see that you can get things done [on social media], but then you have to start all over again the next time'.

The recent scholarly tendency to equate intimacy between individuals with electronic links promotes an impoverished vision of human connection. Examples of this type of reasoning abound in contemporary feminist social movement scholarship. For instance, Alison Dahl Crossley (2017, 97) coined the term 'Facebook feminism' to depict how Web 2.0 has 'significantly upheld women's feminist communities'. Within this vision of female bonding, communities are theorised to come into existence through digital networking practices. Heather Hurwitz (2017, 472) has also argued that 'young women build feminist communities by exchanging emails, posting comments about their blog posts, and through "blog rolls", a hyperlinked network of blogs'. Such a conception of female bonding confuses digital links with community: in Raymond's (1986, 28) words, it is a conception that lacks 'vitality and vision' because it fails to adequately understand gyn/affective friendship as the lynchpin of community life. It is difficult to see how women can begin to deeply understand one another and become woman-identified when they do not

meet face-to-face. Conceived from this angle, women's use of social media for feminist communication fuels the patriarchal political project of keeping women both separate from, and suspicious of, each other.

As the following quotes demonstrate, interviewees were of the opinion that social media produces a qualitatively different form of feminist connection, bonding and friendship than the sense of sisterhood that can develop when activists are spatially proximate over a sustained period:

> People can get some emotional needs met [on social media], but I think it's a very limited version of community. It's better than nothing, but there is nothing like sitting in a group, sharing bread together and really getting to know each other as full human beings, not from what you write on prostitution online. (Hilla Kerner DN, CA)

> This past year when I went to the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival* […] there [was] so much free time […] we had the time to get to know each other as people. [It's] not just a Facebook post of "hey, here's an article I wrote", which doesn't tell me anything about her. (Samantha Berg DN, USA)

These interviewee accounts are aligned with the perspectives of radical feminist scholars who have argued that gyn/affective friendship both takes time (Hoagland 1988, 112) and is embedded in the material world (Raymond 1986, 114). Susan Hawthorne (1999, 125) argued in the 1990s that 'feminist community cannot happen instantly, it relies on involvement, experience and memory'. In other words, community is reliant on material experiences that are collectively shared in the pursuit of common goals.

In the absence of face-to-face community, social media and digital networking practices can, however, act as a lifeline to other feminists. Either having lost or having never experienced the autonomous physical spaces of the WLM, interviewees expressed a sense of being starved of feminist community today. Tiger Drummond (DN, UK), for example, said that 'there are so many women I come across on the internet who are living in small towns who don't know anybody'. Other interviewees spoke about the sense of desperation and loneliness that this caused. Anne Billows (DN, UK) initially discovered feminist ideas online. She explained how

after she 'connected the dots' and formed an analysis of male dominance, her 'whole world just basically broke down' and then she 'was just desperately looking for anything and anyone who would see things the way [she] saw them'.

In the contemporary context, it is also understandable that women seek refuge from patriarchal society in the form of closed/private Facebook groups. Several interviewees characterised their digital connections as vital everyday support networks that enabled their survival in a cultural climate hostile to both radical feminism and women-only spaces. For example, London-based activist Julia Long (DN, UK) discussed how she initially experienced the discovery of feminist Facebook groups as a 'breath of fresh air' that helped her 'to survive in this hostile environment'. At the time of our interview, Long had been feeling out of place in her face-to-face activist circles, which she described as 'more mainstream, much more heterosexual, much younger than me'. Long was relieved to discover more like-minded women on Facebook, but she also explained how this enhanced her feeling of social isolation because she did not have access to this community in real life: 'I kind of felt I don't want to end up where I felt really remote and my life is all on the computer'.

Worldlessness Is Politically Dangerous for Women

Social media can provide a reprieve from women's social isolation in the absence of a feminist movement, but the medium remains politically insidious from a movement-building perspective because it promotes escapism based upon the transcendence, rather than the transformation, of material reality. As Anne Billows (DN, UK) explained in her interview:

> [Social media] just cuts you away from the world […] you have this secret group with who you talk radical feminism, [but this] cuts you from the world even more.

Dissociating from material reality is politically dangerous for feminism because women, as an oppressed group, have always been rendered worldless by men. Janice Raymond (1986, 152) has argued that women 'have

no state or geographical homeland and, in fact, no territorial ghetto or diaspora from which to act'. Writing decades prior, Virginia Woolf ([1938] 1986, 125) expressed the same idea: 'as a woman, I have no country'. One of the primary tasks of feminism is therefore to create space for women to come together in the material world: 'anything that militates against women's-being-in-the-world—against a female worldliness—undermines a strong female friendship that has political consequences, namely, Gyn/affection' (Raymond 1986, 152).

Although Raymond (1986, 153) was writing in a vastly different historical context, the insight that 'worldlessness produces friendlessness' is still applicable today.[4] As Anne Billows (DN, UK) explained, when women meet in physical women-only space, 'most often they become friends [...] they actually become a support network'. Billows said that this is 'not possible online' because digital participation promotes worldlessness: 'it doesn't encourage or help you to seek women in real life or even give tools for seeking women in real life. *It actually reinforces the opposite*'. Other interviewees also advanced this point of view. Tiger Drummond (DN, UK) stated that the internet 'creates so much opportunity' for isolated women to connect, but she also said that 'it is quite stagnant, to [try to] create activism from that is quite difficult'. Similarly, Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU) characterised digital participation as 'just a way of keeping in touch with radical feminists, but not actually pursuing anything'. Lierre Keith (WLM, USA) agreed with these perspectives. She said:

---

[4]Writing in the 1980s, before the advent of social media, Raymond was not referring to dissociation via digital escapism. Instead, she was highlighting that the tactic of separatism could be politically dangerous if women completely turned their back on contesting men's material power in favour of inward-focussed community-building. Debating the relative merits of various degrees of separatism feels out of touch with the contemporary political context and it is not a task that I take on in this book. Sheila Jeffreys (2018, 73) has recently explained how we are living in an era when women 'no longer [have] a WLM to support the practice [of separatism] and provide lesbian feminist community and culture'. During the WLM, the perceived danger of inwardly focussed separatist praxis was that women were participating in navel gazing at the expense of directly challenging male power. Today, dissociation from the material world is even more politically insidious because it sees women retreating into Facebook groups where their interpersonal behaviour and organising tactics are being shaped by male cultural norms.

> It's just a real toxic mimic of an actual community of actual friends. And when I see these women who are like "I would be dead without all my online friends", it breaks my heart, it really breaks my heart. Because, it's like, you have no idea what friends are, that's not friends. I'm not saying you don't care about each other in some way, but it's what they call a weak tie rather than a strong tie.

Keith went on to explain that social media connections can only ever be weak ties, because geographically dispersed activists 'are never going to sit face-to-face with [other] women and actually be in their lives, and do the grocery shopping, and take care of the sick child, and take them for cancer treatment, and watch them die, and make love, whatever'. By providing a space for geographically dispersed women to digitally interact in an environment surveilled by men, social media offers women a form of escapism built on disconnection from material reality. The political effect of this escapism is that feminists are discouraged from local community-building (see Hawthorne 2002, 363–364; Hawthorne and Klein 1999, 8).

Trust and Accountability

> Anonymity and mystery are not useful amongst one's people (Sarachild 1978, 53–54).

One of the primary reasons why social media precludes the development of a feminist ethic of engagement is because digital space is characterised by anonymity and immateriality. Platforms enable women to participate in feminist discussions without ever having to join a face-to-face collective or feel responsible to a collective constituency of diverse women. This coming together of women *as individuals* does not facilitate the feminist process developed in the WLM; it hinders rather than aids the building of sisterly relations.

Writing at the time of the WLM, Pamela Allen (1970) discussed how establishing trust was crucial to unlocking the revolutionary potential of consciousness-raising. She explained that trust develops over time and is produced when women materially fulfil their responsibilities to the

group: 'building trust is a slow process that grows through seeing each other live up to the commitments we make' (Allen 1970, 17). For Allen, trust was dependent upon women doing the difficult personal work of thinking through ideas before the meeting begins and taking the ideas of other group members seriously. Commitments such as regular meeting attendance and apologising in advance if a woman was unable to make it were important because 'no trust can develop if [women] cannot even trust that our group is a reality' (Allen 1970, 19). Sue Bruley ([1976] 1981) has also highlighted how developing trust is an integral part of the consciousness-raising process. The first rule in her group was 'absence understandable in cases of death, multiple injuries, or being away from London only' (Bruley [1976] 1981, 61).

Allen's and Bruley's insights about the importance of trust are useful for thinking through the barriers that immateriality poses to organising. Feminists using social media are under no obligation to respond to other women, participate regularly or attempt to behave in a sisterly manner: they are not beholden to the accountability mechanisms of the small group process. Some feminist scholars have suggested that accountability and trust are always compromised when women embark on large scale media production. For example, feminist newsletter networks in the WLM provided a point of centralisation for disparate activist groups as well as enabling women to communicate across national borders, but they also undermined the accountability mechanisms of local organising groups by facilitating 'far reaching, potentially anonymous and unaccountable participation' (McKinney 2015, 315). Elizabeth Friedman (2007, 791) has also made this point, arguing that while digital space provides an avenue for lesbians to find one another, it also presents 'new challenges' for organisers: 'internet-based communication, whether by email or through websites, can erode the delicate politics of accountability lesbian communities have struggled to develop'.

Digital anonymity causes significant problems in relation to trust and accountability. Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU) explained how it is difficult to 'draw the line between pseudonyms and what is real and what is not' on social media. While some monikers are clearly anonymous accounts, pseudonyms and real names can be difficult to distinguish (see van der Nagel and Frith 2015). Interviewees believed that an inability to

concretely discern a woman's identity is one of the key reasons why it is difficult to establish trust in digital space:

> I think sometimes people pretend as though [Facebook groups are] a safe space but there's still people that you don't know there. [I might have] seen your pseudonym a whole bunch, but I have no idea who you are and I can't trust you in the same way as a woman who I have met in real life. (Meghan Murphy DN, USA)

> I absolutely like to have stared into the whites of [women's] eyes. Unless I know who someone is, I cannot entirely trust who the hell they are. (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK)

Digital feminists are likely to respond to unknown women with suspicion. Anne Billows (DN, UK) had this experience when she first entered the feminist blogging world: 'nobody knew me at the beginning [and] there is always this suspicion about any new woman, that [she could be] a troll'. Alicen Grey (DN, USA) also said that women who ask genuine questions in an attempt to refine theory are often perceived to be trolling or 'attacking the movement'. Grey said she 'understands the defensiveness and some of the paranoia' of women, but she believed that activists 'need to have brutal conversations' and be able to ask questions without those questions being 'perceived as an attack'.

When an unknown woman does contribute to digital feminism, other activists are deprived of the material cues that give insight into her confidence and how much support she needs. For example, it took Anne Billows (DN, UK) 'a really long time to start commenting' on radical feminist blogs. She rewrote her first comment 'like a 100 times' and was 'really nervous' about posting it. When the blogger responded to her, the tone was 'really dry […] it wasn't nasty, but it was still hurtful'. This experience had a 'really big effect' on Billows, but, as she pointed out, 'there was no way [the blogger] could know that'. At a face-to-face meeting or conference, conversely, newcomers are clearly visible, which means that other women can easily reach out to them: 'at least face-to-face you can see that the woman in the corner hasn't spoken and you can ask her if she has anything to offer. […] if she doesn't, that's okay, but on social media,

you don't know that she is sitting in the corner' (Susan Hawthorne WLM, AU).

There is also an inherent inequality in digital conversations where one woman uses a real name and the other uses a pseudonym. This was a source of anxiety for interviewees. For Julia Long (DN, UK), using her real name on social media is vital both for promoting accountability and for productive critical debate: 'I want to have the [hard] conversations with women in a kind of direct way and if I've got an axe to grind with somebody [it's important] that they can see that it's me'. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) also felt that pseudonyms undermine accountability: 'if you don't use your own name you can say absolutely anything, you can change your pseudonym the next week, and that's a very, very dangerous problem politically, and a dangerous problem for trust'.

Personal Life Change and Digital Space

Another reason being physically around other women is politically important is because it promotes accountability to stated goals. Hilla Kerner (DN, CA) lives with other members of the Vancouver Rape Relief collective. She said:

> There is a price for [being physically together]. We are part of a collective. It means that we are challenging each other and we are asking each other to live with integrity, even when it's not related to our work. (Hilla Kerner DN, CA)

Strong friendship ties have been theorised as a crucial driver of the personal life changes that activists embarked on in the WLM. For many, it was important to innovate new cultural forms based on feminist theory, such as rejecting patriarchal beauty standards and choosing to forgo the oppressive institution of heterosexuality to live as a lesbian. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) explained how British WLM activists developed what she called a 'community of looks': 'feminists gave up make up, bleaching their hair, they mostly wore trousers, the hair of lesbians would probably be a bit shorter, but everyone had a certain look, you could tell the

lesbians because they'd all look very, very similar, at one time they all would have worn dungarees'. According to Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp (1993, 49), US-based WLM activists also developed a communal look based upon their critique of normative femininity: 'in the early years of lesbian feminism, comfortable, practical, less "feminine" style of dress, unshaved legs and armpits, and extremely short hair were de rigueur' (see also Whittier 2017, 382).

Although often derided as a politically derailing aspect of cultural feminism, feminist dress norms had political consequences (Taylor and Rupp 1993, 49–50; Whittier 1995, 141). Women's rejection of restrictive and objectifying clothing liberated them from the shackles of femininity and encouraged activists to adopt more assertive behaviours in everyday interactions with men (Jeffreys [2005] 2015; Whittier 1995, 141). Feminist dress norms also visibly demonstrated an activist's political aversion to *lookism*, understood as the idea that lesbians should not collude in men's objectification of women and should instead find new models for expressing sexual desire (Jeffreys 2018, 90–91). Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) explained that 'looking all the same was based on a developed politics against lookism, against make up as a tool of oppression, against the horrible humiliation of women through disgusting clothing'.

My interview data suggests that social media communication does not facilitate a similar process because it impedes women's ability to start 'living the revolution now' in their personal lives. Women are continually rewarded for their obedience to the cultural requirements of malestream ideology in digital space (Megarry 2018), and, when not materially surrounded by other feminists, they are provided with few incentives to shift their allegiances to women and adopt collective appearance norms aligned with feminist principles. Interviewees suggested that face-to-face autonomous engagement is fundamental to the development of a feminist culture based upon a rejection of beauty norms:

> [Women] are not in the same room as each other, that is the problem with online. If you were actually doing consciousness-raising, actually looking at each other, I think it would be a lot easier to say, okay, we are going to resist this. We are going to have a different aesthetic about being free, that is

about liking our bodies again. And I think that only happens in groups, it doesn't happen alone. (Lierre Keith WLM, USA)

I hear from a lot of young women [who are] trying to reject […] all these beauty routines that we've been doing our whole lives and trying to reject dieting and trying to reject marriage and even heterosexuality in general, which women obviously did in the second wave. I can't say if [women are doing it] more or less [today], but I mean, obviously, it's sort of easier to engage and have politics online without really doing anything in your personal life. (Meghan Murphy DN, CA)

The perceptions advanced in the quotations above were also reinforced by younger interviewees who had embarked on a process of personal life change only *after* spending time in women-only physical space. Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU), for example, explained how she began to reject some of the norms of conventional femininity after participating in a consciousness-raising group. She said that her choice to get a 'short haircut', 'get rid of makeup' and 'not shaving' were actions made possible by being around other women on the same political trajectory: 'being around [women] with hairy armpits […] you are validated and legitimised'.

From Physical Presentation to Digital (Re)Presentation

As several media scholars have now demonstrated, there is considerable pressure on women to produce and curate a digital self that is attuned to and reflects patriarchal ideals of normative femininity (Banet-Weiser 2018; McRobbie 2015; Nakamura 2015; Riordan 2001). Social media spaces provide a constant reminder to women that one of their key duties in patriarchal society is to be ornamental and exist for male pleasure. Women not only self-surveil (Dubrofsky and Magnet 2015; Kanai 2015; Megarry 2018), but they are also encouraged to self-objectify by sharing images in the pursuit of likes, follows and retweets (McRobbie 2015, 5–6; Nakamura 2015, 223). Interviewees characterised social media culture as 'very male-centric [and] driven by male desires' (Alicen Grey DN, USA). They suggested that this was an inhospitable climate for trying to advance a feminist culture. Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU), for example, felt

that representations and discussions of lesbianism are 'always going to be read as pornographic' on an image-based medium. Alicen Grey also felt that, so long as 'women live in conditions where they are made into objects in the real world', 'using an image-based platform to raise our voices' is 'playing with fire'.

If, as lesbian feminists have argued, we should understand women's outward conformity to femininity as 'survival choices' (Hoagland 1988, 50)—'the "choice" of embracing femininity and male authority in order simply to "get by" and survive' (Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, 53)—then it is harder in the digital environment for women to reject appearance norms. Platforms co-opt the revolutionary potential of women's rejection of normative femininity into a visual spectacle which fuels, rather than challenges, the dominant social order (Megarry 2018, 1079–1080). Even oppositional feminist appearance norms become vulnerable to the demands of digital commodity culture and are easily drained of revolutionary potential. For example, when transposed from a feminist context into commercialised digital space, collective strategies of resistance to patriarchal beauty standards can be easily recast as individualised and circumscribed fads performed for the male gaze, such as women posting photos of highly curated bushy eyebrows or dyed underarm hair.

Digital feminist community-building is not geared around women recognising each other outside of male frameworks, but rather towards public relationship-building in front of a wider (male) audience, both real and imagined (Baym and boyd 2012, 325). Interviewees suggested that while the women-only organising spaces of the WLM liberated women from the pressure of dressing for male consumption, communicating in digital space means that women's personal lives are continually offered forward for public opinion. Cristabel Gekas said that women posting photos of their hairy armpits on social media is 'deprived of [feminist] meaning' because 'the purpose of the act is completely different': it is geared around attention-seeking rather than building an oppositional, women-centric, feminist culture. Feminist media scholar Lisa Nakamura (2015, 223) has also argued that the public visibility of women's resistance to normative femininity on social media renders the act vulnerable to the 'significant pressure' placed on women to 'actively invite a sexualized gaze' in *self*-representational environments. Younger interviewees

clearly articulated the performative nature of social media relationship-building:

> [On social media] other people are watching your engagements […] it's not just about you engaging with that other person, it's about what other people are seeing and the performance that's involved. (Meghan Murphy DN, CA)

Some suggested that online social norms encouraged them to participate in sexualised behaviours geared towards male approval that they found easier to resist in face-to-face contexts. Alicen Grey, for example, said (DN, USA):

> As long as the internet is hyper-sexualised, I don't think the internet is a place to build a women's culture. In real life I don't feel the need to be flirty or to post selfies.

These interviewee perspectives evidence Sheila Jeffreys' ([2005] 2015, xxii) claim that 'the transformation of personal life that caused so many women to abandon beauty practices in the 1970s is a phenomenon best effected through women en masse, women who work in [face-to-face] groups together, socialise together, and create common styles and values'.

Feminist Ethics

Before setting out how social media embeds a male ethic of engagement within feminism, it is first necessary to outline the concept of feminist ethics. From a philosophical standpoint, a feminist ethic is distinct from a traditional (masculine) ethic. When studying the field of ethics, feminist scholars 'do not find a neutral, nor indifferent set of ideas, but ideas developed in specific contexts, laced with prejudices and hatred towards women' (Richardson 2019, 115). Traditional ethics begin from the point of view of the unencumbered male subject position where the individual has fraternal agency—or free will to act in his own self-interest—and exists in a society of brothers (Card 1995; Hoagland 1992; Pateman

1988). Situating women in this competitive one-on-one framework as isolated and unencumbered antagonists creates a problem for feminism. Doing so accepts the patriarchal lie that women's interests are inherently at odds and that women are inherently self-interested (Hoagland 1988, 76–77). Feminist ethicists have instead theorised how women could relate to each other as one *amongst many* in a cooperative community (Hoagland 1992, 201). Sarah Hoagland (1992), for example, has argued that a conceptualisation of lesbians as isolated individuals is antithetical to feminist revolution. Observing how women who break from heterosexuality 'have not sought to remain isolated', but rather have 'sought each other out', Hoagland (1992, 199) has highlighted that woman-identified women have often gone to great lengths to connect and share things with one another: 'from oppression to recipes, from resistance to outrageousness'.

The field of radical and lesbian feminist ethics denotes a philosophical attempt to move away from male ethical frameworks that are based upon strict rules and male subjectivity. Lesbian feminist ethicists have refused to strictly regulate how women should behave, choosing instead to appeal to women's capacity for moral discernment (Hoagland 1988; Raymond 1986; see also Dworkin 1978, 52). According to these scholars, the formulaic vision of right and wrong advanced by traditional ethical frameworks reveals a masculine desire to be secure in the knowledge that one is always doing the right thing. In other words, the focus on rules or principles in traditional ethical frameworks is based upon the male desire to control situations, which renders 'ethical virtues as we know them […] master/slave virtues' (Hoagland 1988, 11). The virtues of altruism and self-sacrifice, for example, contain inherent power dynamics: appealing to altruism assumes 'an inherent conflict of interest' amongst individuals (Hoagland 1988, 69), and, notably, the person expected to behave altruistically is usually the person lower in the social hierarchy. Wives, for instance, are often coerced into behaving in a self-sacrificial manner for the good of the family unit (Hoagland 1988, 75). This type of theorising forecloses the possibility that women could work together collectively across differences, because it understands human relationships as inherently hierarchically structured. Hoagland (1988, 11–12) has explained how the male conception of ethics as a set of formulaic rules functions to

crystallise women's oppression by reinforcing that individuals are obligated to act in certain ways towards 'those higher in the hierarchy (including gods)', and have a responsibility to act in certain ways towards 'those lower in the hierarchy, often "for their own good"'.

Having also recognised the pitfalls of traditional masculine ethics for women, some scholars have promoted visions of a feminist ethics of care (Gilligan 1993; Noddings 1984). A feminist ethics of care is based upon celebrating the 'feminine' values of nurturing and self-sacrifice, which are positioned as unique to women. Such a framework ignores how women's behaviour has been shaped in a context of oppression (Hoagland 1988). An ethics of care is also based upon a celebration of togetherness (Card 1991, 1995; Hoagland 1991, 1992). The political problem here is that the moral value of *togetherness with men* has often been used to justify women's subordination in heterosexual relationships. Lesbian feminism and radical feminism advance a different political project, one where separation from men has been valued positively, and produces novel possibilities (Card 1995, 77). Thus, the moral paradigm of 'caring' simply takes the nurturing role patriarchy has traditionally ascribed to women—motherhood—and renders it virtuous. It is for this reason that Claudia Card (1995, 77) has described an ethics of care as 'femin*ine* not femin*ist*, as not revolutionary, but, on the contrary, politically conservative'. Similarly, Hoagland (1992, 197) has argued that 'championing femininity doesn't change or even acknowledge the fact that men still own the scales'.

In the absence of existing ethical frames which they could draw on, lesbian feminist ethicists looked to lesbian lives to begin to imagine a new, *feminist* way of conceptualising care, cooperation and connection between women. Much of the scholarly work on feminist ethics thus far has been based upon analysing women's experiences of WLM organising (see Hoagland 1988; Raymond 1986). The women-only context of the WLM was conducive to the task of experimenting with an explicitly feminist ethic of relating because it provided a means for testing out new political forms and modes of feminist engagement. Through the daily tasks of movement-building, activists realised that feminists needed ways to work through 'conflict resolution and problem solving that draw upon care and respect' (Card 1995, 71), but that also do not fall into the

patriarchal trap of promoting an ethic of engagement based upon domination and control (Hoagland 1992, 202–203). The theoretical work of lesbian feminist ethicists has often been geared towards assisting women to work through ethical and political problems within feminist communities. Without a means to do so, feminists only end up 'destroying the organizations [that they] create' (Card 1995, 71).

I consider a feminist ethical framework to be one that attempts to advance a vision of connection between women that balances the needs of the community with the needs of the individual whilst also retaining a focus on politics (see Miriam 1998, 210). According to Hoagland (1988, 12), such a framework would 'invoke a self who is both separate and related, a self which is neither autonomous nor dissolved'. Lesbian feminist ethicists rarely give prescriptive rules for how this should look in practice. They have argued that it is in the pursuit of (lesbian) feminist revolution that women can generate the self-understanding crucial to the advancement of a feminist ethic of relating. For example, according to Hoagland (1988, 77), 'the function of [feminist] ethics […] is enabling and developing individual integrity and agency within community'. Hoagland positioned the development of feminist ethics as dependent upon feminist creativity and the ongoing choices that women make in the pursuit of common goals, rather than strict regulation or an appeal to formal rules (Hoagland 1988, 291; see also Dworkin 1978, 52–53).

Hoagland did not provide women with strict rules for how to behave in every situation. She did, however (along with other lesbian feminists), argue that the pursuit of a revolutionary feminist ethic would require women to resist and reject all models of behaviour that reinforce the heteropatriarchal values of dominance and submission. Hoagland (1988) recognised that women's moral agency is shaped by the context of oppression under which they live, and that power relations between women did not simply disappear when women became feminists or lesbians. Hoagland (1988, 67–68) and Julia Penelope (1992, 1–16), for example, contested sadomasochistic practices and butch/femme role playing in lesbian relationships from the ethical standpoint that they reproduced heterosexual power dynamics and diluted the revolutionary potential of women loving women. Other lesbian feminists also theorised that the type of sex women have matters in the pursuit of social

change. They understood that lesbians were not immune from reproducing patriarchal power dynamics simply because they were sexually involved with women instead of men (Jeffreys 2018, 135–138).

Women need space and time within feminist organising structures to develop their capacity to make context-specific moral choices. Following Alice Walker, Janice Raymond (1986, 172) has referred to women's capacity to make informed moral choices as 'the rigours of discernment'. Developing the capacity for moral discernment is a difficult task for feminists: too much order in organising structures can quell women's passion and energy, but a complete lack of organisation can also prevent the possibility of future collective political action (Raymond 1986, 109). According to Raymond (1986, 109), the crucial factor is that any established norms within feminist organising structures or feminist communities 'must be internally generated and established for women's purposes' rather than 'externally imposed by male authorities'. As I will argue throughout the remaining sections of this chapter, social media does not provide feminists with a setting conducive to the development of women's moral capacity. Instead, platforms force activists to engage with each other within parameters designed by men.

From Prefigurative Forms to a Male Ethic of Engagement

The micropractices of activist engagement matter, because they shape how movements evolve (Beins 2017, 67). In this section of the chapter, I argue that social media communication results in feminists absorbing male tactics of engagement. Social media has created new organising issues for feminists, and it has also further complicated old ones, such as the question of leadership. Before specifically analysing how social media is shaping women's organising tactics, I will first outline activist responses to issues of leadership and hierarchy within WLM organising structures. In doing so, I will also make the case that, while the existence of leaders within feminist organising is not inherently anti-feminist, activists do

need to advance a feminist politics of leadership that divorces leadership from notions of superiority and celebrity.

Feminism, Leadership and Hierarchy

Based upon a rejection of male political forms, WLM activists strove to create organising spaces that promoted collectivity. Consciousness-raising, for example, was seen as suited to a feminist ethic because 'anyone could do it' provided they had access to an autonomous meeting space (Hanisch 2010, n.p.). Attempting to resist replicating social and political forms that subordinate women to men, activists also strove to eliminate hierarchy within their collectives by rotating roles within groups, encouraging all women to contribute and initiating consensus-based decision-making practices (Beins 2017, 79). Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ) described how principles of non-hierarchical organising were put into practice when she was involved in producing *Broadsheet*, a monthly feminist magazine published between 1972 and 1997 in New Zealand:

> That was a big thing for us, as feminists organising in the 1980s: non-hierarchical. So, you have a collective that is deemed equal in status. And you don't have a chair and a secretary and a treasurer as you have to with an incorporated society. And what you do is you rotate roles within a collective group […] we rotated chairing, and we rotated note taking, and we had different amounts of power or different expertise depending on our roles.

According to historian Jeska Rees (2007, 62), 'women were trying to create an equality that would allow every woman to participate in the sharing of knowledge, the creation of theory, and the decision to take political action about women's issues'. This vision of revolution was based upon a rejection of hierarchy and the star-systems of male organising structures in favour of a praxis of collectivity and skill-sharing amongst women (Beins 2017, 79–80; Bunch 1978, 122). Activists believed that power should be shared and that feminist structures should create space for

'fostering in every woman the responsibility to develop her own capabilities' (Bunch 1978, 122).

In the early years of the WLM, the issue of leadership was hotly contested, with many activists demonstrating an aversion to formal structures based upon the idea that 'leadership was associated with hierarchy and hierarchy was seen as inextricably linked with the patriarchal domination of women' (Sawer and Merrindahl 2014, n.p.). Based upon their political critique of hierarchy, structurelessness came to be worshiped as the ideal form of organisation. However, many feminists have claimed that this had a debilitating effect on women's ability to politically mobilise (Bunch 1978; Freeman [1972] 2013). In her famous position paper 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', Jo Freeman ([1972] 2013, 239) argued that while 'unstructured groups may be very effective in getting women to talk about their lives; they aren't very good for getting things done' (see also Hanisch 2001; Whittier 1995, 97). Freeman ([1972] 2013, 237) also warned that governance by informal elites impeded accountability within feminist groups: 'because their power was not given to them; it cannot be taken away'. The danger of informal structures, she argued, is that 'decision making will be like a sorority', where ideas become evaluated according to the popularity of the author.

Despite the anti-leadership stance popular among WLM activists, leaders certainly did emerge. When women began to organise large-scale protests, the media sought out spokeswomen (Hanisch 2001; Sawer and Merrindahl 2014). Due to the lack of formalised structure, the hostile press could appoint or remove leaders as they saw fit (Freeman 1975). Hierarchies were also certainly present within small group collectives. Some interviewees, such as Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ), attributed this to individual 'force of character'. Jo Freeman ([1972] 2013) also famously argued that informal leadership manifests in social movements regardless of whether a formalised structure exists, and Pamela Allen (1970, 23) put forward a similar perspective in her treatise on the small group process. Allen stated that 'there is always a structure', thus 'the issue' for feminists is to 'consciously choose one that will encourage our growth rather than just hope that it will happen'. This line of argument was taken up by other WLM activists and scholars, such as Janice Raymond, who perceived women's belief in the political efficacy of non-hierarchical

organising structures to be misguided and dangerous for movement-building. Raymond (1986, 196) pointed to the fact that 'uncritical acceptance' of any doctrine can 'spawn a whole different set of injustices'. The issue of the use of pseudonyms within movement publications provides a good example here. Adherence to the idea of complete egalitarianism resulted in many women adopting pseudonyms in movement publications to avoid charges of 'stardom' by other activists (Rees 2007, 129). On the one hand, the use of pseudonyms functioned to both deemphasise the individual and communicate more broadly that feminist ideas were collectively developed (Beins 2017, 89). Some activists also promoted the use of pseudonyms on the basis that they made it more difficult for the media to 'latch on to particular feminists and attempt to elevate them to any sort of leadership role' (Bruley 2016, 726). Others, however, strongly critiqued the use of pseudonyms because they thought anonymity undermined activist accountability (Sarachild 1978; Jeffreys 1980).

Most women interviewed for this project questioned the political efficacy of the ideal of non-hierarchical organising. Carol Hanisch (WLM, USA) said that making non-hierarchical organising 'your goal' is 'a mistake' for activists. Writing elsewhere, she has argued that this is because, without accountable leaders, political movements are unable to 'unite, fight and survive' (Hanisch 2001, 77). Finn Mackay (DN, UK) also believed it is misguided to pretend that activist groups are non-hierarchical. Mackay said that groups should not be afraid to utilise individual activists based upon their abilities, but all women should also be encouraged to develop their skill set: 'I think you should blend a commitment to inclusion alongside strategic practicality'. Lierre Keith (WLM, USA) expressed a similar sentiment when asked if social media facilitated non-hierarchical organising:

> I don't think there is such a thing [as non-hierarchical organising] and I don't think online it's any better than in real life. There [are] always going to be more dominant personalities, and there [are] always going to be women who know more, and who do more […] There [are] always going to be leaders and that's not a bad thing. Having a leader is different to having power over somebody […] People have skills, they have talents, they

have knowledge, and we get that. [Women should] train others behind [them] that want to learn.

The political and ethical problem for feminism, therefore, is not so much that leaders emerge through the process of social movement organising. As Keith articulates in the quote above, leadership is distinct from power, and it holds other moral possibilities when taken outside of coercive situations (see Bunch 1978, 127).

A central problem for the WLM was how to develop an ethical framework that valued the contributions of all women, but also did not diminish those who displayed unique skills. Advancing an ethos of collectivity that promotes and puts into practice the idea that all women can participate is politically crucial, but so is acknowledging women's unique strengths. According to Janice Raymond (1986, 197), this is because 'no real power emerges from a group that silences its best and brightest voices for a false sense of group equality'. Some WLM activists and scholars argued that 'anti-leadership bias often hampered the growth of women by burying talents within group anonymity, and reinforcing stereotypes of women's weakness' (Bunch 1978; 122; see also Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, 147). They argued that women should 'value and encourage [leadership]' like they would other talents, but also that they must move away from the patriarchal association of leadership with superiority (Bunch 1978, 126). This vision would better suit a feminist ethic of one amongst many that I discussed above; it would create space for women to learn to value each contribution without trying to rank it. Leadership is one of the many skills necessary for movement-building, but ranking contributions can cause women to lose sight of the value of each participant (Hoagland 1988, 288).

Developing a feminist conception of leadership divorced from notions of superiority would also require women to actively reject the ideology of celebrity. In an article published in the *Revolutionary/Radical Feminist Newsletter* in 1980 titled 'Pseudonyms', Sheila Jeffreys put forward the view that the political problem with leadership lies not so much with women who display an individual talent, but rather with the behaviour of other women towards her. Instead of challenging women who display leadership through writing under their own name, Jeffreys argued that

activists should challenge 'the star-makers' who idolise well-known movement women:

> If there is a problem in the movement of the creation of stars then it is the tendency of women to create them that has to be dealt with. To say women should not write is like saying that women should not walk the streets at night because rapists may attack them. The problem is the rapist not the victim. (Jeffreys 1980, 14)

According to Jeffreys (1980, 15), challenging the 'star makers' and not the 'victim' would require all women to 'challeng[e] others when they speak of a particular woman with disproportionate respect and awe, or gossip about women they consider particularly important'. I will now turn to an analysis of how social media imbeds male forms of relating within feminism.

The Cult of the Star Blogger

Interviewees were concerned that activist visibility within the digital network—as quantified by followers, friends and retweets—is now translated as assumed organising experience and feminist leadership credentials. Carol Hanisch (WLM, USA) explained how social media produces stars in accordance with the celebrity values embedded in digital platforms: 'I mean, people get known, their names get known, but are they really leaders? Leaders of social media maybe, but not of a movement'. Mariana Borges Vanin (DN, USA) agreed with this assessment. She said that 'it gets complicated as to who is considered a thought leader [on] social media' because 'it [becomes] the person with more [celebrity] power relative to those with actual experience'. Alicen Grey (DN, USA) also said that 'popularity' on social media 'influences […] whether someone is considered a leader'. These perspectives suggest that the skills required to become well-known on social media are not necessarily aligned with feminist principles.

According to popular perception, the networked architecture of social media has lowered the barriers to becoming a speaker in the public sphere

(Benkler 2006). In relation to feminist organising, this claim warrants further investigation. Unlike print media, digital space is technically boundless: anyone with an account can speak. Being able to speak and being heard, however, are different things. Platforms force users to compete for attention in the form of digital visibility (Banet-Weiser 2018, 10; Tufekci 2013) and some women's contributions remain invisible to the network at large (Baym and boyd 2012, 322). As Zeynep Tufekci (2013, 849–850) has pointed out, attention is rarely analysed as a resource by social movement scholars, which means that the effects of its scarcity are easily overlooked. Social media can appear more egalitarian than it is because scholars often forget to consider that attention remains a finite resource, even in digital space (Hassan 2012, 9; Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 40; Tufekci 2013, 849–850). It is still only a select number of users that are widely followed, shared and heard, and women have no means of ascertaining which contributions they have missed. Within the digital content economy, people and ideas are rewarded with approval (likes, follows, shares), or are rejected by being ignored.

The values embedded in social media platforms fly in the face of a feminist ethics of engagement based upon principles of collectivity. Social media promotes a hierarchical form of engagement whereby individual activists control their own pages and can set the agenda for acceptable topics of discussion. In contrast to the organising structures of the WLM, social media does not promote a flat structure in which all activists are understood as equal and are given equal space to contribute. Lynne Harne (WLM, UK) felt that the face-to-face conferences of the WLM facilitated egalitarianism in a way that is not possible on social media: 'we gave papers at conferences; it was a more democratic way really'. The amateurism of WLM newsletters also created an organising climate which consistently encouraged all women to participate. WLM print culture advanced the ethos that all women can, and should, participate, and made visible mistakes such as typos. As Agatha Beins (2017, 67) has explained, these 'signifiers of amateurism' conveyed 'that even those who were not professionals or experts could participate in the publishing process [and] see themselves as potential writers, editors, and distributors of feminism'.

Conversely, norms of competitive neoliberal self-governance urge users to cultivate a 'digital self-brand' across platforms (Scolere et al. 2018), and this has had significant implications for activist pursuits. Not only does social media encourage individual women to compete with each other for digital visibility, but it also instructs them to curate a public self that obfuscates imperfections. Feminist activists are not immune from the digital imperative of vying for visibility in the network or competing for likes. Both younger and older interviewees explained how the individualism promoted by social media negates any possibility of an ethos of collectivity developing between activists. Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ) said: 'I actually think that what Facebook and social media do is [construct] a collective made up of individuals who are all talking to themselves'. According to Lynne Harne (WLM, UK), 'a lot of [social media] is just all about self-promotion and not women working collectively together'. Julia Long (DN, UK) suggested that women who 'have their own brand to defend' on social media become 'very defensive' when challenged or critiqued. Amy Richards (DN, USA) also felt that social media encourages women 'to put themselves forward' and develop their own personal brand: 'social media is about branding […] and sometimes that *you* is an issue'.

In addition to issues of self-branding and perfectionism, Silicon Valley executives now work tirelessly in the pursuit of 'mediat[ing] and monetiz[ing] everyday life to the maximum possible extent' (Greenfield 2018, 283). Political scientist Anna Yeatman (2014, 87) has argued that a feminist acceptance of the technological is unethical because it aligns the movement for the liberation of women with the norms of patriarchal culture. By using social media, feminists embrace an 'instrumental individualism' where they make themselves 'available as individual units of calculable performance' (Yeatman 2014, 87). One recent example of the way that Facebook harnesses women to 'the adrenalin-rushed rhythms of fast, managed performance' (Yeatman 2014, 93) is the 'conversation starter' merit badge now pinned to some women's profile pictures (Rosales 2018). 'Conversation starters' are women who consistently post content that receives a response, or, in Facebook's words, those who are creating the most 'meaningful social interactions' on the site (Wagner 2018). It is difficult to understand how Facebook could adjudicate between

meaningful and non-meaningful conversation in any way that is useful or relevant to feminists. The 'conversation starter' feature is antithetical to a feminist ethic of engagement because it perpetuates the notion that some women's words should be paid attention to and promoted above others.

Networked Microcelebrity Activism

It is quite astonishing that there is—to my knowledge—little literature explicitly critiquing the use of social media by feminist activists from the standpoint that it encourages, rather than contests, the adoption of male forms of engagement between women.[5] This could be because social institutions have often buttressed male power by absorbing and diluting activist radicalism. For example, feminist radicalism devolved when WLM activists moved into academic positions or got jobs in the media (Firth and Robinson 2016, 347). Historian Barbara Epstein (2009, 381) has explained this phenomenon in relation to academic careers:

> Feminists in the academy […] have often become caught up in the values of the university […] the pursuit of status, prestige, and stardom has turned feminist and progressive values on their head. Instead of the sixties' radical feminist critique of hierarchy, we have a kind of revelling in hierarchy and in the benefits that come with rising to the top of it.

The notion of 'revelling in hierarchy' aptly describes women's use of social media for feminism. In the WLM, activists such as Kate Millett were heavily critiqued by other movement women for not being accountable to any collective constituency and for purportedly seeking attention.[6] No

---

[5] For scholarship that explores how platform logics reinscribe oppressive structures of racism, ableism and misogyny within feminism see Jessie Daniels (2016), Safiya Umoja Noble and Brendesha M. Tynes (2016) and Rianka Singh (2018).

[6] Kate Millet was elevated by the media to the position of movement spokeswoman following the publication of her doctoral thesis, *Sexual Politics* (Jeffreys 2011, 78). Published in 1970, *Sexual Politics* was the first book-length exposition of radical feminist theory. Millett quickly became a national figure: she was put on the front cover of *Time Magazine* and was also described as the 'principal theoretician and new high priestess of the feminist wave' in a two-column profile in the *New York Times* (Brownmiller 1999, 148). Millett's status as media star, however, was short lived: within four months she was stripped of her role as spokeswoman by a media industry that became

similar broad-based critique seems to be developing today of the phenomenon that Zeynep Tufekci ([2013](#), 850) has called *networked microcelebrity activism*. According to Tufekci ([2013](#), 850), networked microcelebrity activists are:

> Politically motivated noninstitutional actors who use affordances of social media to engage in presentation of their political and personal selves to garner public attention to their cause, usually through a combination of testimony, advocacy, and citizen journalism.

On social media, feminists compete to publicise their cause to a wider, *non-movement* audience, but they also compete for visibility within their own 'internal movement publics' (Tufekci [2013](#), 859; see also Singh and Sharma [2019](#)). The problem is that achieving visibility within digital activist networks relies on women absorbing and complying with the patriarchal values embedded in social media.

A good example of this is the algorithmic promotion of images over plain text posts. Some feminists try to game the algorithm by constructing memes comprised of an author's face overlaid by a quote. Such a tactic might enable a woman to achieve visibility for her post in timelines and feeds, but it also promotes what Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) called the 'hero-worship' of networked microcelebrity activists. The architecture of social media encourages women to look at and remain focussed on certain idolised activists, but not in such a way as to become woman-identified. Women watch each other as they wait for new posts or updates, but they remain geographically isolated. They are not privy to the insecurities, flaws and personal struggles of other women that would become naturally apparent if women became friends in real life. This digitally mediated form of engagement promotes a logic of detachment and a culture of friendship-as-watching that impedes women's ability to build gyn/affective relationships.

The proclamations of love and general adoration that are commonplace on social media would also have grated harshly with the feminist

---

increasingly hostile once she became tainted with lesbianism (Brownmiller [1999](#); Poirot [2004](#)). The media's ability to appoint and discard feminist leaders continues to be a problem for feminism today.

politics of anti-lookism and anti-stardom that activists developed in the WLM. Interviewees discussed how a culture of praise proliferates amongst grassroots digital feminist activists: 'there is this whole thing of women saying, "she's amazing, she's amazing", going on about individuals' (Julia Long DN, UK). Here, the revolutionary potential of gyn/affective friendship is reduced to a kind of mutual digital backscratching that increases the visibility of the tagged parties within the network and encourages feelings of exclusion in other women. Regardless of individual intentions, interviewee accounts reveal that the praise women bestow upon each other in digital space is often read as disingenuous or over the top by other women viewing the exchanges. Digital validation in the form of likes, retweets and positive affirmation from other women cannot be equated with gyn/affective bonding or a feminist ethic of engagement.

While WLM respondents were more likely to problematise the hero-worshipping of individual activists on social media, younger interviewees were also troubled by it. Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU) explained how women endeavour to attract the attention of networked microcelebrity activists, such as Meghan Murphy (owner and creator of the popular blog *Feminist Current*), and feel briefly validated when they do:

> You might have people retweeting [you], but it's a very ephemeral sense of achievement without substance. Even though you might get retweeted by Meghan Murphy, it doesn't mean anything […] you get two minutes of "woohoo!"

Some activists experience a sense of achievement when well-known feminists pay attention to them, but this feeling is ultimately transitory and does not easily translate to meaningful relationship-building. Gekas' quote also highlights how social media feminism pivots around the behaviour of microcelebrity networked activists, which further calls into question the political efficacy of trying to advance an ethic of collective organising in digital space. Alicen Grey (DN, USA) is another interviewee who described her feelings of discomfort with 'some of the hero-worshipping' she had experienced in Facebook groups. Grey's writing has appeared on the blog *Feminist Current*, and one of her articles, 'You've heard of Rape Culture, but have you heard of Pedophile Culture?', had

been shared 236,200 times by August 2020. Following this digital exposure, Grey described how 'someone made fan art' of her which 'freaked her out'. At the time of our interview, Grey was taking a break from social media to 'figure out to what degree I'm comfortable with being known, or having expectations put on me for how to represent the movement'.

Practices of digital hero-worship also have the politically insidious effect of enabling women to abdicate their own personal responsibility to participate in feminist organising. In a digital environment fuelled by celebrity culture, Al Garthwaite (WLM, UK) worried that newcomers might be hesitant to get involved in debates and instead think 'oh well, I can't really participate, not with the great so-and-so in the argument'. Tiger Drummond (DN, UK) echoed this sentiment. She believed that the social media logic of followers and career feminism 'negatively affect[s] real-life feminist interactions, where people are so in awe of the people that they […] don't feel able to criticise them'. The networked promotion of women based upon individual popularity is difficult to reconcile with a feminist ethic based upon values of collectivity. Alicen Grey (DN, USA) said that 'there was a time where I was getting some crazy amount of likes on my comments and I didn't even say something new, I just rephrased something I heard somewhere'. When some activists are rewarded based upon their microcelebrity status over the quality of their contribution— 'there are some women who can post "bit cloudy outside" and get 100 likes' (Julia Long DN, UK)—other women become less likely to feel that they can participate.

Trashing and the 'No Personal Attacks' Policy of the WLM

Face-to-face organising enabled WLM activists to develop a new, women-centred culture of engagement. One key principle was that activists should debate ideas without personally attacking individuals. *Broadsheet* magazine in New Zealand and the *London Women's Liberation Newsletter* in the UK are just two of the periodicals that developed explicit policies stating that debate was to be kept to the level of ideas. This 'no personal attacks' policy was common across the print culture of the WLM, and

interviewees explained how it was also enforced at face-to-face meetings and conferences: 'you could only discuss the ideas, you must not attack the person […] if there were transgressions of this, women would get shouted at, somebody would say: "that's a personal attack!"' (Sheila Jeffreys WLM, UK). Lynne Harne (WLM, UK) spoke about the stark differences in activist culture then and now: 'I see women [make personal attacks] over and over again on Facebook, they make huge nasty personal attacks on women because they disagree with their politics'. WLM activists often called this type of behaviour *trashing*, which Charlotte Bunch (1978, 124) has defined as 'a type of verbal attack that includes both *personal* and political criticism'. Bunch argued that trashing was aimed at bringing a woman down rather than 'changing her behaviour, or developing a means of constructive criticism'. Personal attacks on social media take a similar form, but digital technologies provide activists with the means to publicly expose and ridicule other movement women at a scale which would not have been possible in the WLM.

Promoting Combative Behaviour

Instead of being a sisterly and supportive environment, interviewees characterised digital feminism as competitive, combative and distressing. Anne Billows (DN, UK) said that 'women on the internet would blow up all the time, it was really, really violent, and [they] would say really harmful mean things on the internet […] that they would never say to a woman face-to-face'. Lierre Keith (WLM, USA) also explained how she finds digital feminism 'very painful':

> All that ever happens [in Facebook groups] is a fight, and then another fight, and then another stupid fight […] and then [women] hate each other and then there is some kind of war of unfriending [and then] this one blocked that one [and] then somebody screenshots it and sends it along […] I just hate it.

Keith now limits her involvement in feminist Facebook groups to those which organise face-to-face events, rather than those that exist for the sole

purposes of digital discussion: 'I find the discussions upsetting and destructive, and they don't give me anything, they drain me'. Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU) also characterised social media conversations as draining. She suggested that social media primes women to behave in an antagonistic fashion: 'I've only been doing social media for like 3 months maybe, and it's […] hard, like really hard […] mentally very draining. And it also makes you on the defence all the time, [I feel like] I'm in a Twitter battle all the time'.

Attempting to grow a movement entirely online means that activists are likely to model the behaviour they see on social media. Platforms also present women with certain modes of dispute resolution, configured simply as the option to block, delete or mute those that they do not agree with. Blocking promotes a method of engagement based upon the formation of smaller and smaller 'echo chambers' or 'walled gardens' which reinforce established group perspectives (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 120). As Lynne Harne (WLM, UK) said, 'all of these [social media] group things and chat things just keep you in your own space, your own bubble'. The creation of activist echo chambers creates problems for theory-building, as I discussed in the last chapter, and they also impede women's ability to deal with interpersonal differences. Anne Billows traced the difficulties she experienced organising in digital space to a widespread inability to deal with conflict as well as an authoritarian culture where women running highly visible blogs 'treat other women with contempt' but never 'see the effects of what [they] are saying on women in real life'. She said that women who are not involved in face-to-face groups fail to develop the interpersonal skills crucial to effective organising: 'what was problematic about […] the kind of women who were attracted by anonymous blogging [was that they] were extremely isolated women, and most of them had no experience of organising [face-to-face] with other women'.

Surveilling Each Other

Social media exposes women to omnipresent male surveillance, and feminist activists are also cognisant that their every interaction is visible within the activist network. Interviewees discussed how feminists use social

media to surveil each other. Permanently captured and easily shared, critique of a woman's behaviour or of her ideas takes on a different dimension in digital space than it could in a small group or at a conference. Alicen Grey (DN, USA) characterised Facebook groups as 'pretty effective in terms of giving women a place to talk and to stay informed', but she also spoke negatively about the culture of engagement: 'there was a lot of screenshotting things women had said elsewhere and picking it apart'. The culture of screenshotting and sharing images from closed/private groups in other digital spaces is now commonplace amongst activists (Clark-Parsons 2018, 2134–2136), and interviewees spoke about how women often keep digital files on each other. In the digital environment, mistakes or perceived transgressions are often publicly punished and, insidiously, women being spoken about can view what would once have been a private conversation. Alicen Grey (DN, UK) recalled a situation where she wrote something contentious on her Facebook wall: 'a lot of people started responding to [my post] on their walls and […] I think they forgot I'm right here, I can see what you are saying about it'. Grey perceived this behaviour as 'passive aggressive', and she was annoyed that women had chosen to publicly speak about her rather than talking to her directly. Julia Long (DN, UK) also said that the surveillance properties of social media make digital feminism 'feel like […] a minefield' to navigate: 'there are all these different factions and divisions and women unfriending you because you have someone on your friends list […] and god forbid you go to an event organised by someone someone's got an issue with!'

The Digital Pile-On

Encouraging other women to pile-on another user is also a common tactic of digital feminist engagement. Women post in closed/private feminist groups to alert other activists that they have entered into a digital argument and request help to 'win' the fight. Alicen Grey (DN, USA) provided an example:

> I have a friend online who will message me if someone is attacking her on her page for saying something trans critical, and I'll jump in and help her, I'll start debating for her.

The idea that feminists ganging up on each other might cause other women to change their minds on contentious issues is incongruent with the small group process developed in the WLM. Rosemary Clark-Parsons (2018, 2134) has recently described this kind of behaviour as women 'call[ing] for backup fending off bigotry in discussion threads'. While women helping each other in debates could be viewed as a form of supportive sisterly behaviour, it is difficult to see how pile-ons are aligned with a broader feminist ethic, or to understand how they differ from men's use of social media to engage in 'semi-coordinated campaign[s] of online abuse and harassment' (Salter 2017, 247). Social media has enabled activists to antagonistically harass each other at all hours of the night and day, beyond the scope of what would have been possible if women disagreed in a face-to-face context. Not only is the digital pile-on a waste of women's energy, but it is also further evidence that feminists are now playing into, rather than challenging, male cultural norms. The culture of digital bombardment via @mentions reflects norms of masculine aggression and male modes of engagement which directly contradict a feminist politics of sisterhood based upon cooperation and equality.

The Closed Facebook Group: From Free Spaces to Safe Spaces

Because women participate in closed Facebook groups as atomised individuals, much more work—or moderation—is needed to try to ensure that digital spaces remain operational as sites of feminist discussion. Recent social movement studies scholarship has discussed this problem using the language of 'safe spaces' (Clark-Parsons 2018; Fotopoulou 2016; Lewis et al. 2015). Rosemary Clark-Parsons (2018) has positioned digital safe spaces—in the form of closed feminist Facebook groups—as both the modern incarnation of the women-only free spaces of the WLM and an extension of the separatist tradition. Although often presented as

ideologically aligned (see Crossley 2017; Firth and Robinson 2016), safe spaces are not politically equivalent to the free spaces of the WLM. According to Clark-Parsons (2018, 2129), digital safe spaces are groups 'formed with the intention of cultivating closed-off, separatist, safe spaces, whose protective boundaries filter harassment and foster open dialogue about questions, topics and concerns marginalized within the public sphere'. As I have argued in this book, it is ideologically incongruent to understand women's use of a male-owned, male-controlled digital platform as an extension of the WLM's praxis of autonomous organising. To understand Facebook as a container housing an autonomous feminist community is nonsensical; it confuses separatism with assimilation and reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the politics of women's liberation.

Promoting closed Facebook groups as safe spaces is not conducive to the development of feminist forms of conflict resolution. It also stifles women's ability to develop interpersonal skills fundamental to movement-building. The concept of feminist safe spaces has historically received substantial critique from radical feminist scholars. For example, in their book charting how the rise of therapy and self-help negatively influenced lesbian feminist communities in the 1980s, Celia Kitzinger and Rachel Perkins (1993, 147) described how lesbian communities devolved from places of contestation geared towards creating new political possibilities to become internally focussed 'safe spaces' where women could retreat from patriarchal society to seek solace and avoid painful contestations:

> Lesbian friendships and lesbian communities are now supposed to be places of safety, where we bind each other's wounds, listen to each other's feelings, and help each other to recover from the damage inflicted upon us in a toxic world.[7]

Kitzinger and Perkins argued that communities which aim to provide safe spaces fail to value individual talents and skills and instead celebrate

---

[7] This quote goes on: '[Lesbian communities] are not, of course, *actually* quite like that [...]. More often they have been vital and exciting, alive with outward-directed plans and projects, often exhilarating, demanding, exhausting, sometimes riven by conflict, competition, backbiting, exasperation, envy, lovers' disputes and irreconcilable political differences'.

incompetence. Contestation is stifled in this environment, because any disagreement is seen to further endanger women's fragile state of mind (Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, 142). Kathy Miriam (1998, 223) has also critiqued the politics of safe spaces from the point of view that safe space discourse promotes the securing of safe space as the end goal of feminism. Within this framework, Miriam (1998, 228) warned that 'the stakes are no longer resistance but (an idea of) "safe space"'.

Related to the discourse of safe spaces, trigger warnings are another manifestation of digital feminism that functions to shut down critical debate. Initially emerging as a phenomenon of the online world, trigger warnings are frequently used on blogging platforms such as Tumblr (Bell 2013). Commonly issued at the beginning of a social media post (or preceding a lecture or a speech in educational settings), they are intended to flag that the writer or speaker will touch on content that someone may find upsetting (Rentschler 2014, 76). Lenore Bell (2013, 36) has charted how trigger warnings in queer Tumblr communities expanded from their initial use. At first, they were used to flag discussions of sexual violence. Soon, however, they included flags for content pertaining to 'cissexism' and 'racism', even when the post was not promoting these behaviours, but rather critiquing them. According to Bell, trigger warnings have a counterintuitive impact: often, they function to discourage the participation of users who would likely benefit from engagement with such content. Bell (2013, 37) has argued that trigger warnings create communities of victims: 'in their attempt to shield the community [they] are more likely to increase feelings of fear and victimisation'. Angela Nagle (2017, 73) has also highlighted how a 'culture of suffering, weakness and vulnerability […] is enacted in spaces like Tumblr'. Some radical feminist digital communities have absorbed the discourse of safe spaces, and its associated use of trigger warnings. Julia Long (DN, UK) gave an example of safe spaces rhetoric being used to shut down debate. Long had been involved in an argument on Facebook, after which she was deleted from the group by the moderator. According to Long, she was removed because the woman she disagreed with had complained that 'she can't be in the same space as me […] just seeing my name come up triggered her'.

The Facebook Moderator

Maintaining the sanctity of closed Facebook groups has become one of the primary tasks for activists working in the digital environment. This drive is best exemplified through the figure of the moderator. Moderation is a time-consuming task for women, particularly in large groups. Some interviewees questioned whether the moderation of digital spaces was a productive use of activist energy. They also indicated that, without a dedicated moderator, digital groups could easily become hostile and nasty spaces. Samantha Berg (DN, USA) felt that moderation was necessary to offset unaccountable participation:

> There is a value in reliable, trustworthy leadership. Especially online […] when you don't know who you can trust, and who is telling you what story. I have come to appreciate [moderators].

Alicen Grey (DN, USA) also said that the success of a digital group could be traced to the quality and frequency of moderator intervention. For Grey, the most productive digital conversations occurred in tightly controlled spaces where 'the mods are much stricter about not making fun of women [and] if you start any sort of name-calling or gossiping you get banned'.

Moderation may be a necessary feature of digital groups, but it also instils a fundamental structural inequality between activists:

> Some people have to manage the [Facebook] page. And so, the people that manage the page have more power than the people who just comment on it, or read it, or use it for catching up. And they can block people, or delete people, or edit. (Jenny Rankine WLM, NZ)

The election of a Facebook group moderator is not democratic. The woman who starts the group automatically controls group membership; she is able to screen which content is made publicly visible and she can decide whether or not to assign moderating privileges to other users (Clark-Parsons 2018, 2140). Women who write blogs also retain exclusive control over their spaces and the conversations that can be had in

them, unless they chose to delegate authority. This concentration of digital publishing power around one individual activist can cause significant problems for feminist organising, especially when blogs and Facebook groups become popular. Unilateral decision-making cannot be held to collective account because there is no built-in mechanism that allows group members to challenge the authority of moderators. Once blocked from a group, group activity disappears from an activists' timeline, and she cannot search for it (Clark-Parsons 2018, 2140). Even more insidiously, moderators can also erase all evidence that a confrontation ever took place by deleting content. This lack of transparency generated considerable anxiety amongst interviewees. Julia Long (DN, UK) explained how in one group, women did not respond to a post she had written asking for clarification around recent decision-making, and her comment was then deleted:

> I was searching for [my comment], it didn't even come up searching for it, I'd been totally booted out. So, does that not seem pretty sinister? I'd raised this thing and I'd been booted out of the group!

Long's experience demonstrates how woman are sometimes never informed as to why certain decisions were made, and, having been blocked from further participation, they are also denied the opportunity to defend themselves. For individual women who are censored, this can be a dispiriting and confusing process that builds significant resentment.

The presence of moderators within digital feminism raises several questions about the political efficacy of using social media for collective-based organising. Moderators and individual bloggers are not necessarily the best equipped women to perform a gatekeeping role. Moderating power also undermines the decision-making transparency that naturally occurs in face-to face settings. For example, if all group members are present at a face-to-face meeting, then any decisions that are made, and any disagreements that are had in the room, are witnessed by all. In print material, too, errors have to be publicly accounted for, which means that all activists can trace amendments or contestations over content. WLM newsletters 'frequently contained small paratextual disruptions' that noted where editors had mistyped someone's text or omitted a paragraph

in the previous edition (Beins 2017, 75). Conversely, the ability of moderators to delete content unilaterally can promote an illusion of consensus when there is none. Platforms enable individual women to retrospectively curate the historical record of feminism in a way which would have been impossible in previous eras of print-based communication. Several interviewees expressed concern over the lack of transparency in digital space. Linda Bellos (WLM, UK) said: 'I don't think I trust [Facebook groups] I don't get a sense of equality. You see communication between one or two people [but] if there are other [conversations] going on, you can't see them'. Mariana Borges Vanin (DN, USA) also described the negative effects of Facebook moderation, highlighting how difficult it is for activists to challenge established group norms:

> Sensitivity to anything that may be considered offensive is starting to come out in [Facebook] groups […] someone says something, and, all of a sudden, they get mobbed. There is a lot of policing […] of the discussion. And you have moderators and they are like "oh this shouldn't be said like this" […] so there is a lot of policing going on even in a private/closed group.

Borges Vanin's account reveals how feminists struggle to create a productive political space on social media. It also provides another example of how moderation can stifle group development.

Conflict Is Integral to Movement-Building

Just as men 'seek to preserve a sense of control over their preferred technological domains' (Salter 2017, 247), so too are women driven to try to control interactions in their social media spaces. Contentious conversations are likely to be heavily moderated, or else deleted entirely. This might be because a woman is trying to preserve the sanctity of the group as a safe space, or because she wants to promote a certain image or self-brand across platforms. Nonetheless, internal debate is an integral element of movement-building. The ease with which women can block or mute other activists and exit challenging conversations in digital space is a severe impediment to developing a feminist ethic of engagement

between women. To avoid such blow ups, some moderators begin to toe the line and privilege politeness and group cohesion over refining theory and praxis through critical debate. I have argued in this final section of the chapter that women do not need safe spaces free from contention. They do, however, need an ethical framework for dealing with debates and interpersonal conflict. Older interviewees felt that the small group process of the WLM fulfilled this function: 'one of the things I found really excellent about consciousness-raising and the feminist process was that even when you disagreed, you could respect someone whilst disagreeing […] even when we argued bitterly, there was respect' (Linda Bellos WLM, UK). Interviewee accounts expose how digital feminists are absorbing the rhetoric of safe spaces, and also how norms of activist engagement are now being shaped by individual page moderators.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that visions of social media as a hospitable space for feminist community-building promote an impoverished vision of sisterhood. Distinct from a feminist ethic of engagement, digital space promotes an organising praxis underwritten by a logic of individual self-promotion rather than gyn/affective bonding. The connections that women make on social media are mediated by male structures and male modes of interaction, which means that digital relationship-building between activists is qualitatively different than during the WLM. 'Sisterhood' today is often performed in publicly visible digital networks, frequently remains devoid of a face-to-face dimension and is characterised by fleeting ties rather than sustained engagement. What this means is that women's contemporary organising tactics have not emerged from a feminist ethic of engagement, but rather are being influenced by the architecture of social media. I have also suggested that the culture of watching and following spurs antagonism between women and limits their ability to promote feminist collectivity. As a result, feminism loses its potential to prefigure new forms of relating.

References

Allen, Pamela. 1970. *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation*. New York: Times Change Press.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2018. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Baym, Nancy K., and danah boyd. 2012. Socially Mediated Publicness: An Introduction. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 56 (3): 320–329.

Beins, Agatha. 2010. Sisterly Solidarity: Politics and Rhetoric of the Direct Address in US Feminism in the 1970s. *Women: A Cultural Review* 21 (3): 292–308.

———. 2017. *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Bell, Lenore. 2013. Trigger Warnings: Sex, Lies and Social Justice Utopia on Tumblr. *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network* 6 (1): 31–47.

Benkler, Yochai. 2006. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale Press.

Brownmiller, Susan. 1999. *Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*. New York: The Dial Press.

Bruley, Sue. [1976] 1981. Women Awake: The Experience of Consciousness-Raising. In *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975–80*, ed. Feminist Anthology Collective, 60–67. London: the Women's Press.

———. 2016. Women's Liberation at the Grass Roots: A View from Some English Towns, c.1968–1990. *Women's History Review* 25 (5): 723–740.

Bunch, Charlotte. 1978. *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Card, Claudia. 1991. *Feminist Ethics*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

———. 1995. *Lesbian Choices*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Clark-Parsons, Rosemary. 2018. Building a Digital Girl Army: The Cultivation of Feminist Safe Spaces Online. *New Media and Society* 20 (6): 2125–2144.

Crossley, Alison Dahl. 2017. *Finding Feminism: Millennial Activists and the Unfinished Gender Revolution* [Electronic Book]. New York: New York University Press.

Daniels, Jessie. 2016. The Trouble with White Feminism: Whiteness, Digital Feminism and the Intersectional Internet. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race,*

Sex, Class and Culture Online, ed. Safiya Umoja Noble and Brendesha M. Tynes, 41–60. New York: Peter Lang.

Dubrofsky, Rachel E., and Shoshana A. Magnet, eds. 2015. *Feminist Surveillance Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Dworkin, Andrea. 1978. *Right-Wing Women*. New York: Perigee.

Epstein, Barbara. 2009. The Decline of the Women's Movement. In *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, ed. Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, 2nd ed., 376–382. Malden: Wiley Blackwell.

Evans, Elizabeth, and Prudence Chamberlain. 2015. Critical Waves: Exploring Feminist Identity, Discourse and Praxis in Western Feminism. *Social Movement Studies* 14 (4): 396–409.

Firth, Rhiannon, and Andrew Robinson. 2016. For a Revival of Feminist Consciousness-Raising: Horizontal Transformation of Epistemologies and Transgression of Neoliberal TimeSpace. *Gender and Education* 28 (3): 343–358.

Fotopoulou, Aristea. 2016. *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks: Between Empowerment and Vulnerability*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Freeman, Jo. [1972] 2013. The Tyranny of Structurelessness. *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41 (3–4): 231–246.

———. 1975. Political Organization in the Feminist Movement. *Acta Sociologica* 18 (2/3): 142–161.

Friedman, Elisabeth Jay. 2007. Lesbians in (Cyber)Space: The Politics of the Internet in Latin American On- and Off-Line Communities. *Media, Culture and Society* 29 (5): 790–811.

Fuchs, Christian. 2017. *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Gillespie, Tarleton. 2015. Platforms Intervene. *Social Media + Society* 1 (1): 1–2.

———. 2018. *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions that Shape Social Media*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gilligan, Carol. 1993. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Greenfield, Adam. 2018. *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*. Brooklyn: Verso.

Hanisch, Carol. 2001. Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement. In *Leadership and Social Movements*, ed. Colin Barker, Alan Johnson, and Michael Lavalette, 77–95. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

———. 2010. Women's Liberation Consciousness-Raising: Then and Now. *On the Issues*, Spring. https://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2010spring/2010spring_Hanisch.php.

Hassan, Robert. 2012. *The Age of Distraction: Reading, Writing, and Politics in a High-Speed Networked Economy*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Hawthorne, Susan. 1999. Connectivity: Cultural Practices of the Powerful or Subversion from the Margins? In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, ed. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, 119–136. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

———. 2002. *Wild Politics*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Hawthorne, Susan, and Renate Klein. 1999. CyberFeminism: Introduction. In *Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, ed. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, 1–16. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia. 1988. *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Value*. Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies.

———. 1991. Some Thoughts about Caring. In *Feminist Ethics*, ed. Claudia Card, 246–263. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

———. 1992. Why Lesbian Ethics? *Hypatia* 7 (4): 195–206.

Hurwitz, Heather McKee. 2017. From Ink to Web and Beyond: U.S. Women's Activism Using Traditional and New Social Media. In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, ed. Verta Taylor, Holly J. McCammon, Jo Reger, and Rachel L. Einwohner, 462–483. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jeffreys, Sheila. 1980. *Pseudonyms* [Article printed in Revolutionary/Radical Feminist Newsletter, No. 4, 6 pages]. Copy in possession of Sandra McNeill, Leeds, United Kingdom.

———. 1985. *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880–1930*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

———. 2011. Kate Millett's Sexual Politics: 40 Years On. *Women's Studies International Forum* 34 (1): 76–84.

———. [2005] 2015. *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*. London: Routledge.

———. 2018. *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970–1990*. London: Routledge.

Kanai, Akane. 2015. Thinking Beyond the Internet as a Tool: Girls' Online Spaces as Postfeminist Structures of Surveillance. In *eGirls, eCitizens*, ed. Jane Bailey and Valerie Steeves, 83–106. Ottowa: University of Ottowa Press.

Kitzinger, Celia, and Rachel Perkins. 1993. *Changing Our Minds: Lesbian Feminism and Psychology*. London: Onlywomen Press.

Lewis, Ruth, Elizabeth Sharp, Jenni Remnant, and Rhiannon Redpath. 2015. 'Safe Spaces': Experiences of Feminist Women-Only Space. *Sociological Research Online* 20 (4): 1–14.

Lorde, Audre. [1978] 2007. Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power. In *Sister Outrider*, 53–59. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

Lovink, Geert, and Ned Rossiter. 2018. *Organization After Social Media*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia.

Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McKinney, Cait. 2015. Newsletter Networks in the Feminist History and Archives Movement. *Feminist Theory* 16 (3): 309–328.

McRobbie, Angela. 2015. Notes on the Perfect. *Australian Feminist Studies* 30 (83): 3–20.

Megarry, Jessica. 2018. Under the Watchful Eyes of Men: Theorising the Implications of Male Surveillance Practices for Feminist Activism on Social Media. *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (6): 1070–1085.

Miriam, Kathy. 1998. *Re-thinking Radical Feminism: Opposition, Utopianism and the Moral Imagination of Feminist Theory*. PhD thesis. University of California, Santa Cruz.

Nagle, Angela. 2017. *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*. Winchester: Zero Books.

Nakamura, Lisa. 2015. Blaming, Shaming, and the Feminisation of Social Media. In *Feminist Surveillance Studies*, ed. Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana A. Magnet, 221–228. Durham: Duke University Press.

Noble, Safiya Umoja, and Brendesha M. Tynes, eds. 2016. *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class and Culture Online*. New York: Peter Lang.

Noddings, Nel. 1984. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education Berkeley*. University of California Press.

Pateman, Carole. 1988. *The Sexual Contract*. Cambridge: Polity.

Penelope, Julia. 1992. *Call Me Lesbian: Lesbian Lives, Lesbian Theory*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

Poirot, Kristan. 2004. Mediating a Movement, Authorizing Discourse: Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, and Feminism's Second Wave. *Women's Studies in Communication* 27 (2): 204–235.

Radicalesbians. [1970] 1988. The Woman-Identified Woman. In *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 17–22. London: Onlywomen Press.

Raymond, Janice. 1986. *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection*. London: The Women's Press.

Rees, Jeska. 2007. *All the Rage: Revolutionary Feminism in England, 1977–1983*. PhD thesis. School of Humanities, University of Western Australia.

Rentschler, Carrie A. 2014. Rape Culture and the Feminist Politics of Social Media. *Girlhood Studies* 7 (1): 65–82.

Richardson, K. 2019. The Business of Ethics, Robotics, and Artificial Intelligence. In *Cyborg Futures*, ed. Teresa Heffernan, 113–140. Palgrave Macmillan.

Riordan, Ellen. 2001. Commodified Agents and Empowered Girls: Consuming and Producing Feminism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 25 (3): 279–297.

Risam, Roopika. 2015. Toxic Femininity 4.0. *First Monday* 20 (4): n.p.

Rosales, Lani. 2018. Facebook Starts Handing Out Merit Badges Like We're Girl Scouts. *The American Genius*, August 17. https://theamericangenius. com/tech-news/facebook-starts-handing-out-merit-badges-like-were-girl-scouts/

Rowland, Robyn, and Renate Klein. 1996. Radical Feminism: History, Politics, Action. In *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, ed. Diane Bell and Renate Klein, 9–36. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Salter, Michael. 2017. From Geek Masculinity to Gamergate: The Technological Rationality of Online Abuse. *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* 14 (2): 247–264.

Sarachild, Kathie. 1978. Who Are We? The Redstockings Position on Names. In *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, 53–55. New York: Random House.

Sawer, Marian, and Andrew Merrindahl. 2014. The Evolution of Feminist Approaches to Leadership. In *The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia*, ed. Shurlee Swain and Judith Smart: Australian Women's Archives Project 2014. http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0437b.htm.

Scolere, Leah, Urszula Pruchniewska, and Erin Brooke Duffy. 2018. Constructing the Platform-Specific Self-Brand: The Labor of Social Media Promotion. *Social Media + Society* 4 (3): 1–11.

Shaw, Frances. 2012. *Discursive Politics Online: Political Creativity and Affective Networking in Australian Feminist Blogs*. PhD thesis. Department of Politics and International Relations, University of New South Wales.

Singh, Rianka. 2018. Platform Feminism: Protest and the Politics of Spatial Organization. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media & Technology*, 14 (1). https://adanewmedia.org/2018/11/issue14-singh/

Singh, Rianka, and Sarah Sharma. 2019. Platform Uncommons. *Feminist Media Studies* 19 (2): 302–303.

Taylor, Verta, and Leila J. Rupp. 1993. Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism. *Signs* 19 (1): 32–61.

Thompson, Denise. 1994. Defining Feminism. *Australian Feminist Studies* 9 (20): 171–192.

Tufekci, Zeynep. 2013. 'Not this One': Social Movements, the Attention Economy, and Microcelebrity Networked Activism. *American Behavioral Scientist* 57 (7): 848–870.

van Dijck, José. 2013. Social Media and the Culture of Connectivity. *UOP Blog*, February 25.

van der Nagel, Emily, and Jordan Frith. 2015. Anonymity, Pseudonymity and the Agency of Online Identity: Examining the Social Practices of r/Gonewild. *First Monday* 20 (3): n.p.

Wagner, Kurt. 2018. Facebook Wants News Feed to Create More 'Meaningful Social Interactions'. It's Still Trying to Figure Out What That Means. *Recode*, February 12. https://www.recode.net/2018/2/12/17006362/facebook-news-feed-change-meaningful-interactions-definition-measure

Weisman, Leslie Kanes. 1992. *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Whittier, Nancy. 1995. *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

———. 2017. Identity Politics, Consciousness Raising and Visibility Politics. In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, ed. Holly J. McCammon, Verta Taylor, Jo Regnr, and Rachel L. Einwohner, 376–397. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Woolf, Virginia. [1938] 1986. *Three Guineas*. London: Hogarth Press.

Yeatman, Anna. 2014. Feminism and the Technological Age. *Australian Feminist Studies* 29 (79): 85–100.

Zimmerman, Tegan. 2017. #Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice* 38 (1): 54–70.

7

Female Performers on a Male Stage

There is no way you are going to build a radical movement without some deep intensive thought and without a real community too, but you can't have either of those online. I hate the thing. Sometimes I think our only hope is when the internet goes down. Then we can have a real movement again. I don't know what else to hope for at this point […] it's just overwhelming. All I can do is encourage people to still think, and still be together, and still care about each other in some way. But it's a real fall-back position because everybody is addicted.
—Lierre Keith WLM, USA

It's very energy sucking, it's just a never-ending hole […] it's just a constant reaction to men rather than [a focus] on us, and any attempt to build an alternative reality, basically, which should happen when we meet in real life.
—Anne Billows DN, UK

The title of this concluding chapter is taken from a paper delivered at a WLM conference held in London in 1980. The author of the paper, Elizabeth Sarah (1982), argued that the first wave of feminism failed because it was based around achieving equality with men in their world, rather than fighting to liberate women from male control. Throughout this book, I

have attempted to demonstrate that while WLM activists understood that bringing about a feminist revolution required autonomous organising and a complete break with male culture, women today are once again organising alongside men, in a male space, on a male stage. I have argued that social media and the politics of women's liberation are incompatible. Relying on social media for organising produces an impoverished form of feminist politics that ultimately preserves the status quo. My argument is not only that social media is an impediment to reviving the WLM, but also that the use of male-controlled digital platforms for feminist organising is politically dangerous for women. To this end, I have not discussed alternative technological platforms that could be more women-friendly, or that might offer feminist activists more personal security in digital space. Such a focus would constitute reformism by endeavouring to alter the technological landscape in specific ways, rather than recognising social media as a political institution upholding male dominance that feminists should reject.

There is an inherent fallacy in the idea that a male-owned digital platform could provide an auspicious organising space for advancing women's liberation. As Audre Lorde ([1979] 2007, 112) famously stated, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'. In the much less frequently quoted sentences that follow the citation above, Lorde goes on to say that:

> [The master's tools] may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. *And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support* (emphasis added).

Lorde's claim is illuminating because it accurately captures the limitations of the celebratory zeitgeist that many feminist thinkers have been caught up in following the rise of social media. Her argument also reinforces the claim that I have made throughout this book: it remains politically crucial for feminists to become women-identified and to move away from a reliance on male culture and male structures. Without a feminist press and autonomous points of distribution, it is difficult to see how women can do much more today than write on male platforms whilst remaining

visible and accessible to a male audience. Many women depend on social media as 'their only source of support' in the contemporary neoliberal context, but I have argued that revolution is dependent upon women rejecting male structures and moving towards each other in physical space.

The radical and lesbian feminist theoretical framework I adopt in this book is distinct from other recent critical investigations of social media and feminism. Here, I foreground the existence of male supremacy, and I also explicitly theorise women's oppression. As several scholars have now identified, the alliance between social media and the values of neoliberal capitalism is certainly an uncomfortable one for feminism (Banet-Weiser 2018; Jarrett 2016; Yeatman 2014). Nonetheless, it is also crucial that scholars and activists remain committed to analysing how feminist success in digital space is dependent on male approval, and to take seriously how social media perpetuates patriarchy.

I have demonstrated how male power intersects with social media and how an omnipotent male presence in digital space is limiting women's ability to revive the WLM. Activists in the WLM had already embarked on the process of consciousness-raising before they engaged in print-based media production. In other words, there was an already existing groundswell of WLM activists who had come together to participate in consciousness-raising *prior* to movement women engaging with anti-feminists or non-politicised women in the wider public sphere. Via the small group process, many activists had also already developed strong relationships that transcended the boundaries of male-approved female bonding. The digitally mediated context that activists are working in today, however, is markedly different: instead of collectively creating media *from* a movement, women have been presented with men's digital communication tools, from which they are trying to grow a movement. What this means is that women who have never participated in a face-to-face feminist group or bonded with other women in a political organising context are now trying to raise their consciousness, build feminist theory and engage in activism in digital spaces initially designed for young men to share and rate photos of their female classmates. In the pages that follow, I will provide a brief overview of the argument that has been advanced thus far, before offering some concluding remarks.

Chapter 3 drew attention to the significance of place and space to the political project of women's liberation. Proceeding from the standpoint that space is relevant to the question of social and political change, I argued that the WLM was revolutionary because it materially shifted men's patterns of access to women. For WLM activists, occupying places for feminism and making them women-only spaces involved an element of saying no, of denying men access (Frye [1977] 1988). This organising praxis was revolutionary because women moved; they created an infrastructure through which they could begin to move away from men and towards other women in their day-to-day lives. The face-to-face and print-based communication infrastructure of the WLM also facilitated women's ability to live their whole lives in the movement, and this promoted the development of both a visionary politics and an oppositional women's culture that presented a tangible challenge to male supremacy. WLM activists prefigured in their personal lives revolutionary ways of living. It was by separating from men that they set up the material conditions through which they could begin to explore—and also enact—their potential to be fully human outside of male control.

In Chap. 4, I argued that social media cannot provide a politically similar infrastructure for women because male omnipresence in digital space functions as a serious impediment to women's ability to think outside of male political frameworks. I also argued that feminists need to be alert to male surveillance of digital feminism as a form of political intervention. Women bear witness to the abuse of other feminists online. This serves as a warning to all women about what ideas constitute acceptable feminist speech and it discourages them from pursuing revolutionary actions. So far, feminist social movement scholars have often uncritically accepted the architecture of social media as politically neutral, rather than a landscape created by, and for, male interests. Such an approach is both naïve and politically dangerous. Feminist geographers such as Leslie Kanes Weisman (1992, 10) have done considerable work charting how male-dominated societies produce 'social, physical and metaphysical space[s]' that reflect and perpetuate 'male experience, male consciousness and male control'. In both platform policies and architectural design, social media companies advance a male worldview, are imbued with male values and, 'being the beneficiaries of the current political system' (Hilla

Kerner DN, CA), are also thoroughly implicated in global systems of imperialist, capitalist and racist exploitation.

Significant scholarly attention has now been dedicated to investigating how women are organising online, but, as Anne Billows (DN, UK) pointed out in her interview, feminist academics and activists still know very little about MRAs and the strategies they use. Robustly investigating the digital manifestations of male dominance is a pertinent avenue of research for feminist scholars. Billows expressed this well when she said that women should 'stop leaving our whole souls and minds and bodies on the internet' and find answers to questions such as 'who are [MRAs], what companies do they own, what concrete power do they have, and how does that play with the rest of patriarchal society?' In this book, I could only give a modest indication of the scope of men's digital organising against feminists, and the diverse tactics they use to perpetuate male control of women. There is much work still to do in this area.

In Chap. 4, I also demonstrated how digital activists try to survive men's hostility by adopting anonymous profiles, moderating content and retreating to closed and secret Facebook groups. Both retreating and attempting to render oneself anonymous or invisible are tactics that have long been used by women to try to circumvent male violence. According to Weisman (1992, 70), 'it stands to reason that if women perceive public space as unmanageable and threatening, they will avoid it and restrict their mobility within it'. A retreat to closed digital groups, however, is not ideologically aligned with the separatist tradition, and, as I have argued, it does not produce the same emancipatory political effects. The popularity of closed/private Facebook groups amongst feminists is evidence of women attempting to carve out *potentially safer* enclaves within male institutions. Separatism, conversely, is based not only on a rejection of, and a withdrawal from, male institutions; it is also a political process which attempts to create new social and political forms based upon feminist principles. I will expand on this point further below.

Like spatial autonomy, temporal autonomy is a feminist resource. Scholars such as Robert Hassan (2012, 195) have argued that, in the contemporary context, 'the individual struggles to achieve any sort of temporal autonomy'. This is because our time 'is "owned" by [an] information network that continually makes demands on it and distracts it

into countless different, yet increasingly homogenous commercial and commodified spaces'. In Chap. 5, I contested the idea that social media has saved feminists time in politically meaningful ways. In doing so, I argued that the WLM 'feedback loop' (Beins 2017) between consciousness-raising, theory-building and action should not be short-circuited. I demonstrated how the speed at which digital content is created fragments feminist ideas, obliterating a sense of the past and impeding women's ability to develop a structural analysis of male supremacy. As Charlotte Bunch (1978, 219) has argued, 'if the written word is important, then where, why and how we do it matters also'.

Social media is not a space conducive to strategic political organising; it keeps women's attention focussed on a perpetual present moment circumscribed by male concerns. Platforms encourage personal expression, personal feelings trump political analysis and theory development is only permitted within tightly controlled parameters that are acceptable to men. In Chap. 5, I also discussed how social media is underwritten by the ideology of *therapism* (Raymond 1986), where the goal is to make women feel temporarily better, rather than enabling them to challenge structural conditions. I suggested that connection in digital space does not encapsulate, and cannot transmit, the life of the revolution. While WLM newsletters were not responsible for sparking the creativity and passion which underwrote women's interactions in women-only physical space, they could, at that particular historical moment, provide a space for women to advertise events and spread feminist ideas without fear of surveillance or intervention.

It is now becoming increasingly recognised that digital interactions are preformatted (van Dijck and Poell 2015, 2), and that individuals have little control over how they construct their social media spaces. In Chap. 6, I argued that social media has hampered, rather than facilitated, the development of a feminist ethic. Activists are currently attempting to grow a feminist movement whilst firmly embedded within the dominant woman-hating culture, using a platform architecture that encourages combative, instead of feminist, forms of engagement. I critically analysed how social media logic has infiltrated contemporary feminist praxis, posing new barriers to women's ability to develop the skills of organising, envision alternative cultural forms and become gyn/affective (Raymond

1986). Women cannot create their own ways of communicating in digital space. Because social media destroys the bridge between practice and theory that was so integral to the success of the WLM, there is also very little opportunity for women to develop gyn/affection. While activists might individually benefit from digital camaraderie and the sense of support they derive from social media interactions, digital participation is an individual coping mechanism for the present moment which does not facilitate collective resistance to male cultural norms in the same way that is possible in women-only physical space. Women can discuss prefigurative forms online but they cannot put ideas into action until they physically come together. Experimentation is also precluded, and, insidiously, conformity to the dominant culture is encouraged and rewarded via promotion in the network. In Chap. 6, I suggested that women are picking up male tactics of political engagement based around the logic of surveillance, combative behaviour and hero worship.

I also discussed how scholars often forget that attention remains a finite resource in digital space (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 40; Tufekci 2013). It is still only a select number of users that are widely followed, shared and heard (Dean 2019). Within the social media economy, people and ideas are rewarded with approval (likes, follows, shares), or are rejected by being ignored, which means that some women's contributions remain invisible to the network at large (Baym and boyd 2012, 322). Social media architecture makes it very difficult for activists to determine whether they have read every contribution to a discussion: preferences algorithmically shape what activists are exposed to, content is evanescent and past contributions are difficult to retrieve. Older interviewees highlighted how physical participation in the WLM, by contrast, gave them access to 'an ongoing ferment of ideas' and a diversity of perspectives which helped to ensure that feminist theory remained attuned to the diverse realities of women's lives:

[The ideas] were all happening at once, and they were all affecting each other […] we would have working class women say one thing, and Maori women would say another thing, and lesbians would say another thing, […] and mothers would say another thing. And so, we heard a wide range of views about each particular issue, you know? It wasn't restricted to what

you would get on the end of a blog about a particular shade of feminism. (Jenny Rankine WLM, NZ)

According to Rankine, the 'ferment of ideas' that she experienced in the face-to-face context of the WLM is very difficult to achieve in social media spaces: 'I don't see it's possible to have it online'. Linda Bellos (WLM, UK) made a similar point in relation to the ethos of equality enacted in WLM consciousness-raising groups, where every woman present was given the opportunity to speak:

> In a two-hour session [we were able to understand] each other, and we can develop arguments […] we don't all have to agree, I'm not talking about hegemony, I'm talking about equality. Everybody having a right to have their say, and [if] I don't agree with some of the things you say, you'll be aware of that. You don't have to change; you merely need to know that I'm not agreeing with everything you say […]. I think there is something good about that, there is something free.

Digital self-publishing makes space for marginalised voices in the sense that it has removed traditional publishing gatekeepers, but nonetheless, there is little political use in every woman being able to speak if only certain women are listened to and promoted via sharing and liking functionalities. Social media might enable women of colour to immediately call out and speak back to racism within feminist networks (Daniels 2016, 54; Okolosie 2014, 90), but my interviewees drew attention to how a feminist praxis of anti-racism will not implicitly come to be because of the self-publishing properties of platforms. They also contested the idea that social media offers a more equal communicative space than face-to-face discussions or print-based media, because they traced getting rid of relations of dominance to the intentions of activists, rather than to technological architecture: 'people can say [social media] is horizontal, but our biases are always going to be there' (Alicen Grey DN, USA). From this vantage point, the claim that social media facilitates intersectionality, or that digital organising is more inclusive than earlier forms of feminism (Hurwitz 2017), denotes a form of technological determinism

that pays insufficient attention to how 'getting rid of immanent hierarchies requires politics' (Dean 2019, 329).

Just Another Communication Tool?

The point of view advanced in this book is a partial one, as there are undoubtedly many manifestations of both WLM and contemporary radical feminist organising that I have not been able to consider. What has been presented thus far is my analysis of the political efficacy of historical and digital radical feminist organising tactics. This analysis was informed by radical and lesbian feminist theory; the archival and digital data I collected; the perspectives, experiences and insights of my interviewees; and my own experiences of feminist organising and activism. I have argued that the idea that feminism is a broad umbrella movement containing diverse and competing political perspectives is politically dangerous because it creates space for anti-feminist viewpoints to masquerade as feminist and makes feminism vulnerable to attack from within (Thompson 2001). This is not to suggest that the feminist movement is static and does not morph alongside the evolution of political ideas, but it is to suggest that feminism can be defined, and that its meaning should be debated (Raymond [1993] 1995, 93). I hope that the ideas presented here can contribute to sparking both scholarly and activist debate about the most efficacious ways forward for radical feminists in the digitally oriented social and political context of the twenty-first century.

In this book, I have attempted to systematically lay out how social media creates barriers to consciousness-raising, theory-building and the development of politically informed feminist praxis. I have suggested that social media does not provide the spatial or temporal conditions for theorising and activism to easily co-exist, and that the emancipatory potential of digital space has now been reduced to encouraging women to pursue a male ethic of engagement. Today, it is becoming increasingly understood that social media corporations perpetuate misogyny and racism (Daniels 2009; Megarry 2018; Noble 2018), are responsible for large and distressing abuses of corporate power (Cadwalladr 2017; Zuboff 2019), have enabled mass social surveillance (Dubrofsky and Magnet 2015; Fuchs

2017) and are advancing a new kind of imperialism (Greenfield 2018, 278; Grossman 2015; Lafrance 2016). Still, many radical feminists continue to use social media because they find it personally valuable. In their book *Changing Our Minds*, Celia Kitzinger and Rachel Perkins (1993, 6) began their treatise on the dangers of psychology for lesbian feminism by stating that they have 'heard enough lesbians say it "saved my life" to feel almost guilty about challenging psychology'. Throughout the years in which I have been working on this project, I, too, have commonly encountered the viewpoint that women both enjoy and would be lost without their international digital connections. Like Kitzinger and Perkins, I have also at times been self-conscious about politically challenging an institution that has provided a lifeline to so many women. Nonetheless, I remain convinced that feminists' use of social media should be challenged.

Overarching Interviewee Perspectives

All 26 women interviewed for this project, to varying degrees, advanced the view that social media is an impediment to the political project of women's liberation. Of the two principal viewpoints that are discernible within the data set, the first is a complete rejection of the idea that social media facilitates feminist organising or feminist movement-building. For these women, social media communication is something else entirely. Hilla Kerner (DN, CA), for example, said that social media 'is very limited, it's just another way to get to women, it's not organising […] some women think more of it [but] I would not call [digital] conversation actual political organising'. Sheila Jeffreys (WLM, UK) also advanced this line of argument. She said: 'I'm not sure [social media] helps to create a movement because the groups don't exist, and the campaigns don't really exist either. […] I don't think social media facilitates organising'.

The second commonly articulated perspective was that, while women held severe misgivings about the political efficacy of using social media as a tool for feminism, they also did not want to be completely negative about it. These interviewees pointed to communicative speed and the

breaking down of geographical barriers between women as *potentially* beneficial to feminism:

> Having access to a second by second, hour by hour reminder that you are not alone can be such an amazing thing that [women] wouldn't have had before the internet. Women going through their day-to-day lives having their phone go "ding! ding! ding!" as a reminder that they are not alone. (Tiger Drummond DN, UK)

> The States are so big that a lot of American feminists think they are the only one in their town […] so for them, the ability to connect and talk with women online who are like-minded is really important to learn that they're not alone. (Meghan Murphy DN, CA)

These quotes highlight how networked technologies enable women to feel better—what social movement scholars often term the affective benefits of digital participation (see Mendes et al. 2019)—or cope more easily with their daily reality in a hostile cultural and political climate. Still, the potential advantages of communicative speed and international connections were not generally perceived by interviewees to make up for what feminism has lost in the shift away from face-to-face organising. For example, Lierre Keith (WLM, USA) said that 'there are women who have good experiences' and social media 'can provide an entry into radical feminism' but, ultimately, she felt that digital space provides an inhospitable climate for feminist movement-building: 'compared to the richness of what I experienced [in the WLM], it just makes me feel very sad for [activists today] because [social media is] not a life. We had a life together'. Younger activists such as Cristabel Gekas (DN, AU) also made this point. Gekas explained how she did not 'come away from [social media] feeling better or rewarded, if anything quite the opposite'. Conversely, Gekas said she 'felt really good [when] leaving from a conference or a [face-to-face] group'.

Political Lesbianism and Digital Space

> I know women who have become lesbians [in recent years] but a handful of them, really a handful. (Julia Long DN, UK)

Reinstating lesbian feminism as a central pillar of the WLM was another important aim of this book. I have argued that moving away from men and choosing to live as lesbians offered women space to enact new social and political forms based upon feminist principles. While lesbians were crucial drivers of feminism during the WLM, several interviewees expressed concern that rejecting heterosexuality is not understood as a viable and positive choice for feminists today. Some traced this directly to digital organising. Tiger Drummond (DN, UK), for example, said that because lesbianism remains intangible for women in digital space, the reality of women loving women cannot be rendered material; it remains an idea, rather than a reality. For Drummond, interacting in women-only physical space is crucial if women are to reject heterosexuality. As she said, coming together physically 'deletes hours of [digital] arguments' because women can witness 'the reality' of women loving women for themselves.

Other interviewees pointed to the dominant cultural influence of queer politics to explain the decline in women choosing to live as lesbians today. Queer politics creates problems for feminism, not least because it holds two oppositional perspectives in tandem: it claims that sexually is biologically innate instead of socially constructed, and it also positions normative sexuality as flexible and fluid, which suggests that women should be open to diverse sexual encounters (Megarry et al. 2018). Both of these ideas perpetuate male dominance. Suggesting that lesbianism is biologically innate is a politically conservative move that positions heterosexuality as natural and inevitable, thus foreclosing resistance (Kitzinger 1989). Some interviewees, such as Lynne Harne (WLM, UK), reported that they were 'shocked to see the belief in biological determinism' in digital feminist spaces. Harne felt that the notion that homosexual people are 'born this way' has a policing effect, and she explained how 'women get loads of abuse from people' online for suggesting that it is

possible to leave heterosexuality and choose to live as a lesbian. The idea that women should be open to various sexual encounters also perpetuates male dominance because it buys into the patriarchal notion that all men should have access to women, even when they have declared themselves to be lesbians. Interviewees were particularly concerned with the impact transgender ideology has had upon women's ability to delineate their own sexual boundaries. As I explained in Chap. 2, transgender ideology obscures women's structural oppression because it understands cisgender women as having power over men who wish to perform femininity. In this way, transgenderism casts transgender-identified men as more oppressed than women and vilifies the idea of lesbianism on the basis that it is an exclusive sexuality which does not conform to compulsory queer fluidity (Megarry et al. 2018). Although they were cognisant that the Leftist political climate of 'let's not exclude anybody' predates the rise of social media (Jenny Rankine WLM, NZ), some interviewees felt that it is more difficult in the digital era for women to draw their own boundaries.

In stark contrast to the ideology of the WLM, lesbianism is not commonly viewed as a revolutionary political choice for feminists today. Queer culture positions lesbian identity as anachronistic, exclusionary and out of date (Bendix 2019), and, in line with this sensibility, many women now prefer the term 'queer' instead of 'lesbian' to describe themselves (Jeffreys 2018; Megarry et al. 2018; Miller et al. 2016). Sheila Jeffreys (2018, 189) has also recently written about anti-feminist developments within digital lesbian communities, highlighting how the boundaries of who can call themselves a lesbian are now being viciously policed by bloggers who insist that sexuality is biologically determined, and that women cannot choose to live as lesbians. According to this line of argument, a woman can only call herself a lesbian if she has only ever felt sexual desire for women and has never had sexual contact with men (Jeffreys 2018, 189). Interviewees also flagged a rising anti-political lesbianism sentiment in digital feminist discussions. Tiger Drummond (DN, UK) and Alicen Grey (DN, USA) both traced its emergence to the blogging site Tumblr. Grey said: 'I'd say Tumblr is heavily responsible. It sounds silly to blame Tumblr, but really though!' Drummond offered further expansion on this claim. She said that political lesbianism 'is a swear word on Tumblr': 'I've had several friends who have left that site or

have been sent abusive messages because they've entertained it as a possible thing […] it's just such a vicious environment'.[1] That lesbianism is being positioned as an elite club in digital spaces, one in which women who have never had sexual relationships with men and who have only ever felt sexual desire for women are worthy of joining, creates a significant problem for women's liberation. As Jeffreys (2018, 189) has explained, this idea is 'harmful to the possibility of creating lesbian feminist community and politics, which cannot develop when the idea of essential lesbianism is wielded to prevent women imagining that they could choose to love women'.

Alongside the dominance of queer politics, the shift away from face-to-face organising and the feminist embrace of a social media ethic of antagonism may have also influenced the rise of anti-political lesbianism sentiment in social media spaces. Jeffreys (2018, 189) has called the online boundary wars over lesbianism a type of 'jockeying for position, and for authenticity, for the status of "real ones"'. This kind of behaviour is congruent with social media logic, where feminists must fight for visibility and attention, and success is measured according to adherence to male cultural norms. Social media spaces encourage lesbians to show off their wives and girlfriends and publicly display their relationships to receive cultural traction via likes and retweets. This strand of digital culture creates severe impediments to the revival of the WLM, because both the boundary wars over who is an authentic lesbian, as well as the behaviour of vying for visibility in alignment with the norms of celebrity culture, significantly impede the development of a feminist ethics of sexual practice. Engaging solely in digital space and surrounded by male cultural norms, it is difficult to contest the celebration of inequality in interpersonal relationships, such as the manifestation of heterosexual power dynamics in lesbian couples. As I explained in Chap. 5, personal experience is equated with truth in digital space, but there is no in-built mechanism that prompts a shift to critical analysis or collective theorising. Tiger Drummond (DN, UK) said that some activists feel they cannot critically

---

[1] The revival of claims that sexuality is biologically innate is perhaps unsurprising as this view is congruent with the Tumblr culture of playing 'the most enticing victim' (Bell 2013, 36; see also Nagle 2017). According to this logic, lesbians on Tumblr gain traction for their blogs by politically positioning themselves as authentic victims of their innate sexual desires.

contest other women's ideas about lesbianism, which become 'untouchable online' when personal expression is privileged over critical analysis and debate: 'when [women] are told that these are the rules of radical feminism they go, "oh, okay". And they go, "let's not question that, or let's not offend, let's not be critical of the butch/femme dichotomy, or let's not be critical of lesbian relationships"'.

A More Difficult Cultural and Political Moment

It is important to acknowledge that feminists today are trying to organise in a more difficult cultural and political moment than that which was faced by early WLM activists. Living under conditions of advanced neoliberal capitalism, in an era which is 'dedicated to the undoing of public collectivism as it centres on the authority of the state' (Yeatman 2014, 90), women are now bound by structural constraints that WLM activists did not have to contend with. For example, without access to state welfare, sustained participation in feminist organising is financially untenable for many women today. Several WLM respondents explained how receiving benefits enabled them to dedicate their life to feminist activist work. Jenny Rankine (WLM, NZ), for example, got a job in Auckland's Rape Crisis centre because the organisation received state funding to cover one unemployed worker: 'I got paid the dole, basically, to work there on women's work, which I thought was wonderful'.

Interviewee accounts also reveal that the type of political action that activists engage in is related to the social context in which they are working. Finn Mackay (DN, UK) explained how 'the level of scrutiny that we live under today' means that political action is more constrained:

> That sort of direct action doesn't really happen now and I think a lot of the younger women are organising within the law, getting permission for protests, getting formal funding, getting formal sponsorship which comes with strings which means you can't do that kind of thing […] I totally understand why people organise the way that they do because of the parameters that are on activists nowadays.

The beginnings of state surveillance in the 1980s also prompted some WLM activists to forgo participation in direct actions such as marches and vandalism and begin to work within legal channels to campaign for change. Lynne Harne (WLM, UK), for example, started working with the Left-leaning Greater London Council in the 1980s to reform sex education in schools and also to raise awareness about lesbian women losing custody of their children after divorce. For Harne, this type of campaigning is conceptually distinct from activism, because she understands activism to be an illegal activity. Prior to the introduction of CCTV, Harne conceived of herself as a 'direct action' feminist:

> We used to do loads of spray painting and things [like] putting glue in the locks of sex shops, spray painting huge posters on motorways and trying to get cinemas closed down by putting concrete down the toilets [...] we were actually trying to harm the pornographers, we were trying to harm their businesses.

Feminists today are even more bound by the constraints of competitive neoliberalism than women like Harne were, and this shapes the type of organising they pursue. For example, a police record could now significantly impede a woman's future employment possibilities. As Finn Mackay (DN, UK) said, 'students are not as free as they used to be, if you are unemployed there are all these requirements and checks on you'.

The structural conditions of the present moment also make it very difficult for women to find a place to meet. Whereas 'most [WLM] meetings were held in someone's living room or in some other free meeting space' (Hanisch 2010, n.p.), many British women today can no longer afford to keep a lounge room in their private home, where political meetings could be hosted.[2] The introduction of the 'bedroom tax' in April 2013 imposed increasing conditionality on recipients of UK housing benefits by 'introduc[ing] financial penalties for anyone of working age living in rented social housing who was in receipt of Housing Benefit and deemed to be "over-occupying"' (Dabrowski 2017, 163). What this

---

[2] I am indebted to Jess Kathryn, a member of the London-based Lesbian History Group, for this observation.

means is that individuals who receive housing benefits have their stipends reduced if they have a spare room. According to Vicki Dabrowski (2017, 164–165), such a policy makes 'an enormous difference to some young women's standard of living' and has 'made already unstable positions worse'. This neoliberal climate of gendered austerity is not unique to Britain; it is a reality across developed Western liberal democracies (Bray 2013, 93–116). The process of gentrification that Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter (2018, 28–29) have called the 'financialization of urban space' has profoundly affected women's ability to autonomously organise. Across the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, it is largely no longer possible to 'hangout on the fringes of festivals, make happenings in the underground cafes, build art spaces and studios, maintain theatre and performance spaces [and] run off zines on your own printing press or server' (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 28–29).

Not only is it more difficult for women to access autonomous spaces today, but they also struggle to find the time to participate regularly in groups. Increased flexibilisation and casualisation of labour (Springer et al. 2016) means that feminist meetings must now be organised around women's ever-changing work rosters. Women can be 'called into work erratically and unexpectedly', and this makes regular participation in a movement almost impossible (Sitka 2017, 74). Organising consciousness-raising groups in the twenty-first century is no easy task: 'everyone is busier' and 'work and family demand much more of our time' (Hanisch 2010, n.p.).

Digital feminist praxis is perhaps fitting for a time in which revolutionary social change feels completely beyond reach. My interview data suggests that women's reliance on social media is related to changes in structural conditions. Some interviewees wanted to meet other women more regularly face-to-face, but they felt constrained in their ability to do so:

> I'd love to meet more than we do […] every now and then there is an event, it's typically something like a radical feminist conference, and it's so good. Things like that are really just kind of energising, because you have a weekend or whatever with your sisters, and you're talking, and you feel like "yeah, it's not just me", and [you feel] solidarity […] I love stuff like that! I

just, obviously, wish we could do it more, but I guess everyone is coming from all over [Australia and] I guess we are just [living] fast-paced lives and everything. It is kinda hard [but] if I had lots of money, then I'd totally be going to things. (Caitlin Roper DN, AU)

Social media provides a form of escapism for women; it is a place where they can try to transcend their material reality. The use of social media for feminism is also suited to the context of advanced neoliberal capitalism, where feminist participation, like the casualisation of labour, has become fragmented. Women can get involved from anywhere, at any time, via smartphones, but this form of feminist engagement is questionable as a means for reviving the WLM: it contributes to fuelling, rather than challenging, the status quo. Women's use of social media directly results in increased profits for globally dominant male-owned corporations (Jarrett 2016), and digital space is also totally surveilled. The internet cannot provide an effective space for women's political growth because it is not an autonomous space. Rather, it is a commercial space that men have created to fulfil their own political agenda. If women are lacking in imagination today in comparison to WLM activists, then perhaps this is because they currently have very little free space in which they could dream.

 Feminists today are also organising in a context that is more hostile to the pursuit of a genderless world. Older interviewees explained how coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s meant that women were socialised into a culture dominated by a hippie aesthetic and the values of the counter-cultural Left. According to Lierre Keith (WLM, USA), this framework lent itself more easily to a rejection of patriarchal beauty standards and normative femininity. She pointed to how socialist critiques of consumerist capitalism were quickly taken up by WLM activists and further subjected to feminist analysis:

It was all about natural [and] that's not a bad value system because it's about saying we want to like our bodies [and] we are tired of these rules that say we are supposed to hate ourselves. Women took [these values] and ran with [them] in particularly feminist ways.

In contrast to the backdrop of Leftist social movements which provided a culture conducive to the emergence of the WLM, Keith suggested that it is more difficult for women to reject femininity and consumer culture today because they have been socialised into a hypersexual world: 'I know it's harder and harder for the young ones, I see that they are up against way more than I was ever up against. [The culture is] so increasingly pornified, so it's harder for women to get out'. As well as discussing how transgender ideology perpetuates gendered stereotypes, younger interviewees also highlighted porn culture (see Dines 2010) as posing an additional barrier to women's ability to reject patriarchal social norms and formulate an oppositional feminist consciousness. Tiger Drummond (DN, UK), for example, said: 'the way that […] young girls [are] being exposed to pornography at such a young age [means that] things like [wanting to be sexually attractive to men] are really, really ingrained in women'.

By encouraging women to utilise digital space and then celebrating them for their efforts, popular culture and mainstream political messaging function to implicitly discourage the building of face-to-face feminist connections. If women's liberation is dependent upon women and girls having time to explore their humanity away from male cultural norms, then the move to digital life is having profound consequences for a generation of young women whose every interaction is now being surveilled. Chris Sitka (WLM, AU) expressed this idea in her interview:

> In order to be a small group of people standing up to the whole world around you, you have to build your own strength, and you do it by having your own culture, your own family, your own tribe. And this is why, when I see how young women now are all split off from each other, separated, not meeting, not even sharing houses together or whatever, I can't see how they can be strong enough to stand up against that pressure to conform to what we're told is correct.

Digital networking does not allow women to really see each other outside of male parameters, thus social media perpetuates their social and political atomisation. One recent British survey found 'a sharp decline in the happiness of young women and girls' (Weale 2018). Explaining how

girls' lives 'have contracted as their world moves online', the researchers reported that only 21% of girls 'met friends at each others' houses' in 2018, compared to 69% in 2009 (Weale 2018; see also Rogan and Budgeon 2018, 9).

At the time of this book going to press, the COVID-19 pandemic, its associated nation-wide lockdown policies, as well as the unprecedented push to digitally mediated engagement for all social, economic, political and educational activities will still be unfolding. Of particular relevance to this book is the likelihood that the pandemic will enable further surveillance opportunities and extend the power and reach of social media companies. Naomi Klein has recently argued that we are currently 'observing the seamless integration of government with a handful of Silicon Valley giants' (Klein 2020, n.p.). Klein (2020, n.p.) has called this a 'coherent pandemic shock doctrine', drawing attention to how 'the future that is being rushed into being as the bodies still pile up treats our past weeks of physical isolation not as a painful necessity to save lives, but as a living laboratory for a permanent—and highly profitable—no-touch future'. It remains to be seen whether Big Tech scepticism and resistance will flourish post-pandemic, or whether public and academic opinion will be largely supportive of frenzied tech development as our only possible avenue out.

While it is too early for me to comment at length here about the widespread implications of COVID-19 for women's liberation, early developments are troubling. Feminists know that in times of crisis the hard-won rights of women can be easily rolled back, or else forsaken entirely in the design of response measures (European Network of Migrant Women 2020, 7). Early reports indicate that both private and public spaces have become more dangerous for women, with rates of domestic violence, street harassment and indecent exposure spiking globally in the wake of 'stay at home' orders. In lockdown situations, women have few avenues to seek help from male violence, and digital space is far from a saviour. Privacy issues with video conferencing platforms such as Zoom have already been widely reported, with men hacking into meetings to share pornography alongside racist and misogynistic content. Also concerning is that Pornhub, 'the largest online depository of recorded sexual abuse of women', chose to respond to the crisis by offering men a free upgrade to

its premium service (European Network of Migrant Women 2020, 5). The consumption of online pornography has surged has a result, which equates to the increased dissemination of sexually violent content into private homes, where women and girls are currently trapped alongside their male abusers (Quek and Tyler 2020). Much work will need to be done by feminists to document and analyse various government responses to COVID-19, associated technological development and the implications for women globally.

Rejecting Social Media

> We do need to resist [social media], reject it actually, not really resist but reject it. And build something [of our own]. (Linda Bellos WLM, UK)

It has now been over ten years since the emergence of social media, and despite sustained efforts from feminist activists, evidence of tangible social and political outcomes for women remain unclear. Amy Richards (DN, USA)—the one activist I interviewed who did not describe herself as a radical feminist—evocatively characterised this situation:

> Feminists have had a very robust presence on social media for 10 years. Have the numbers of sexual assault gone down? No. Have the number of women tenured professors gone up? No. Has the pay disparity shrunk? No. In terms of social media being the turning point for change, I'm not so sure.

Some interviewees suggested that feminists are now developing more critical awareness around the limitations of social media and felt that a moment of change is afoot:

> I think that with experience, a lot of women are [now] seeing the limitations of 100% blogging and have [taken] to real life organising much more than they used to. They learnt the lesson basically. [Social media] had its use, and now I think more and more women are learning to use the internet in more healthy ways. (Anne Billows DN, UK)

Refusing social media is not an easy task, especially when many scholars foreclose this as a practical possibility. Laura Portwood-Stacer (2014, 299), for example, has argued that feminist media scholars should challenge women's participation in media systems as 'an intrinsic good', but nonetheless she also posits that 'non-participation is largely untenable—we have little choice but to participate'. The internet is now so much a part of our daily lives that we can barely imagine a future which is not intrinsically bound to the digital. According to technology critic Adam Greenfield (2018, 8), discursive foreclosures of alternatives impede our ability to collectively resist or 'think meaningfully about the future', because 'any conversation about the reality we want to live in [is now reframed] as a choice between varying shades of technical development'. This is similar to how feminist utopian imaginings have historically been shut down in the public sphere, presented as dangerous and impractical in order to preserve the status quo. Heterosexuality, for example, was commonly understood as natural and inevitable before the WLM (Miriam 1998, 13). Feminism threatens male institutions, and it is fear of feminist revolution that 'lurks behind the claim that radical feminism is *utopian* and therefore impossible' (Miriam 1998, 13).

At this point of advanced neoliberal capitalism, resistance to social media can seem largely futile, especially considering that platforms are commercial enterprises 'whose size and concentrated technical competence now span much of the terrain of ordinary experience' (Greenfield 2018, 275). In the face of this onslaught, much feminist activism has understandably become oriented towards *taking back the tech*: getting women into positions in technology firms or trying to occupy space for feminism on digital platforms. This drive is only likely to increase in the post-COVID-19 world. Over the last few years, when I have presented some of the ideas contained in this book in activist and academic settings, many women have quickly accepted my argument that feminists should move away from social media giants. The focus of debate then usually turns to a consideration of the relative merits of alternative digital spaces for feminism, such as Spinster, and how alternative platforms can best be kept secure from male surveillance and infiltrators. Following Twitter's decision to implement policies that effectively banned radical feminist speech in 2018, Spinster was created in 2019 on the Fediverse network to

provide women with an alternative, women-centric space for digital discussion.[3] It was so popular when it launched that its servers initially failed. While there is clearly a strong appetite amongst women to move away from the digital giants, Spinster is hardly free from their reach, or indeed from hostile men within the wider Fediverse network. Questions of safety persist for Spinster users: some groups in the Fediverse network blocked the site or have tried to shut it down, and Google has also banned its android app, which significantly impedes usability for some women (Fain 2019). I remain unconvinced that any digital space, even those which women can more easily shape and control, are politically useful for feminist movement-building. The activist focus on creating digital platforms *more suited* to feminism continues to play into the idea that women's liberation can be achieved via digital transcendence.

Another common response to my argument that feminists should abandon social media is to suggest that women should technologically upskill themselves as hackers, forum designers and moderators. This suggestion is premised on the notion that if women were as technologically skilled as men, then they would be better equipped to control their digital domains. While it is crucially important that activists do develop the material skills of organising, if women continue down a digitally oriented path, then their activist energies will remain focussed on developing tech skills based around how to succeed on social media. Many feminists now attend training days to learn 'the praxis of media-skills' including how to 'participate in tech cultures', and how to best avoid online sexual harassment (Hurwitz 2017, 476). Such a trajectory binds women more closely to the digital world, and to a technological future. Throughout this book, I have questioned whether such a future is suited to the political and ethical project of women's liberation.

Advocating that women become better hackers ignores that hacking evokes a male ethic of engagement based upon deception, sexual violence—that is, the penetration of targets—colonisation and surveillance (see Tanczer 2015). The battle for control of digital space can be seen as a

---

[3] The Fediverse is a 'decentralised' form of social media that is comprised of 'over 4,500 unique servers which all speak to each other'. Spinster's moderators have not banned men from participating, according to the FAQ section of the website this is because 'there is no reasonable way to check anyone's sex' when they register. See: https://spinster.xyz/about

type of modern warfare (Lovink and Rossiter 2018; Pötzsch 2015), and although academic debates often recast what I would see as a dangerous competition for manhood as boyish mischief (see Cohn 2013, 138)—that is, trolling—this does not diminish the danger for women. An embrace of social media for political organising makes feminism complicit in what Anna Yeatman (2014, 85) has called 'a distinctively modern fantasy of control' that promotes individualisation and fails to politically contend with the embodied experiences of everyday life. For this reason, Yeatman (2014, 86) has called for feminists to 'interrogate [their] complicity with modern technology in a way that responds to the distinctive concerns of feminism'.

Recent scholarly suggestions for *where to from here* also fall radically short for women. Disillusionment with social media and the decision-making mechanisms of unstructured crowds has prompted some academics to call for a return to the political party (Dean 2016, 2019). For feminists, however, new visions of the political party, complete with membership fees, are hardly suited to a political project that aims for nothing less than a complete overthrow of the patriarchal state system. Another proposition is set out in Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter's (2018) *Organisation After Social Media*. In their book, Lovink and Rossiter (2018, 6) suggest that 'offline romanticism' is the 'nostalgia option' for activists because a rejection of digital space is unsuited to the present moment. They argue that what activists need is for organised digital networks to replace virtual communities (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 35). According to Lovink and Rossiter (2018, 13), digital networks have become too big, and activists need to shift their focus away from the logic of watching and following to getting things done. Their suggestion for *where to now* builds on an idea of small group organising that is coordinated through local, regional and national efforts. This is reminiscent of the WLM's organising structure, only transposed into the virtual realm. Within Lovink and Rossiter's (2018, 5) framework, the autonomous, small, face-to-face group of the WLM is reimagined as a digital secret cell where communication is encrypted as a protection mechanism from outside dangers. Lovink and Rossiter (2018, 18) conceptualise their vision for the future of social movement organising as a praxis of 'organised networks', or 'orgnets'. They suggest that orgnets could draw on

'intelligent [*male-designed*] software' to remind people of when a network has lost focus and got too big, and assist them with 'dissolv[ing] connections, clos[ing] conversations, and delet[ing] groups once their task was over' (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 2).

Lovink and Rossiter's treatise does not consider the needs of women to move towards each other, formulate a class consciousness and begin to recognise each other outside of male control. Instead, their use of cutting-edge cyber metaphors reveals a masculine focus on hacking, encryption, transcendence and domination of the digital realm. Reminiscent of Donna Haraway's cyberfeminist dreaming, it is very difficult to know what to actually do to 'rewire, recode and redefine' the core values of the network society to create 'contradictory platforms that break through the unconscious numbness of smooth surfaces', 'hack the attention economy' and 'smash the online self' (Lovink and Rossiter 2018, 4, 163). Even Lovink and Rossiter's (2018, 134) tangible suggestions, such as the idea that movements should take inspiration from hate groups and paedophiles who create firewalls and use encryption technology to protect themselves against digital surveillance, also fall radically short for women. Continually retreating into increasingly more tightly secured digital spaces does not solve the initial problem I have identified with closed/private Facebook groups: women's attention remains continually focussed on men and outside threat, rather than collective-based movement-building with other women. It is also difficult to understand how the tactics that have spurned the rise of politically conservative groups and paved the way for the expansion of male sexual violence in digital space can be in any way useful for prefiguring a feminist world.

A feminist culture of social media refusal requires that women not only recognise the dangers of using the technology for feminist organising, but also that they begin to abandon it. For women isolated in their home-towns without access to other feminists locally, there are many reasons why this may be difficult. For younger women who have only ever participated in feminism in digital space, shifting focus and beginning to seek face-to-face connections might also be daunting. Social media companies actively encourage users to spend more and more time on platforms, with the aim of making them feel indispensable to modern everyday life. Lierre Keith (WLM, USA) was one interviewee who

explained how she had shut down her Facebook account for a time, but having now reinstated it, finds that she keeps getting 'snowballed in'. Refusal, however, is crucial. Continuing down the current path will likely produce a generation of feminist activists who only know how to interact, debate and organise within the confines of platforms. The more feminists that step away from social media and begin to organise locally face-to-face, the easier it will become for others to find them and act to revive a collective-based movement. I am hesitant to suggest that it is politically efficacious for women to still use social media in conjunction with their face-to-face efforts. This is because, when I meet other activists in physical space, one of their first questions is often 'are you on Facebook?' This question reveals the extent of our contemporary digital orientation: this woman does not need to begin the process of getting to know me, or to organise anything concrete here-and-now, because such work can be carried out later in digital space. While a staged shift from dependence on social media towards a face-to-face movement could potentially take place without the need to immediately abandon social media, this would need to be based upon women's concomitant pledge to creating face-to-face organising structures.

Space to Dream: Separatism as Creation

Male-dominated societies continually deny women access to stable ground upon which they can base their activism, and developing strong female friendships is one way in which women can resist. According to Janice Raymond (1986, 152), the development of gyn/affective friendship is fundamental to movement-building because it provides activists with an anchor from which they can launch political projects:

> The sharing of common views, attractions, and energies gives women a connection to the world so they do not lose their bearing. Thus a sharing of personal life is at the same time a grounding for social and political existence.

Social media provides no such anchor for feminists today, and nor does it provide an infrastructure through which they can begin to move towards other women. Instead, social media reproduces the values of male institutions within feminist organising structures. Women need to separate from male systems to access the free space crucial to fostering revolutionary feminist ideas. This vision of separatism is aligned with the work of lesbian feminist scholars who have highlighted the creative possibilities that emerge when women withdraw from male-dominated institutions and male-dominated culture. It is not a vision of separatism as inaction, or a retreat to women licking their wounds in private. Rather, it is a vision of separatism as a generative force (Hoagland and Penelope 1988). For some women, giving up social media might feel like an enormous sacrifice. Yet, if we understand separation from men and male institutions as a positive act that enables feminist creation (Hoagland 1992, 197–198), then we can begin to ascribe new feminist value to our choices.

Recently, there have been some signs of a return to face-to-face organising based around specific feminist campaigns. In the UK, for example, women managed to hold regular public meetings to protest the suggested changes to the Gender Recognition Act that would allow men to change their legal status from men to women based only on the criteria that they self-identify as women (Turner 2018). New feminist hosting organisations such as Woman's Place UK, We Need to Talk and Let a Woman Speak were formed to mobilise women across the country to fight the proposed reforms. Several of the events hosted by the above-named organisations have been subjected to considerable protest and intimidation by transgender rights activists (Hinsliff 2018). Despite this considerable pressure, women managed to hold a meeting in the House of Commons on 14 March 2018 (Maynard 2018). The momentum sparked by these face-to-face gatherings has been tangible, but it is yet to be determined whether this revival of face-to-face campaigning will translate into grassroots mobilising around other issues, or a revival of consciousness-raising groups. Academics and activists have also recently pointed to the continuing importance of consciousness-raising for the development of feminism, complete with calls for feminists to return to small group face-to-face organising (Firth and Robinson 2016; Hanisch 2010; Megarry

2018), as well as providing educational workshops on how to do so.[4] Revivals of face-to-face international radical feminist gatherings in Europe provide another sign of hope. These events, however, also clearly expose how the lack of face-to-face organising in local communities today means that many women now travel enormous distances to access women-only space and intergenerational feminist community.

At this point in history, it is important that feminists begin to conceptualise social media as the technological institutionalisation of male access to individual women, their political consciousness and the political project of women's liberation. I am arguing for a feminist paradigm shift away from the digital. Social media provides an instant means of communication that transcends geographical boundaries, but digital space is not suited to the feminist political project. While both traditional print-based and digital media provide a mechanism for raising awareness of feminism and feminist issues amongst women, the existence of tangible and physically locatable feminist groups is crucial to women's political development and the growth of a revolutionary movement for social change. According to Janice Raymond (1986, 18), 'men's ultimate fear is the threat posed by all dimensions, degrees and manifestations of women's personal and political movement towards and for each other'. A feminist movement grown entirely on social media would lose the basic components that made participating in the WLM life-changing and revolutionary. If feminism (and lesbianism) is to transform women's lives, then it needs to be a face-to-face activity.

References

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2018. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Baym, Nancy K., and danah boyd. 2012. Socially Mediated Publicness: An Introduction. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 56 (3): 320–329.

---

[4] In 2019, for example, British WLM activist Lynn Alderson ran a booked out workshop, 'Introduction to Consciousness-Raising', for attendees of the annual FILIA conference (https://filia.org.uk/new-blog/2019/9/17/lynn-alderson).

Beins, Agatha. 2017. *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Bell, Lenore. 2013. Trigger Warnings: Sex, Lies and Social Justice Utopia on Tumblr. *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network* 6 (1): 31–47.

Bendix, Trish. 2019. How to Make Lesbians Cool (and Inclusive) Again. *NBC News*, April 27. https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/how-make-lesbians-cool-inclusive-again-ncna999066?fbclid=IwAR0JLVlvzaFmrMdphJxhVOyNtWVF0zTUHuofukkGvcas8_9tdI0iUkmsIWo

Bray, Abigail. 2013. *Misogyny Reloaded*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Bunch, Charlotte. 1978. *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Cadwalladr, Carole. 2017. Mark Zuckerberg Says Change the World, Yet He Sets the Rules. *The Guardian*, February 19. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/19/mark-zuckerberg-says-change-world-he-sets-rules

Cohn, Carol. 2013. Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals. In *Women, Science, and Technology: A Reader in Feminist Science Studies* [electronic resource], ed. Mary Wyer, Mary Barbercheck, Donna Cookmeyer, Hatice Ozturk and Marta Wayne, 133–156. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

Dabrowski, Vicki. 2017. The Role of the State in Shaping Young Women's Experiences of Austerity. *PhD thesis*. Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Daniels, Jessie. 2009. "My Brain Database Doesn't see Skin Colour": Colourblind Racism in the Technology Industry and Theorizing the Web. *American Behavioural Scientist* 59 (11): 1377–1393.

———. 2016. The Trouble with White Feminism: Whiteness, Digital Feminism and the Intersectional Internet. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class and Culture Online*, ed. Safiya Umoja Noble and Brendesha M. Tynes, 41–60. New York: Peter Lang.

Dean, Jodi. 2016. *Crowds and Party*. London: Verso.

———. 2019. Communicative Capitalism and Revolutionary Form. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47 (3): 326–340.

Dines, Gail. 2010. *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Dubrofsky, Rachel E., and Shoshana A. Magnet, eds. 2015. *Feminist Surveillance Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

European Network of Migrant Women. 2020. Global Feminist Perspective on the Pandemic: What "Normal" Do We Expect When the Crisis Is Over? *ENOMW*, March 3. http://www.migrantwomennetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/ENOMW-Covid19-article.pdf

Fain, M.K. 2019. Spinster Is in Its Infancy, But It Is Already Making Waves in the Fediverse. *Feminist Current*, September 12. https://www.feministcurrent.com/2019/09/12/spinster-is-in-its-infancy-but-already-making-waves-on-the-fediverse/

Firth, Rhiannon, and Andrew Robinson. 2016. For a Revival of Feminist Consciousness-Raising: Horizontal Transformation of Epistemologies and Transgression of Neoliberal TimeSpace. *Gender and Education* 28 (3): 343–358.

Frye, Marilyn. [1977] 1988. Some Reflections on Separatism and Power. In *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, 62–72. London: Onlywomen Press.

Fuchs, Christian. 2017. *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Greenfield, Adam. 2018. *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life*. Brooklyn: Verso.

Grossman, Lev. 2015. Inside Facebook's Plan to Wire the World: Mark Zuckerberg's Crusade to Put Every Single Human Being Online. *Time Magazine*. http://time.com/facebook-world-plan/

Hanisch, Carol. 2010. Women's Liberation Consciousness-Raising: Then and Now. *On the Issues*, Spring. https://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2010spring/2010spring_Hanisch.php.

Hassan, Robert. 2012. *The Age of Distraction: Reading, Writing, and Politics in a High-Speed Networked Economy*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Hinsliff, Gaby. 2018. The Gender Recognition Act is Controversial—Can a Path to Common Ground Be Found? *The Guardian*, May 10. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/10/the-gender-recognition-act-is-controversial-can-a-path-to-common-ground-be-found

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia. 1992. Why Lesbian Ethics? *Hypatia* 7 (4): 195–206.

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia, and Julia Penelope, eds. 1988. *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*. London: Onlywomen Press.

Hurwitz, Heather McKee. 2017. From Ink to Web and Beyond: U.S. Women's Activism Using Traditional and New Social Media. In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, ed. Verta Taylor, Holly J. McCammon, Jo Reger, and Rachel L. Einwohner, 462–483. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jarrett, Kylie. 2016. *Feminism, Labour and Digital Media*. New York: Routledge.

Jeffreys, Sheila. 2018. *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminism in the UK 1970–1990*. London: Routledge.

Kitzinger, Celia. 1989. Liberal Humanism as an Ideology of Social Control: The Regulation of Lesbian Identities. In *Texts of Identity*, ed. John Shotter and Kenneth J. Gergen, 82–98. London: SAGE.

Kitzinger, Celia, and Rachel Perkins. 1993. *Changing Our Minds: Lesbian Feminism and Psychology*. London: Onlywomen Press.

Klein, Naomi. 2020. How Big Tech Plans to Profit from the Pandemic. *The Guardian*, May 13. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/may/13/naomi-klein-how-big-tech-plans-to-profit-from-coronavirus-pandemic

Lafrance, Adrienne. 2016. Facebook and the New Colonialism. *The Atlantic*, February, 11. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/02/facebook-and-the-new-colonialism/462393/

Lorde, Audre. [1979] 2007. The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House. In *Sister Outsider*, 110–113. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

Lovink, Geert, and Ned Rossiter. 2018. *Organization After Social Media*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia.

Maynard, Lily. 2018. Transgenderism and the War on Women—House of Commons 14/3/18. *Wordpress blog*, March 16. https://lilymaynard.wordpress.com/2018/03/16/transgenderism-and-the-war-on-women-house-of-commons-14-3-18/

Megarry, Jessica. 2018. Under the Watchful Eyes of Men: Theorising the Implications of Male Surveillance Practices for Feminist Activism on Social Media. *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (6): 1070–1085.

Megarry, Jessica, Meagan Tyler, Kate Farhall, and Catherine Weiss. 2018. Queer Inclusion or Lesbian Exclusion: Project Update (Nov 2018). https://www.academia.edu/37906812/Queer_Inclusion_or_Lesbian_Exclusion_Project_Update_Nov_2018_

Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalyn Keller. 2019. *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miller, Shaelaya D., Verta Taylor, and Leila J. Rupp. 2016. Social Movements and the Construction of Queer Identity. In *New Directions in Identity Theory and Research*, ed. Jan E. Stets and Richard T. Serpe, 1–25. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miriam, Kathy. 1998. *Re-thinking Radical Feminism: Opposition, Utopianism and the Moral Imagination of Feminist Theory*. PhD thesis. University of California, Santa Cruz.

Nagle, Angela. 2017. *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*. Winchester: Zero Books.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press.

Okolosie, Lola. 2014. Beyond 'Talking' and 'Owning' Intersectionality. *Feminist Review* 108: 90–96.

Portwood-Stacer, Laura. 2014. Feminism and Participation: A Complicated Relationship. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11 (3): 298–300.

Pötzsch, Holger. 2015. The Emergence of iWar: Changing Practices and Perceptions of Military Engagement in a Digital Era. *New Media and Society* 17 (1): 78–95.

Quek, Kaye, and Meagan Tyler. 2020. When Staying Home Isn't Safe: COVID-19, Pornography and the Pandemic of Violence Against Women. *ABC*, April 7. https://www.abc.net.au/religion/coronavirus-pornography-and-the-pandemic-of-violence-against-wo/12131020

Raymond, Janice. 1986. *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection*. London: The Women's Press.

———. [1993] 1995. *Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle Over Women's Freedom*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Rogan, Frances, and Shelley Budgeon. 2018. The Personal Is Political: Assessing Feminist Fundamental in the Digital Age. *Social Sciences* 7 (8): 132–151.

Sarah, Elizabeth. 1982. Female Performers on a Male Stage: The First Women's Liberation Movement and the Authority of Men, 1890–1930. In *On the Problem of Men: Two Feminist Conferences*, ed. Scarlet Friedman and Elizabeth Sarah, 135–156. London: The Women's Press.

Sitka, Chris. 2017. Being Together. In *On for Young and Old: Australian Intergenerational Radical Lesbian Feminist Anthology*, ed. Long Breast Press, 68–77. Melbourne: Long Breast Press.

Springer, Simon, Kean Birch, and Julie MacLeavy, eds. 2016. *The Handbook of Neoliberalism*. New York: Routledge.

Tanczer, Leonie Maria. 2015. Hacktivism and the Male Only Stereotype. *New Media and Society* 18 (8): 1599–1615.

Thompson, Denise. 2001. *Radical Feminism Today*. London: SAGE.

Tufekci, Zeynep. 2013. 'Not this One': Social Movements, the Attention Economy, and Microcelebrity Networked Activism. *American Behavioral Scientist* 57 (7): 848–870.

Turner, Janice. 2018. This Gender Battle Is Harder to Solve Than Brexit. *The Guardian*, June 30. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/this-gender-battle-is-harder-to-solve-than-brexit-0jc0pn867

van Dijck, José, and Thomas Poell. 2015. Social Media and the Transformation of Public Space. *Social Media + Society* 1 (2): 1–5.

Weale, Sally. 2018. UK Survey Finds Sharp Decline in Happiness of Young Women and Girls. *The Guardian*, September 19. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/sep/19/uk-survey-finds-sharp-decline-in-happiness-of-young-women-and-girls

Weisman, Leslie Kanes. 1992. *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Yeatman, Anna. 2014. Feminism and the Technological Age. *Australian Feminist Studies* 29 (79): 85–100.

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. London: Profile Books.

Index[1]

---

[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.