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Teen Feminist Digital Activisms

Resisting Rape Culture in and around School

In late spring of 2015, 17-year-old Alexi Halket was summoned to the vice principal's office in her suburban Toronto high school. Her offense was her attire—a trendy, navel-revealing crop top that, according to her vice principal, looked "too much like a sports bra" and was "inappropriate" for school (Diblasi 2015). Yet, Halket refused to change, arguing that it was not girls' clothing that was problematic, but a school dress code that unnecessarily sexualizes girls' bodies at school. Halket decided to act on this issue, organizing a "crop top day" protest where she encouraged all students to don crop tops for classes the following day. Halket used social media, including Twitter and Facebook, to spread the word to her classmates, dubbing the day #CropTopDay, which became the protest hashtag (see Keller 2018 for further discussion). Within a few hours, the hashtag was used by over 5,000 people, spreading well beyond Halket's school community and attracting substantial mainstream media attention, which covered the students' school protest the next day (Luxen 2015). Halket and her classmates were also joined by hundreds of other students around the Greater Toronto Area—and even globally—who sported crop tops to problematize the relationship between school dress codes and rape culture. Halket was reported by MTV as passionately affirming that school dress codes directly perpetuate rape culture:

> Hell yeah! School dress codes teach female students that their bodies are a problem and they have to cover up. [Dress codes] are telling a girl that her body and her skin are symbols of her sexuality, and that if she wants respect and to avoid sexual harassment, particularly from male students, she has to cover up. That is so messed up. Nobody should be harassing them in the first place and it is definitely not their responsibility and they are not at fault! (Diblasi 2015)

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Many #CropTopDay tweets emphasized the relationship between school dress codes and rape culture, often in explicit terms. For example, one tweet reads: "#CropTopDay #StandInSolidarity dress codes encourage the sexualization of woman's [*sic*] bodies and rape culture #NotOkay." Another reads, "4 dirty looks and 2 cat calls in an hour and a half on the TTC [subway] JUST because I was wearing a tank top crop top. Disgusted. #CropTopDay." This tweet was retweeted by the poster's older sister, with an accompanying note saying, "It's never okay for my sixteen-year-old sister to feel uncomfortable or anyone for that matter. #CropTopDay" (see Figure 7.1).

In making explicit the connection between rape culture and dress codes in both the tweet itself and accompanying hashtags such as #feminism, girls are using digital technologies to engage in feminist critique and analysis by discursively positioning their actions as political, feminist, and activist. In this way, as we saw in chapter 6, hashtags work to highlight the relationship amongst dress, embodiment, and sexualization within institutional codes of practice, providing a networked capacity for girls to organize as feminist activists.

We have begun this chapter foregrounding #CropTopDay and the story of Halket's experience to showcase how teenage girls internationally have been increasingly vocal, visible, and public about the ways in which rape culture shapes their experiences as young people, using social media to document their experiences and struggles (see Sills et al. 2016; Ringrose and Renold 2016a). We are also mindful of Deborah Tolman's (2012, n.p.) argument: "The mainstream media loves the story of a sole, courageous girl going after a media empire, the proverbial David and Goliath gone girl." While Tolman is referring to the media coverage of Julia Bluhm, a 14-year-old who garnered publicity for her role in lobbying *Seventeen Magazine* to cease photoshopping their models, her comments are applicable to Halket, who was often celebrated in the Canadian media as a particularly daring individual girl activist.

Figure 7.1 #CropTopDay tweet. Author screenshot.

In this final data-driven chapter, we aim to move beyond the privileging of high-profile celebrated media coverage of hashtag movements such as #CropTopDay, #BeenRapedNeverReported, and more recently #MeToo, which have dominated feminist media studies accounts of Twitter Feminism (Berridge and Portwood-Stacer 2014). Instead we explore the everyday experiences of teenage girls who are engaging in social media feminist activism, ranging from hashtag campaigns to less visible forms of digital activism in their everyday lives. We draw upon qualitative data from 27 teen participants, including seven semi-structured Skype interviews and one email interview gathered from our larger survey sample in chapter 5, three semi-structured interviews with teenagers who participated in the Canadian #CropTopDay campaign, and four focus groups with 16 teenage girls conducted with members of a high school feminist club in the UK. The individual and focus group interview data is supplemented with social media artifacts that were either purposefully selected (such as the #CropTopDay tweets, for example) or shared with us by our participants where we used "scroll-back" methodology to capture relevant tweets and posts on mobile phones during the interviews (Robards and Lincoln 2017).

We make three primary arguments in this chapter. First, relating back to chapter 5 we show how the girls use Twitter as a pedagogical platform to discover feminism but also to specifically develop their analyses of how rape culture is operating at school. Second, we demonstrate how girls use Twitter both publicly for instance by lobbying school administration or collectively operating a Feminist Twitter account, but also how they use social media privately as a backchannel to challenge sexism through private messaging functions. We explain how Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and iPhone group chat provide different platform affordances and generate distinct practices or vernaculars (Boyd, 2010; Gibbs et al. 2015; Warfield 2016). From using Facebook to challenge a rape joke in the peer group to tweeting about sexist dress code live during assemblies at school, or creating jointly authored feminist tweets from a joint Twitter account, we explore a wide range of novel uses of digital platforms. Finally, we argue that despite the opportunities for feminist activism found via social media, there remains significant barriers to participation, including trolling and harassment, which schools are failing to address, that present serious challenges for girls ability to practice digital feminist politics in their everyday lives.

Discovering Feminism through Social Media

A significant finding from chapter 5 was that 33 percent of the 46 survey respondents were teenagers who were still attending school. These teens noted how social media, but particularly Twitter, provided knowledge that was not

available at school: a world "out there" to connect with like-minded people, and find information that was not taught within the formal curriculum. Many teens were also optimistic that they could use social media connections and information to influence, and even *educate* their known peers at school (see also Retallack, Ringrose, and Lawrence 2016; Kim and Ringrose 2018), highlighting the important pedagogical function that digital media platforms provide for young people (Keller 2015).

Chloe, a 17-year old self-defined feminist activist from Pennsylvania, said: "90% of my tweets are feminist" and that she uses Twitter over other more popular platforms for teens, such as Instagram, because:

> I can gain a lot of access to people that I wouldn't have on other platforms . . . it helps me connect to more people . . . say I tweeted something about feminism, and even if you're not following someone, say someone retweeted it and they saw it's spreading the message easier. . . . I have met a lot of people online who I'm friends with now on social media who will have conversations about feminism . . . a lot of people in the older generation will say that social media is bad, that it's causing a lot of harm . . . but in all I think it's good for connecting you to people around the world who you would never be able to meet beforehand.

While some students were comfortable having their feminist identity easily findable and searchable online, this was not always the case. Chloe, for example, reported being concerned about making her Twitter account known to any friends at school. Similarly, she had a YouTube Feminist channel and she tweeted her broadcasts, but said only one of her school friends knew about it: "I never put my Twitter account on my Facebook or anything because I don't want any of my friends to find it. . . . I'm not confident enough." We can see how Chloe keeps separate her Twitter account as its platform affordances are distinct and less visible to her school-based peer group than Facebook.

Also, echoing our findings from chapter 5, social media provides a counterpublic and a connective bridge between those who are geographically isolated or dispersed, or who lack parental permission to attend offline events. For example, Kara, 15, says that she's exchanged tweets with girls from other Canadian provinces who are part of what she called the "Crop Top Day movement," and she credits the social media platform for her burgeoning feminist consciousness. She said:

> There's a lot [on Twitter] promoting feminism now, which is good. If it wasn't for social media I probably wouldn't know what feminism is and what it's all about. I think social media has really helped.

Tori, 14, from London, notes that social media has given her an outlet to "spread information and education" and learn about feminist issues, adding that for her it was a more practical and accessible channel for getting involved given her age:

> The thing is I don't think I'd be allowed to go to all these feminist activist's events at the moment, but I definitely want to. When I'm an adult living on my own I'd love to start going to these events.

Similarly, Sophia, 14, from Florida, says that living in the "bible belt" of the southern US means that it is easier for her to express her feminism online than in person:

> With social media I feel a bit safer in a way to say I know that I'm speaking out to a community that I know I feel a bit safer to . . . its easier for me to put it into words, something I can't think of things off the top of my head but I can think about something. . . . I can talk about something that's halfway across the world and it's more well-known.

While some participants felt that social media provided a "safe" space to speak their views, this was not a universal perspective. Debbie, 18, from Ireland, for example, shared the way she was rarely moved beyond retweeting feminist posts on Twitter because "there's so many people could just come and attack you . . . people love having a strong option against something rather than for something."

Significantly, as we will continue to explore, our data shows the ways teens are discerning about which social media platforms they use to engage with feminism. Debbie, like Chloe mentioned earlier, uses Twitter and Tumblr for feminist posts, but wouldn't feel comfortable posting on Facebook because of its visibility with her friendship group from school and summer camp:

> When it's someone you know or you're close with—like when you express something and then they have a really strong opinion against what you're saying . . . I find it a bit awkward to get over that. . . . I have a few friends they pass remarks a lot . . . who'd be like you don't want to say that around Debbie.

In line with previous research on occupying a feminist identity inside school, Debbie finds it difficult to cope with peer conflict or "remarks" about her feminist views (see Ringrose and Renold 2016b). Although some participants did not feel confident allowing friends and acquaintances to see their feminist views, this was not a problem for all teens in our study. For example, Terri, 18, from

London, says that she became a feminist during her final year of high school, and explicitly uses Twitter to connect with others online. Terri says she mostly has her high school friends as Twitter followers and that she thinks of her feed as a place where they will be "forced" to see her feminist views:

> I share things and post things that combat oppression and patriarchy. It is not just a feminist discourse but an overall SOCIAL JUSTICE discourse, but for me, they are one in the same. I do not hold back in what I share because I know that as an "activist" it is my duty to "spread the word" and make people see things that they would not see otherwise. I consider it my responsibility to spread that word because without me, maybe no one else would ever share such a message, and my followers would not ever hear about it or be forced to think about it (social justice, power systems, oppression, etc).

We find this interesting that "spreading the word" is positioned as a form of feminist burden to be taken on by Terri. As an older teen, perhaps she also gained confidence to exert her views, as part of her desire to transform her peers by showing them the "right way." Using social media in such a fashion also allows Terri to intensify and spread out her feminist activist identity as a girl (Brown 2016; Taft 2014). But even for girls such as Terri, who found professing feminism empowering in some ways, many shared how they struggled with the issues and conflicts that this has brought into their daily lives. Difficulties were particularly evident when they tried to call out sexism, misogyny, and rape culture in the institutional setting of school, as we continue to explore later.

Discovering Rape Culture

As we saw in the survey data in chapter 5 and in our opening discussion of #CropTopDay protests, rape culture was becoming a recognizable part of the lives of all the teenage girls we spoke with. Most of our Canadian, American, and British participants were becoming familiar with the term "rape culture," and this feminist awareness was explicitly connected to learning about issues online. Sophia, 14, from Florida for example, explained how she learned about rape culture through social media, and recounts explicitly searching for information on the issues that she wasn't learning about at school:

> I started getting home schooled . . . and looking more about other things in history and I started on focusing on what's happening in the world and what my school would tell me. And I would sort of see things,

> wrong things, that have happened. One of my friends a couple of years ago was raped. And the police wouldn't do a lot. And that was when I kind of like decided I need to get involved.

Sophia's parents removed her from school when she wasn't doing well, and it is significant that it is in a home schooling environment that she learns to be critical about what she was learning (or not) in school. Significantly, her friend's rape has also led her to actively seek out information on social media. Jamie, 17, from Ohio also discussed how her personal experience of dating abuse led to heightened awareness of rape culture:

> I was in an abusive relationship and that's something I try to talk about a lot because I don't want that to happen to any of my friends. But when it was happening I didn't tell anyone . . . but definitely that relationship was a product of rape culture . . . while I was dating him he monitored all of my social media. . . . I was a feminist when I was dating him, but I was a lot more subtle about it because I knew that he would be upset about it and he was a lot bigger than me, he was a lot scarier than me.

Jamie moves beyond a personal experience to share how feminism has enabled her to develop a critical feminist analysis of rape culture. This analytical move we are tracing positions abuse as a product of cultural norms: "something that says men are entitled to women, and that it's a women's job to protect themselves, as opposed to teaching men to not do certain things, such as catcalling, rape, assaults, those kinds of things." Jamie then applies this understanding to her experiences of being catcalled on the way to school:

> To get to our school, you have to walk across the street and a lot of the times in the morning, you're just so tired and then a car will honk at you, and a guy will whistle or something. And you're just like, okay, really, I'm on my way to school and it's seven in the morning!

Here, Jamie points to the ways in which girls experience rape culture commuting to and from school, street harassment that most often goes unaddressed by school officials because it is not directly on school property. Caroline, 16, from London, also discussed having to battle rape culture daily at school, mentioning frustration at the popularity of Robin Thicke's song "Blurred Lines" with her peers (see also Horeck 2014). She argued that inadequate sex education on issues such as relationships and "consent" was key in perpetuating rape culture. Kara, a 15-year-old #CropTopDay participant from Nova Scotia, Canada, also argued rape culture was a big problem that was not being recognized at

school: "Oh definitely! I actually know a few people in my school who have been sexually assaulted by other schoolmates. And I think that people need to be educated more on what rape culture is."

Getting "Fired Up": Challenging Dress Codes in North America

As indicated by the #CropTopDay campaign, one of the issues being connected to rape culture in the institutional culture of schooling is that of sexist school dress codes. This is not a new issue, as the policing of schoolgirl bodies has a lengthy history—as does girls' resistance to dress code policies (Lovell 2016; Pomerantz 2007, 2008; Schrum 2004). Nonetheless, we are likely hearing more about these resistances due to teens' ability to broadcast their views via social media platforms, such as Twitter. It is significant that all the teen feminist activists in our research were aware of the gender imbalances surrounding clothing policies at school. From our North American data, we found that teenagers were increasingly retaliating against sexist dress codes. For example, Kara (15, Nova Scotia, Canada) says, "I definitely think that [#CropTopDay] is a feminist movement, it has to do with rape culture and how that's affecting us. Rape culture says that women are just used for sexual objects and that they don't really have an importance beside just giving men what they want." Morgan, a 19-year-old American college student agrees, comparing #CropTopDay to historical moments when women were prevented from wearing particular garments, such as pants: "We're not getting arrested on the streets for what we're wearing, but in schools we're being told you have to cover yourself because you're a distraction. That's not okay." Sofia (14, Florida) similarly talked about how dress codes had become one of the most salient issues for girls at school in her context:

> Recently we've been challenging dress codes. We find that they're very unfair. And living in Florida its very hot and a lot of girls are just tired of wearing jeans every day and having to cover up so much because apparently, what our teachers tell us is that we distract the boys. We can't wear shorts. They tell us that they have to be say like three inches above the knee . . . I've seen if a person is disobeying the dress code they have to put on a bright neon shirt and these ugly sweatpants and we have to wear that around the school. And it's very embarrassing. I've seen this one girl have a panic attack because she was so shy that her mom had to come and pick her up because she didn't want people to know. It gets pretty bad.

Sofia reported that there were at least two dozen girls a day who were forced to wear the "shame suit" and that it had become such a regional problem that it made the news: "[I]t was on the national news . . . a nearby high school down the street where my mom went to . . . they put this girl in a shame suit . . . what happened was the girl posted it online."

The media coverage and the girl posting it online seemed to galvanize Sofia, who then also began tweeting about the dress codes at her school and about her experiences with street harassment. Here tweets included: "sick and tired of catcalling at this school" and "whistling at me isn't a compliment it's degrading." She also actively retweeted posts from girls in other schools who protested gender bias against girls' attire and noted the failure to sanction boys in dress codes through tweets such as: "don't say dress codes are for professionalism unless you are prepared to ban sweatshirts and t-shirts too." Although Twitter offered Sofia an important channel for raising her own awareness and connecting with teens outside school, as she explained, challenging dress codes *within* her school proved much more difficult.

This was evident when describing her participation in the school's "Girl Up" club, officially supported by the United Nations, which advocated and fundraised for "girls in less developed countries." During one of their meetings, the girls agreed to start a petition to challenge the school's dress code. As she recounted:

> And we all felt the same, we were all standing on our desk, talking like just saying out loud personal experiences with dress codes. And we were getting really fired up. And some of us started recording it and putting it on Snapchat. And then after the meeting the president of our club, she told us, we need to take those videos down because if someone finds them we could get in a lot of trouble.

Here, although the school supported feminist activism in "other" parts of the world, it was fearful of actions or criticisms that might bring negative attention. This is despite Sofia's acknowledgment that teachers and school boards had the power to challenge slut-shaming, they still refused to do anything about it

Although many of the teen girls in our sample took to Twitter or other social media platforms to express their anger and frustration at dress codes, not many were able to translate this into direct challenges at school. Feeling fed up with the school's inaction, Kara (15, Nova Scotia, Canada), took to tweeting the school's official Twitter handle to express her opinions. Jamie (17, Ohio) similarly attempted to engage with her school culture saying: "I try to tweet a lot of stuff about what's going (on) . . . I try to post when I see misogynistic things happening and call them out, pretty much." She described learning about these issues on feminist social media:

> On Tumblr I see a lot of posts about "I just got in trouble for wearing this" and then like a blurb about what the teacher said. One of the things I saw was a teacher got her in trouble for her shorts being too short. But the guy didn't get in trouble for wearing, I think it was a Hooters shirt, that had the outline of a girl. Why would you ever wear a Hooters shirt to school? Like who do you think you are?

Like Kara, Jamie described how she then began using Twitter to try to challenge the multiple and various permutations of sexism that fall under the umbrella of "rape culture," and eventually even tweeted her principal directly. After hosting a meeting with all the girls in her school to talk about the dress code as they approached summer, Jamie took to Twitter to challenge many of the unsatisfactory answers given about both the dress code and the way it was policed.

Here, Jamie describes herself and other girls challenging the principal's girls-only dress code assembly. Jamie's Twitter feed also showed that she and her friends live tweeted during the assembly reporting on the discussion. They used the immediacy that social media platforms such as Twitter provide to speak and galvanize the collective in the school. Jamie tweeted: "I don't want to try have [*sic*] to not look at a woman's cleavage when I'm trying to talk to her. Actual quote." She then tweeted: "translation: Boys can't control themselves and it's the fault of girls." Jamie's friend Theresa also tweeted, "We pay for this school and yr [*sic*] going to FORCE us to LEAVE because you think our FULLY COVERED legs aren't suitable for a school environment?"

We are characterizing these tweets as an example of "backchannel" social media use, a strategy used by teenage girls to document instances of sexism in school in real time. The resulting conversation shows the creative use of Twitter by teens inside of school to disrupt institutionalized sexism through the immediacy of Twitter (Ringrose and Mendes 2018). This is methodologically significant in that they are not using a recognizable hashtag, which would make it easier to detect this activism in the Twitter network through big data hashtag harvesting and mining (see boyd and Crawford 2012 for an excellent discussion on the politics of big data). Instead, we can only see this type of activism through the entry point of the social media "produser" and the interview triangulation with participants to discuss their Twitter posts (Bruns 2008). We can also see that the teens are not simply connecting with an online affective public (Papacharissi 2015) or counter-public (McCosker 2015) by joining into a trending hashtag, they are speaking to their preexisting Twitter contacts, an "intimate public" built upon affective relations, such as friendship (Khoja-Moolji 2015). Indeed, the known peer group at school carries many different affective implications around visibility, privacy, and voice for "networked teens" (boyd 2014), as we'll continue to explore as we proceed.

Hidden Sexism: Uniform Codes Responsibilizing Girls for the Sexualization of Their Bodies

Where sexist dress codes have dominated discussion in North America, in the UK, and Ireland all our participants wore school uniforms rather than plain clothes; but they also connected the policing of their uniform skirts to rape culture. As part of our research we worked extensively with a feminist group in a UK high school, interviewing 16 girls over a two-year period. Each focus group had a mixture of grade 9 and 10 girls, aged 14 to 16. The school feminist group was founded in 2014 after girls in shorts were sent home or held in detention during a non-uniform day (see Ringrose and Renold 2016a). The girls were clear that skirt policing was one of the main dynamics informing the sexism and rape culture at school:

KELLY: There is a lot of hidden sexism within the school, like the whole thing with the uniform.
DANA: Completely.
KELLY: Just the whole attitude of, not the majority, but a strong amount of the teachers, it is really sexist. And they probably don't even realize that its sexist. Its just sort of really embedded within the school and within the school culture.
SAM: [S]ome teachers take it like, a personal offence if a girls got their skirt rolled up. They'll say "oh, why do you want your legs out, why do you want people to look at you, you know, like do you want boys to touch you, do you want to distract boys from their work?" things like that.
KELLY: Some teachers can be quite sexist.
DANA: One student got called a porn star because she had her skirt rolled up.
SAM: Yeah and on non-uniform days people were sent home for wearing short shorts and told to change.
KELLY: Awful. Like the Headteacher, he's a man he will look you up and down and decide whether its suitable or not.
DANA: You're appropriate or whether you're going to ruin the school

The discussion from this focus group shows how girls are responsibilized for sexism instrumentally through the actual uniform policies, which are organized around the binary of appropriate/inappropriate sexuality, enforced through the gaze and evaluation of (in this case male) teachers. The notion that sexual reputation and school reputation are linked explicitly comes through in our data, particularly how a "bad" reputation with the former can "ruin" the latter. That

honor resides with women's behavior is nothing new—after all, in many cultures around the world, family honor is also connected to normative cultural expectations that blame the victim when they transgress the cultural rules around female sexuality (Payne 2015). Tori (14, West London) who was not part of our main research school, connected the way uniform codes were linked to rape culture at her school:

> It's literally ridiculous the things that girls are sent out of school for compared to boys and it's encouraging the rape culture by saying girls need to be told what they wear because boys are more horny than girls and therefore it's easy for them to rape you; instead of teaching boys not to rape.

Girls articulated the way "school rules" around gender, sexuality, and embodiment work to legitimize sexism, and limit a discursive space to challenge the sexual objectification and regulation of their bodies (Raby 2012). This was clearly articulated by Leigh, age 15, from our research school:

> Unless [lad culture] is breaking an actual rule, then there's not much they'll [the school administration] want to do. If we just say, "oh, they're [the boys] always making these comments and stuff," a teacher can tell them [to stop] but they'd just start again when the teacher went away.

Leigh here is discussing the British notion of lad culture (see Jackson and Sundaram 2018; Phipps et al. 2018) which we defined in chapter 2 as the idea that "boys will be boys" and the normalization of sexist banter as expected behavior from boys, an idea that emerged strongly throughout our data.

Another way that sexism from peers expressed itself was anti-feminism and rejecting girls' experiences of sexism as legitimate. Callie, age 15, from our research school recounted the ways boys denied girls' experiences of street harassment, or dismissed effects of sexism:

> I feel like when you say you're a feminist or you say you're affected by sexism, loads of boys are, like, well, how does it affect you and stuff? And you say, well, I don't really appreciate being wolf whistled in the street, and stuff like that. And they're like, yeah, but that doesn't happen, and, oh, but how does that upset you, and stuff? So I think if I did a tweet, I'd want to include quite shocking statistics about maybe not just stuff like wolf whistling and stuff, it would be more FGM and rape, so that they'd actually take the statistics and they would think, God, that actually is a big problem.

It is perhaps no surprise that the girls in our focus groups often resorted to calling upon more extreme forms of violence as a tactic to get others to recognize sexism as a problem. We can draw parallels here with posts to Who Needs Feminism?, discussed in chapter 3, where contributors similarly used issues such as violence against women as a reason that feminism was necessary, because it is harder to dispute or dismiss. The girls tried to explain their difficulties in getting the boys to understand or accept their views as linked to immaturity and "lack of understanding"; but others felt this was cultivated through a lack of education in school, as we saw in chapter 5:

JANE: We never had a lesson on consent really.
INTERVIEWER: What do you want to be taught about . . . or if you could design it yourself?
CLARISSA: A lot about consent.
JANE: Yeah.
KERRY: *A lot about what's right and what's wrong* (emphasis added).

These same dynamics of facing widespread ignorance about rape culture as well as resistance to feminist analyses and experiences of sexism and sexual violence discussed by our adult participants are raised here as the girls highlight the key word of "consent" twice (Lanford 2017). The difference for these girls is they are living inside the school structure and attempting to challenge sexual violence within it through a range of political practices (see also Sundaram 2014).

Challenging Rape Culture on Facebook

As noted, the school feminist group originated in 2014 after girls were sent home for violating dress codes during a school non-uniform day in the summer. From discussions in class supported by a man sociology teacher, the sessions quickly spilled over into "digilante" (Jane 2017) activism on their social media accounts. For example, Robin, age 16, had begun to openly challenge posts on school peer's Facebook accounts. When a male schoolmate and Facebook friend posted a rape joke on another boy's Facebook wall, Robin responded with: "Are rape jokes funny? *winces.*" Another member of the feminist group, Amelia, chimed in to support this, commenting underneath Robin's post: "Yes, rape, that hilarious topic. Everyone loves a little rape," going on to suggest that the contributor think about how rape could affect girls and women in his family, such as his sister. After this comment, the boy turned violent calling Amelia "a f-ing bitch" and telling her to "shut the 'f' up" for talking about his sister. This is an interesting

example of where protective masculinity clashes with the lad bravado of his rape joke discourse (Niccolini 2016). This exchange begins to make visible the opportunity for community-building and support that Facebook provided some of our teen feminists, who were already generating solidarity through their participation in their lunchtime school feminist group (see Ringrose and Renold 2016a for a fuller account).

In 2015 the girls again talked about a disgruntled Facebook post from another one of the founding members of the feminist club, Francesca, age 16, which this time documents her harassment in the school hallway. This post generated 69 comments and 160 likes. We reproduce this post in full as follows:

> Today I left my lesson and walked a few meters before being tapped on the bum by a 12–13 year old boy. As any girl should I stopped, asked which one it was and explained how incredibly unacceptable it was to touch a girl's bum without her permission, and made everyone aware of what had just happened. Unsurprisingly neither boy owned up but simply laughed and blamed the other. I then had a group of young girls approach me saying things such as "Stop," "Calm down," "it's not a big deal" "it happens everyday," "don't worry." It makes me so angry upset and disappointed to think that these girls see it as OK to be inappropriately touched on a DAILY BASIS and see it as unnecessary to DO SOMETHING about it! I think it is so ironic that [the school] held a model United Nations Conference discussing the inequality women face globally only just last Saturday when they have cases of the discussions within the school. Something needs to be done. Girls and women need to know and understand that THEY should choose who and what touches THEIR bodies and that they are NOT public property for anyone to touch. Girls who laugh along or ignore these events are enabling and encouraging these boys or men to continue. Don't just stand there or move on DO SOMETHING.

The girls commented extensively about this incident and the many online comments it had provoked, noting:

> [M]ost of the comments were from boys saying like what's the deal? Firstly. Then comments from girls saying girl, pretty much the exact same thing happened to me and emojis . . . like praising her. Well done . . . and . . . shown support, be like yeah, I agree with you. (Sam, age 15)

This example indicates in this case it was *easier* to challenge sexist behavior on Facebook than in the institutional setting of the school because there were more people from their peer group to lend support, as we discussed earlier. The connective capabilities of Facebook then provided a space for these girls to "come together" to challenge rape culture among their peers. However, while it would be easy to look at this data and conclude that challenging rape culture online is less difficult than in offline settings, our analysis of different groups of girls in different friend groups and social statuses in the school reveal many social and interpersonal complexities and girl "hierarchies" (Ringrose 2013). Only some girls, often those with "higher status" in the peer hierarchy, found challenging rape culture on Facebook possible at all. Our interviews revealed that in fact, some girls found Facebook much more difficult to navigate because of their status in the peer group and lack of support. For instance Jos, age 15, argued "there's a certain category of girls that would make this type of post . . . [about their personal experiences of rape culture] because they'd be thinking more about what actually happened than the repercussions of putting [your encounter with sexual harassment] on a Facebook page and having people reply." We see that Jos is noting that some girls would be more anxious than Francesca about the negative responses from peers either denying these encounters, or possibly even aggressively attacking the victims online as we saw with Robin's post earlier. In addition, Rhea, age 15, says that she avoids reporting on personal incidents of sexism on Facebook because the audience on Facebook is beyond school but also includes her family, "it's [not] going to do anything but worry my nan." Girls worry about the reception of their feminism and protest statements among family as well as friends, and feeling able to post sensitive material about gender and sexuality on Facebook appears to relate directly to age and peer status of the girls involved. Where Francesca was one of the older, popular, and high-achieving girls in the school and one of the founding members of the feminist club, Jos and Rhea are younger and less confident about their ability to manage the types of negative comments leveled toward Francesca.

Challenges of Using Social Media for Feminist Activism in School

As we've been discussing, it would be misleading to minimize the enormous challenges in doing feminist digital activism in and around schools faced by our participants. If we move to the formal policy context, in-school social media use is largely unsupported in many schools in Britain through policies such as mobile phone banning, which was in effect in the research school (Francis 2017).

The girls in our research school felt hampered by how social media was blocked by the school safety policies, which position platforms such as Twitter as a distraction, rather than a forum for political participation or engagement with social justice issues:

SAM: All social media sites, or pretty much all of them are blocked in school. Yeah, like on the school computers.
LEIGH: It's like school doesn't want anything to do with it. . . . If you try to go on it it just says this URL is blocked so you can't access the website.
SARAH: We're not allowed to be online . . .
CALLIE: They're worried about offending anyone. All schools are so worried about offending people all the time . . .

Indeed, the girls were clear that the school did not support them in their activism, which could be positioned as "offensive." One participant said at best the school "didn't care," and at worst they were actively dissuaded from expressing activist views or those that challenged school authority:

LEIGH: Like if it's an issue we're fighting trying to make people aware of and trying to make it more sort of universally accepted.
SAM: Like we're meant to be naïve to like the big issues, but we're not.
KERRI: A lot of activism within feminism and everything, a lot of it does challenge the education system in schools. So its hard I guess for them to promote that and say you should be activists.

We can see how the school is positioned as hostile to their feminist activism and the girls understand they are being positioned as naïve, as has been seen in other research where adults minimize and/or refuse girls political awareness, voice, and agency (Brown 2016; Kim and Ringrose 2018).

Despite this the girls persisted in their feminist activism, and indeed went so far as to construct a joint Twitter account with which to tweet their feminist views. The girls were informally supported by a teacher in this endeavor, although the account was not connected in any visible way to the school identity.[1] The joint "Feminist Twitter" account, as they informally called it, had the word "girl" in the @ name, which related to their struggles over feminine embodiment and being put down as young girls in school (Young 1980). The Twitter profile image they chose was a humorous 1960s' style beauty queen holding a sign reading "not your bitch." The backdrop profile image was of "feminist conversation hearts" with slogans such as: "gender binary sux," "no means no," "feminist killjoy," and "not your babe." It is significant both that the girls wanted to collectively politicize their group through Twitter and that the

teacher worked to support this activism. Sonia Livingstone and Amanda Third (2017) present a "ladder of social media opportunity in Europe, which shows the relatively small percentage of young people who are politically active given only 8 percent sign an online petition, 12 percent express political views online and only 16 percent publish their own blog/vlog comments" (Ofcom 2014 cited in Livingstone and Third 2017). The finding that only 12 percent of young people express political views online puts the exceptional political ambitions of many of our teen participants from both the UK and North America in sharp perspective.

Challenges in Operating a Joint Feminist Twitter Account

Given the groundbreaking nature of what the girls were attempting, it is not surprising that they faced significant challenges in their collective attempts to run a feminist Twitter account through their feminist group at school. The first tweet they sent out as a group was a retweet of this quote: "Feminism is about human equality not female supremacy. Feminism is about HUMAN EQUALITY not diffusion of the male ego." Talking excitedly over one another, they recalled:

DANA: And even after the first couple of tweets we got, this one person . . .
KELLY: So many trolls, even within the first couple of tweets.
DANA: The first hour.
SAM: Who were challenging it. And there was even a girl who was challenging us.
DANA: Oh my god that girl!

It is likely that the negative attention brought to this tweet was enhanced by Twitter's functionality, where users can not only see, respond to (and critique) the original tweet, but any retweets as well. Emma Jane (2017) has extensively documented the aggressive largely anonymous environment of Twitter as a breeding ground for sexist, anti-feminist vitriol. The girls discussed further the content of the replies:

KERRI: They argue with us because we've called ourselves feminists and they've called themselves something else [humanist].
JANE: A lot of guys are just so against it and one point is that it's called feminism, and not equalism.

When we asked the girls who they thought their trolls were, they replied: "random people in America . . . who scroll through tweets and hashtags about feminism," which is exactly what happened with one of the next tweets they sent out about the sexist double standards of skirt length as seen in Figure 7.2:

This tweet contains the widely circulated Tumblr image created by 18-year-old Rosea Lake from Vancouver, which has become synonymous with calling out rape culture through skirt policing on social media (Whitelocks 2013). The image shows lines drawn down a woman's leg with the words "whore," "slut," "asking for it," "provocative," "cheeky," "flirty," and "prude" to indicate how levels of propriety align with skirt length associated with victim-blaming rape culture. The image is set alongside the popular hashtag #INeedFeminismBecause (referencing an offshoot of the popular Tumblr account we explored in chapter 3). Like our discussion of the hashtag #CropTopDay, the tweet demonstrates a clustering of Twitter techniques, including use of a Tumblr image as well as a trending hashtag to challenge rape culture, a practice that shows the convergent nature of the digital media landscape in which the girls are operating as well as their savvy use of hashtag technology to connect into feminist debates.

The girls received immediate negative feedback to the tweet. First, they received comments from a female-identified Twitter account who questioned the definitions of "slutty" and "appropriate," to which the girls responded,

Figure 7.2 #INeedFeminism tweet. Author screenshot.

"we should be able to wear what we want when we want and not be judged for it." To this the woman replied "you dress unprofessional and wonder why you're not respected. Wear what you want at home, in public it's a different matter." This exchange prompted Sam to switch from the "Feminist Twitter" as many students referred to it, to her personal account, which was a common practice:

> I thought I don't want to say it on the feminist Twitter account because I don't want to, like, I want it to be a nice account. So then I said "what's unprofessional?" to her. She said "Example girl complains about being sent to the office for wearing a crop top to school." I said if the weather is hot, why not wear a crop top? She said its unprofessional and distracting to both males and females. I said "then teach the student not to be distracted by a stomach." She said "That's ludicrous why would the whole class revolve around you and your silly whims? I said "Ludicrous? What's ludicrous is that you don't understand equality is needed." She said "Of course boys and girls wear your crop tops, three cheers for equality."

It is significant to note the ways Sam operates two Twitter accounts and chooses to speak as an individual, rather than for the group to engage in an online argument. She argues that this is because she wants the "Feminist Twitter" to be "nice" in ways that are congruent with normative nonaggressive, congenial teen femininity (Ringrose 2006). But this is contradicted a minute later when she also says:

> Say someone was arguing with the feminist account and then the feminist account was kind of like slacking, and not getting their points across clearly. . . . I'd go on the internet and type in fancy words to make myself sound more intelligent, so then I can argue and debate better, and back them up.

Presumably Sam means that she makes strategic decisions when to post from her own account to either back up or support the feminist account, which would help if it was being "Tweeted against."

The girls demonstrated a swift learning curve about the type of aggressive online attacks common in relation to content that can be searched through feminist hashtags or through the word "feminism." Indeed, the girls became very aware of the fact that the identifying terms on the Twitter account, listing them as "London School girls," was part of why they were being aggressively targeted for their views:

JANE: It said students, it was made quite clear that we were teenage girls.
CLARISSA: I think it's kind of sad that it's still controversial to be a feminist.
JANE: I don't understand how making a feminist Twitter account is controversial at all.
CLARISSA: how it's a thing to be a feminist? it's like you should . . . everyone should be a feminist, it's not an addition to your personality.

The girls express frustration at constantly being attacked for feminist content. Another conflict erupted when Anne, age 15, used the "Feminist Twitter" to directly respond to a Twitter account of local football club supporters who had made a sexist tweet about the Ladies World Cup:

CLARISSA: Some guy tweeted . . . Caitlyn Jenner looks better than half of the Ivory Coast ladies team, or the whole Ivory Coast. And then Anne was like, you should be appreciating them for their football, not for their looks. And then he tweeted back like, yeah, but they'd never get a dick anywhere. And then, like, all of us got involved . . .
JANE: They were just talking about rape and making it sound funny, [having] fun talking about child abuse, it's so funny [laugh]. No one laughed.
CHRISTY: And they were saying, like, oh, you're just Nazis, go and make me a sandwich.
JANE: Feminazi.
CHRISTY: It's like insults from idiots, like go and make me a sandwich.

The girls described this encounter sarcastically, speculating the boys they were in the online encounter with were "12-year-old boys who should be at Nando's" (a fried chicken shop), which is a means of positioning the boys as uneducated, low class and possibly racializing them also. Others however, found the encounter much more threatening and less of a joke:

KELLY: We were told to kill ourselves actually.
SAM: There was one guy who was, like, it doesn't matter what your uncle did to you when you were younger and, like, get over it.
DANA: It's scarier trying to challenge rape culture than it is a lot of other stuff because there's always so many people that are willing to defend it. So it's all banter.
SAM: And I just don't understand how that is funny or humorous at all.
DANA: People just say that stuff to piss people off.
KELLY: To be controversial.
SAM: They think they're so intelligent, they're not.

DANA: People sent us a porno link. I didn't click into that link.

These girls describe how (what they assume are) boys respond to Anne's tweet by telling them to kill themselves. This is clear evidence of trolling in the form of a violent threat. It is also what Nicola Henry and Anastasia Powell (2017) term technological mediated sexual violence since the comments also include sexualized references, implying that Anne was a victim of incestuous sexual assault, which accounts for her feminist views. Perhaps to further offend them, they were sent a "porno link."

The discursive strategy employed here is to undermine Anne's youthful feminism by suggesting that she is against men because she has suffered sexual violence. This explanation is commonly used to explain feminism as a pathology connected to personal experience and to deny wider systemic patterns of patriarchy and sexual power inequalities (Austin 2005). To put Anne in her place, her feminist arguments are attacked through positioning her as a victim of sexual violence from an adult relative (uncle, invoking incest), which make her anti-sex.

Interestingly, Anne related this type of aggressive behavior they were navigating via the Feminist Twitter account to her earlier experiences on Ask FM, a social media platform used extensively by younger teens several years previous:

> I thought it was rude but it happens a lot in social media. If you are having a debate with someone and you fail, you'll just be like oh go kill yourself. It's not like it's shocking to me because I've seen it before. In year eight I used to have this thing called Ask FM and people would be like oh kill yourself.

This discussion reveals the ways abusive rhetorical strategies migrate across social media platforms. Although statements telling her to go kill herself upset Anne, our interview also revealed the ways such aggressive hate speech quickly becomes normalized vernacular practice on Twitter (Jane 2017). At times, these practices frustrated, angered, annoyed, and saddened the girls. Many girls reported being both very incensed by this sexism, but not knowing how to handle their feelings of anger about it:

SARAH: I like getting involved in the arguments. But then I find myself really annoyed . . .
CALLIE: I get too aggressive.

Our data offers insight into how these tweets were experienced in different contexts. Sarah, for example, recounts feelings of frustration while reading the

tweets at home that night: "I was, like, on my bedroom floor and I was like really [ggrrrr] why are they doing this. It's more frustrating because they're obviously not as educated as we are about feminism." Callie and several other girls discussed feeling challenged about how to cope with anger and aggression, noting it was extremely difficult to effectively intervene given the dynamics online:

> SARAH: [they were] ganging up, it's really weird because they all have the same views and they're all talking to each other, so it's right, like in their world . . . all of their friends think the same way, which is quite misogynistic . . .
> CALLIE: Mob mentality. However much we said oh this is very wrong, they would come up with some ignorant, stupid, doesn't make sense. Like you can't stop them.
> HELEN: Its really difficult. They were saying oh well you're asking for it.
> CALLIE: We have a Facebook group so everyone was getting really riled up about it on the group, so we were planning what to say, which made our argument probably a lot stronger than it would have been if we hadn't been communicating at all.

The platform architecture, particularly the anonymity, of Twitter, which enables users to continuously and repeatedly tweet, positions the boys as unstoppable. This was particularly the case when they barraged the girls with comments including those involving sexual violence (girls being molested by their uncle) and victim blaming ("you're asking for it"). At the same time, while feeling overwhelmed by the way they came under attack, the girls demonstrated the important role that their closed Facebook group played as a private, but collaborative "backchannel" that enabled them to plan and organize Twitter responses. It is significant that, although less likely to be responding in real time, they felt their arguments were much stronger than they would have been had they tackled the trolls on their own:

> DANA: I didn't reply to any of the trolls. And I felt much better when someone more stronger in the group created like a strong argument for me, did it for me . . . you felt more supported in your views.
> KELLY: There's no guarantee that people will stick up for you when it's your personal account. Whereas when it's on the group image, everyone will back it up.

The girls articulate the difference between using their personal accounts to respond to attacks and "back up" the Feminist Twitter account, discussing how tweeting from one's personal account made one more vulnerable. Only a few of the girls felt invincible enough to take on this aggressive Twitter culture, such

as Sarah who was identified as "mean" and "forceful" enough to defend herself. But as we have already seen, some members such as Sam wanted the Feminist Twitter to be seen as "nice." The contradiction between expressing political views such as feminism and the normalization of "nice," compliant teen girl identity is therefore placed in sharp contrast (Gonick 2004; Ringrose 2006), creating tension and anxiety for the girls.

Being Trolled by Classmates

Trolling was not limited to unknown others, Chloe, 17, from Pennsylvania, for example, recounted how the worst incidents of trolling happened from people at school. She explained that a boy from her "home room" (form tutor group) challenged her Twitter posts on his own Twitter:

> Someone who wasn't following me who I actually knew at school, I wasn't friends with this guy but he found one of my tweets and took it out of context and put it on his page. . . . We weren't following each other so this means he stalked my account to find this tweet and use it against me, because it was about how I said that male feminists shouldn't be put on a higher platform than women feminists and he was arguing "people get mad when their meninists and then people get mad when there's male feminists and nothing can make us happy. And that's not what I was saying at all in my tweet . . . he just decided that I was a good target for that. And that's when I decided that it's not an educated argument, it's not really worth my time. And so that's when I started blocking people.

Recalling the discussion of men's rights activists and dominant MRA discourses (Ging 2017; Nagle 2017) discussed in chapter 5, the notion of meninism (male anti-feminists) comes up from the boy who is challenging her tweet. Chloe related feeling very anxious about this incident, saying:

> We are not even friends; we don't talk at all or even acquaintances . . . And the next day I was waiting like I didn't know if he was going to fight me or something but he didn't say anything to me in person. It was like he was a whole different person.

While the girls in the feminist group at school had each other to back themselves up in person as well as on private chats, Chloe relates being fearful that the boy may react with physical violence at school given he has sought out and criticized her tweets about "meninism." She relates feeling confused when the

boy did not engage at all in person the next day at school, indicating a disconnect between online and offline engagement and the complexity of engaging in digital feminist activism in a context such as school, but this was not an isolated incident:

> Another time was another guy in my school who was a freshmen and he also commented on my tweets when he wasn't following me. . . . I feel like a lot of the time guys are doing it just to get a reaction . . . getting into these arguments and getting a reaction out of feminists. . . . I think my name must go around in their circles as being a feminist and so they search out my name on Twitter and my bio says I'm a feminist.

Chloe has two important points about these interactions: first, that the anonymity of Twitter seemed to embolden people in a way that is completely different from face to face encounters:

> It's really, really easy to send out whatever you want without getting a backlash. . . . Twitter doesn't really delete accounts so a lot of people think that they can just tweet whatever they want without having any consequence, and you're on a screen, not face-to-face, so it kind of shields you.

Second, Chloe described how there were little if any consequences of students engaging in hostile or threatening Twitter activity from the school:

> They do not like getting involved unless something happens and there's no live contact at school. And so even if we've alerted them about things that happen online they will say, "Okay we'll get it on our radar if something will happen at school" ' . . . If someone threatened me on Twitter and I would go to administration and tell them about it they won't really do anything. And actually, there was a meeting with a girl who had a guy threaten her . . . a hate page on Twitter saying she needed to die, and called her really rude things . . . and they went to administration, they did have a meeting. But what made me really upset is that administration made them both have to apologize to each other, instead of saying you can't attack and threaten someone on social media.

Chloe felt this type of attitude permeated the school around issues of rape culture more generally as well, relating that they did have rape awareness assemblies, but her teacher had opted her class out of the assembly because it was not mandatory.

We return to this failure of schools to recognize or intervene into gender trolling in our conclusion to this chapter.

Negotiating What Content and Platforms to Post On

As with the adult Twitter users in chapter 5, the teens felt that Twitter trolling was most risky if one opens oneself up through sharing personal experiences of sexual harassment. For example, Sam (15, London) discussed tweeting about an episode of street harassment from her personal Twitter account:

> I went on a run with my friend. On the way to the park we got beeped at twice, three times. We were running around the park, people were shouting like oh, sexy blah blah, blah. And then on the way back it happened again, and I exploded. I shouted at the person who did it. I screamed at them, I was so angry. . . . So I went home and I tweeted about it. And then this guy tweeted me back—no idea who he was, no idea how he saw my tweet but he tweeted back "oh no you didn't you fucking whore." I was like you weren't there, I was there.

Sam suggested that sharing a unique personal tweet was more dangerous: "I think you get attacked more if it's something *you've said*." This type of gender trolling on Twitter had an effect on our participants, some of whom began to disengage from tweeting personal experiences and to purposefully avoid challenging sexism in online debates. Ann (15) whom we met earlier when she was attacked for tweeting her local football club to challenge sexism in their comments on female football players, said the experience dramatically decreased her use of Twitter:

> I guess I don't really tweet a lot if I'm honest. I find it will help me more if I just message my friend or to the group chat because when something happens to me I don't instantly think to tweet about it all the time.

Rather than disengaging form activism altogether, the teens developed alternative strategies, such as establishing their "closed" or "private" groups (see also Clark-Parsons 2017) such as Facebook messenger as we saw. Ann discusses how her friendship group has a private iPhone group chat called "Like it Lads," which emerged as a humorous way to "take the piss out of

the boys." This private iPhone Messenger group is made up of six girls who comprise their own friendship group within the Feminist Club at school. The girls explained that they use this group to share problematic or troubling experiences, but also to discuss and debate feminist issues among themselves. For instance, following Sam's frustration about being attacked for tweeting about experiences of street harassment, she explained feeling that she would benefit more from discussing issues with the friendship group through the iPhone group than sharing with the outside world:

> I feel like my friends are closer . . . if I tweet that means no one will be there to support me right away. . . . At the same time I feel like I don't want to tweet it all the time, it happens every other day and I don't want to tweet it all the time because I think it's just a bit sad and I don't want my Twitter to reflect me as this horrible person whose life is so sad.

Again, Sam relates not wanting to be positioned as having a horrible life, a tension inhering in holding the position of teen feminist "killjoy" bringing down everyone with "sad" stories (Ringrose and Renold 2016b). We can see that in balancing these tensions the girls develop different strategies and changing relationships as to how they use social media in their feminist activism. Additional challenges included deciding among the group which feminist perspectives to prioritize in their Twitter posts, as they discussed "low key sort of tensions" (Callie) emerging around the precise wording of tweets and how to manage their interactions with one another:

> CALLIE: It was like I don't want to use the term OCD out of place, but some of the girls were being a bit funny about how the Twitter was laid out . . . someone was like no you can just write that tweet again. They wanted it to be like a professional feminist Twitter. . . . They wanted all of the arguments to be deleted which I thought was kind of silly if it was a good argument.
>
> ANNE: I feel if I don't word what I'm trying to say right, anti-feminists will pick apart what I've said and be like you're wrong. So that makes it a slower thing, I can't just put it out there.

As it emerged, due to these tensions, many of the girls only used the joint Twitter for a relatively short period because "it was a bit of a stress really. I felt like I needed to Okay [the content] if I was going to tweet something." As Dana put it:

> Yeah, I think there was too much competition between who can make the smartest or wittiest tweets. So, there wasn't much point in putting your opinion because someone else would think of something better than you that they could have said.

This exchange provides novel insights into how the girls manage the idea of relating and responding to an outside public through their Feminist Twitter, and group dynamics around who controlled the digital feminist content of the account and what was best to say. They not only had to negotiate what to tweet, but also how to manage public responses. We also see a feeling of competition with some of the girls around appearing "smart" and "witty" (Pomerantz and Raby 2016), which alienated some girls, who eventually stopped contributing to the joint account. While they explained how they continued to use the group "Feminist Twitter" account, this was done more sporadically and with different intentions. As time went by, they began to engage more with satirical humorous feminist content, and to retweet content, rather than post personal experiences "as schoolgirls."

For example, they said they enjoyed an account called "relatable quotes," which highlighted sexual double standards in society. This included, for example a post critiquing the attack on Kim Kardashian's famous "Break the Internet" images with a satirical rejoinder of Justin Bieber's tweets of his bare buttocks, which was widely celebrated, pointing out that this was a sexual double standard. They explained that humorous feminist posts could deliver their message differently:

> CALLIE: [They] take the piss . . . they're feminist but they say everything sarcastically . . . there is one about street harassment. Women should just travel in underground tunnels where no men can see them, they say it in a stupid way to sort of make people see . . .
>
> HELEN: Its sort of on a level that everyone can attain and understand, it's a lot easier and it brings it more to everyone.

Here the girls expressly explain how humor, as an affective channel, can make messages easier to see and relate to. Indeed, scholars have noted how humor can be used to make feminist content "sticky" (Ahmed 2004) and spreadable (Bore, Graefer, and Kilby 2018; Jenkins et al. 2012; Rentschlar and Thrift 2015; Ringrose and Lawrence 2018). They contrast the confidence to use humor with "crying and getting really angry," which is draining, and creates conflict difficult to manage.

As with chapter 5, other platforms were identified by participants as being inherently "safer" than Twitter, with Tumblr again noted as a more "anonymous" place to post or repost feminist content since it "feels much deeper like a black

hole." In part, feelings of safety and security were also associated with the inability to respond directly to the curator of the content (Kanai 2016). In this sense, it is much more difficult to have an argument on Tumblr than Twitter. Furthermore, with Tumblr, participants liked the way:

> You can choose whether something comes up on your Tumblr or not. So, whereas with Twitter you can't really delete something that someone has said to you. You can block them and other people can still see what they've replied to you, and I think it is kind of embarrassing to be shamed for something that has happened to you (Rhea, age 15).

Although it is clear that Tumblr seemed to be a "safer space," we must acknowledge that this platform was actively used by only a handful of girls in both our survey and interviewing samples. Given Tumblr's early associations with queer, artsy, and creative "underground" communities (Cho 2015; Warfield 2016) the girls using Tumblr extensively could be characterized as having sophisticated cultural knowledge, with perhaps more tech savvy users who had a heightened analysis of different platform specific sensibilities using this platform. On the other hand, they may also lack the social capital to post their experiences more publicly on a platform such as Facebook or Twitter, indicating complex intermeshing of online and offline identity and values in performing feminism in and around schools.

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, we have explored how teen girls are using social media to engage with institutionalized and systematic forms of sexism, sexual objectification, and harassment constitutive of not only what can be termed rape culture but also lad culture as it manifests through cultural norms of masculinity in the UK, US, and Canada. We explored the complexity of the girl's feminist activism around these issues offline in their school-based group, but also through their online social media activity. One of the findings that emerged from our research was the careful thought girls put into not only what to post, but where to post. In part, this was linked with girls' understanding of platform affordances (Gibbs et al. 2014; Warfield 2016); opportunities and risks offered by various social media were carefully negotiated and managed, much like we saw earlier in chapter 5. Twitter, according to the girls we spoke to, seemed to offer the girls an opportunity to extend their engagement with feminism beyond their local communities, providing a channel for them to explore viewpoints and identities that might be controversial, such as linking school policy to rape culture. Teens are using

Twitter in what Carrie Rentschler (2014) describes as a feminist politics of witnessing, whereby witnessing is transformed from a "sensory-based act of seeing or hearing to the ability to record and distribute . . . evidence of rape culture and its interruptability" (69). In doing so, girls mobilize evidence from their own lived experiences to make sense of a larger context of sexism and rape culture in much the same way as the participants of the #BeenRapedNeverReported hashtag we discussed in chapter 6.

Twitter was distinguished from other social media, suggesting that its platform vernacular (Gibbs et al. 2015) affords young people both freedoms and risks that other social media platforms do not. Unlike Facebook, which operates through mutual friendship connections often based upon "real life" relationships, Twitter's non-reciprocal following structure means that teens often use the platform to make connections and "follow" a range of people they do not actually know. In this sense, we found Twitter to be a place where certain politicized teens could engage in feminist activism and avoid surveillance from parents, other family members, and peers who may not be supportive of their feminist views, and to communicate with people and organizations they may not have access to in person. Some of the most confident US and Canadian teens also used Twitter to actively communicate with members of their school community including adult authority figures, although that was quite rare, but this detail contributes nuance to research on the low statistical rates of youth digital political participation (Livingstone and Third 2017).

The girls' joint feminist Twitter account in our research school revealed complex dynamics about navigating a feminist identity online and offline as a teen girl. Through carefully mapping group discussions we saw the challenges of doing collective feminism in the networked affective economy of the Twitter sphere for teens, given participation was marked by issues of popularity, liking, and following, as well as adversity, aggression, and trolling. Twitter opened the girls up to a barrage of mediated misogyny including sexualized trolling (Vickery and Everbach 2018). Like the adult feminist activists, the teen girls swiftly developed strategies (group and individual) to cope with attacks and to modify their social media practices, across all the platforms they engaged with.

Taken together, these findings strongly support the need for media literacy and education around social media, digital rights, and responsibilities (Livingstone and Third 2017) especially, however, around issues of gendered and sexualized violence and consent in digital culture and at school (Powell 2010; Dobson and Ringrose 2016). Indeed, the girls in the research school felt that outside attacks and peer group dismissal, as well as institutional failure to support them meant it was difficult to continue their digital activism in relation to their school-based activities in the feminist group. The failure across all the schools discussed by our research participants to acknowledge or protect girls'

against experiences of online trolling, threats, and sexual violence, even when it involved known individuals at school, is one of our most important findings that needs to be urgently addressed in educational research and policy on digital gendered and sexual violence such as cyberbullying and cybersexism, as we will return to in our Conclusion.