"Stumbling Upon Feminism"

Teenage Girls' Forays into Digital and School-Based Feminisms

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Abstract: In this article, we discuss a case study of a feminist society in a girls' secondary school in England, highlighting how teenage girls use social media to combat sexism. Considering the recent growth of feminist societies in UK schools, there is still a lack of research documenting how young feminists use social media's feminist content and connections. Addressing this gap, we draw on interviews and social media analyses to examine how girls navigate feminisms online and in school. Despite their multifaceted use of social media, the girls in our research undervalued digital feminism as valid or valued, in large part because of dismissive teacher and peer responses. We conclude by suggesting that schools need to cultivate social media as a legitimate pedagogical space by developing informed adult support for youth engagement with social justice-oriented online content.

Keywords: digital activism, in-school feminism, Instagram, social media, Twitter, Tumblr, youth activism

Scholarly and media attention to feminist societies in school has recently gained traction in the UK. Jinan Younis's (2013) editorial, "What Happened when I Started a Feminist Society," shared over 30,000 times, is one the most widely circulated articles on the subject. In it, Younis, founder of the feminist society at Altrincham Grammar School for Girls, describes the abusive Twitter comments instigated by boy peers in response to the club's "Who Needs Feminism" campaign. The administration at Altrincham urged the girls to halt their activities, positioning them as having created the threat. In Younis' experience, the authorities at one of the highest ranking girls' institutions in the country blamed the girls rather than tackling the online misogynist abuse. This example resonates with Alyssa Niccolini's (2016) research in the US on a teen activist who was reprimanded after her article about rape culture in her school newspaper went viral because it exposed the school culture as being indelibly sexist.

In these and other recent examples, teen feminists are troubling what Sinikka Aapola et al. (2005) think of as engrained constructions of youth,

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particularly girls, as lacking in political agency. Social media are opening spheres of political participation previously defined, as Anita Harris (2010) has pointed out, strictly through formal processes like voting in elections. Indeed, the fourth wave of feminism is characterized by its digital collectivity and youth-driven presence, as Sowards and Renegar (2006) detail. Additionally, Retallack et al. write that, despite the ostensible neoliberalized depoliticization of contemporary society, through digital politics "a renewed and collectivized feminism has re-entered political and civic life" (2016: 5) and is increasingly present in schools.

There is limited research, however, as Jessalyn Keller (2016) has observed, that examines how young feminists use social media technologies to develop their burgeoning feminist identities. There is even less research that considers girls' relationships with feminism online as well as in their wider lives including in the school and family context (see Ringrose and Renold 2016a, 2016b for exceptions). In this article, we address these specific research gaps and ask the question: If teenage girls are indeed trying to work towards their visions for a more socially just future, in part through online engagement, what are the key obstacles they face at school? First, we provide a brief overview of issues related to feminism and mobile technology in schools and the tendency to devalue girls' online engagement. Then, through a discussion of interviews and analyses of social media productions, following dana boyd (2014), we show how teenage girls demonstrate creative online strategies that defy notions of youth as politically indifferent and inept. We conclude with suggestions on how greater institutional support and intergenerational guidance around online platforms and pedagogy could offer girls important tools for civic engagement.

Feminism, Activism, and Social Media in UK Schools

Educational institutions have proved to be complicated spaces in which girls can advocate for feminism. According to Sharon Lamb and Renee Randazzo (2016), both internationally and in the UK, Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE) has largely neglected feminist input about sexuality and desire. Feminism is rarely transparently taught in the neoliberalized curricula that favor traditional—in other words, male-dominated—perspectives. Even in a subject like sociology we found that in the 2014 Sociology General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) specification, the word feminism was mentioned only once in a unit

entitled, "Socialisation, Culture, and Identity." These selective processes are occurring within a wider context of the downsizing of social science programs in favor of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) courses. Collective spaces for critical pedagogy and feminist-inspired curricula are rapidly diminishing in achievement and testing regimes in school (Ball 2016). Teachers must be motivated to work on units foregrounding optional content if the in-depth engagement of students with feminism is to take place.

Take the recent struggle over the proposed removal of feminism from GSCE Politics A-Levels—efforts to replace the word "feminism" with the term "pressure group" were thinly veiled attempts to depoliticize secondary school curricula. In response to this, June Eric-Udorie, a 17-year-old black British activist began an e-petition to reinstate the word feminism. Then Education Minister, Nicky Morgan, acknowledged this necessity and kept the word in the curriculum (McTague 2016). This struggle to retain even the word feminism in the curriculum highlights the continuing crisis of postfeminism in schooling, as noted by Ringrose (2013). Feminism is not prioritized as relevant or useful school knowledge. It follows, then, that it is outside of school and mostly online that teens are finding the knowledge to challenge such exclusionary practices in educational policy and curricula.

Schools, however, also treat online spaces, particularly social media, for the most part in a way that separates them from legitimate forms of technology-based learning. Social media is typically understood solely as peer-based interaction and, potentially, as dangerous influence and risk, as well as distraction from academic learning. While the dynamics of school media policies are context-specific, the overall tendency is to limit or ban mobile technology during school hours. As Kath Albury and Paul Byron (2016) point out, schools' separation of social media into an area of nonpedagogical value greatly delimits the potential for student engagement with informal learning content that might enable and promote awareness of and activism based on feminism, sexuality, LGBTQ rights, and so on. Rather than differentiating online learning from so called legitimate learning, we argue that it is critical for educators to understand social media as an important site for civic awakening and activity.

Slactivism or Social Media Micro-political Activism?

So far, we have argued that British secondary schools have scarce feminist content in curricula and that they position social media as a problem rather

than harnessing its pedagogical value for social justice. What we have also found, however, is that research on youth activism and social movements tends to overlook girls' engagement with feminist writing, art, and humor, and are prone to discount girls as political agents (for exceptions see the works of Harris 2010; Keller 2016; Retallack et al. 2016). Stacey Sowards and Valerie Renegar argue that although girls' involvement in feminist blogs or online zines "[does] not look like traditional [understanding] of social movements … [it] embodies a sense of personal responsibility and activism" (2006: 71). However, as Jessica Taft (2014) emphasizes, adults may dismiss girls' efforts as frivolous and incapable of bringing about significant attention to an issue or long-lasting political change. Indifference and skepticism towards girls' feminisms may be explained by the fact that they do not imitate traditional activism, as described by David Snow and Sarah Soule (2010) that emphasize sustained in-person action, group solidarity, publicly strategic efforts, and a collective intent on achieving institutional change.

This relates to how, more generally, online activism is likened to what is known as slactivism, or a watered-down version of proper activism. For instance, signing an online petition or challenging a sexist post online is not seen to be a legitimately political activity. Such limited understandings of the impact of social media are changing radically in the context of Twitter's impact on events like the Arab Spring, as Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) reminds us, that show how influential, connective, and contagious, according to Tony Sampson (2011), media networks can be in enabling activism in real life (IRL). In relation to teen activism, take the case of Canadian teenage girls Tessa Hill and Lia Valente, whose "We Need Consent" online campaign and petition to challenge rape culture in the sex education curriculum was embraced by the Government and used to reform the Ontario health curriculum (Ostroff 2016). Although not all e-petitions or hashtag campaigns lead to these types of policy changes, the transformative potential of girls' engagement with social media is evident.

Failure to understand these different kinds of engagement "invalidates some ingenious styles of activism that young women have brought to the movement to integrate activism in their daily lives" (Schubert 1996 cited in Sowards and Renegar 2006: 61). Girls are creating innovative subcultures of feminist thought on the Internet as summed up by girls' studies scholar Harris, who says, "What is required, I think, is an openness in our ideas about what constitutes feminist politics today, especially a greater understanding of the function of *micro-political* acts and unconventional activism" (2010: 481, emphasis added). Therefore, it is critical to recognize that both traditional

forms of embodied protest-driven activism as well as various forms of social media connection and discussion share one fundamental similarity to previous feminist social movements and this is a passionate struggle for equality in opportunity, voice, and the pursuit of justice (Retallack et al. 2016).

Digital activism is embedded within what Nelly Stromquist calls a "microstructure of power" that diverges from notions of political power that neglect "to admit that power transactions occur at all levels of society" (1995: 433). While online activism may be shrugged off as apolitical, what is often less noted is that it offers many user-enabled choices to include political content. Axel Bruns (2008) has called this dynamic one of produsing (that is, producing and using or consuming) content; we adopt this term to suggest that girls are not only social media consumers, but active produsers of feminist content. These interactive and relational aspects are integral components of technology-based microactivism, which breaks down the false binary of the offline and online as separate spheres and negates the perception that the latter does not constitute meaningful IRL change. For instance, Keller's research on girls and digital media (2012, 2015, 2016) focuses on how girls create alternative spaces through blogs to participate in feminism as significant "cultural contributors and political agents" (2012: 431). Writing and storytelling are powerful rhetorical tools for girls to use to experience "self-affirmation, catharsis, and expression" (Sowards and Renegar 2006: 67). Images also play a significant role since girls story their lives through online practices such as posting selfies and curating archival collections of images, according to Katie Warfield (2016). Research on selfie culture suggests that social media networks can "'empower the users to exercise free speech, practice self-religion, express spiritual purity, improve literacy, and form strong interpersonal connections'" (Senft and Baym 2015: 1593). Thus, in response to criticisms that girls' online engagement bears little political influence, we argue that online forms of written and visual engagement via social media are critical extensions of how young feminists today take "some control over the forces that shape their identities" (Buffington and Lai 2011: 6) and resist traditional gender norms, discourses, and practices through their own micro-politics, as pointed out by Mendes et al. (2016).

Researching School Feminist Societies

Here we report on the findings from a project on Brownsmith School for Girls[1] a comprehensive school and coeducational sixth form located in

greater London for girls aged 11 to 19. It is a highly selective school renowned for reporting some of the highest GCSE scores in England. Its website shares details about its academic ranking, examination results, and The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) reports. Opportunities for civic engagement, however, were less visible and less promoted than we anticipated for a school that emphasized the importance of providing equal opportunities for girls to become successful leaders in society.

This project mapped out some experiences of girls who participated in the feminist society at Brownsmith,[2] established during the fall of 2014. Weekly meetings were held by typically 6 to 12 members during free afternoon periods until the end of the 2015 academic year and is currently in hiatus. Following John Postill and Sarah Pink (2012), we conducted in-depth personal interviews with all the Year 13 female students who were members of the feminist society and mapped some of their individual and collective use of social media. In this article, we focus on the four most active members of the feminist society: Moira (19), who identified ethnically as Irish, Chloe (17) as Croatian, Lobna (18) as Egyptian, and Violet (17) as white British. Although they used social media extensively, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Twitter were most commonly mentioned. As Postill and Pink (2012) suggest, exploring routine movements and sociality online is key to understanding social media life. Therefore, we created research accounts on each of these social media platforms to explore their postings over a contained period of four weeks. We also included historical data mining of older posts dating back to their participation in the feminist society. Along with others like Keller (2015), we found that social media may be the initial means by which girls learn about feminism and topics related to social justice. What we unpack in greater detail here is how the girls navigate performing feminism quite differently in digital domains on the one hand and school on the other.

Official/Proper versus Informal/Superficial Feminist Education

Moira, Chloe, and Lobna were enrolled in a Year 12 sociology class during the run of the feminist society and unanimously praised the course for its inclusion of feminist perspectives given that the teacher extrapolated from the suggested content to offer a more in-depth look at the topic. While Chloe had already learned about women's suffrage in history, she articulated

that in sociology, they "properly learned about feminism rather than just [about] women being great." She equated "proper learning" with instruction about "specific people and you know, theories." Lobna noted that sociology "was where I kind of got my validation that all the things I believed in were true." She described how the "evidence" and need for feminism were made clear by learning about "actual statistics from real sources" on topics such as the gender wage gap.

The sociology class not only conferred a profound sense of legitimacy onto their initial forays into feminism, but also confirmed that they were not anomalous in having such beliefs. To Chloe, class discussions made her feel "empowered" and "more like my views were shared, but also that they were *right*." To her, the class was somewhere she felt she could "be respected on like a professional level, because the teacher saw [feminism] as a real thing." Feminism here becomes legitimate when it is positioned as objective, testable facts. Perhaps this is an effect of the performative testing regimes that dominate UK schooling (Ringrose 2013).

Outside of the official curriculum, the girls learned about feminism through a variety of media including literature, popular culture, and friendships. In contrast to their acclamation for their sociology education, the girls spoke of these sources rather dismissively. Chloe, for instance, described sociology coursework enthusiastically, but when she was discussing her admiration for self-proclaimed feminist musician Beyoncé, she spoke with some trepidation and distinguished celebrity feminism as a less credible learning source.

> Chloe: I definitely, genuinely—I know it's pop culture and stuff—but women like Beyoncé and figureheads, like, famous women who have really started to produce songs which are really like empowering, has definitely encouraged me to become more vocal with my opinions.
>
> Crystal: It sounds like literature and celebrities have had a big influence on you.
>
> Chloe: Yeah! And I feel like that's not very valid. It's a bit like, wishy-washy. But genuinely, I feel like a lot of my beliefs and the reason I'm so … like, enthusiastic about it has been because of what I've read and what I've listened to.

Lobna was even more skeptical of celebrity feminists, commenting that "people like Beyoncé and Taylor Swift being public about being feminists has created a trend, I think, amongst young people." Specifically, she found "the trend with [feminist] celebrities" was "quite superficial" because "they kind of pave the way for conversations to happen, but the kind of subject matter that like, people are bringing to the table [is] very basic stuff." It was clear that she interpreted celebrity feminism as a simplified discourse that lacked

legitimacy in the institutionalized power/knowledge hierarchies, and regarding so called truth claims about authentic knowledge in school. A similar trend was evident in Keller and Ringrose's (2015) findings that girls swung between viewing celebrity feminist messages as empowering and also as being in conflict with dominant discourses of slut-shaming in school that encouraged them to avoid sexy figures because these were seen to be inappropriate role models.

Feminist or Girl Power School Culture?

A well-regarded girls' school, Brownsmith visibly celebrated "girl power," as one of the teachers termed it. For example, the school celebrates historically famous women. As Lobna said laughingly, "If someone says they're not a feminist, they'll get seriously destroyed." What became evident was that the official form of feminism was very narrowly conceived of by the students. For instance, the girls discussed various negative repercussions of being seen to be overtly feminist at school. Indeed, the girls noted that their peers suggested that feminist society members went "too far" in their beliefs and positioned them as "men-haters" who "sit around a table and just bitch." They explained that they thought this was because their peers did not "necessarily understand exactly what feminism means." The feminist society was perceived largely as "pointless" and "radical [and] a bit stupid." Chloe noted in a mocking tone, "I feel like some people may think we are picking on the small things, like, 'Oh yeah, but someone said you shouldn't be wearing that short skirt … so you've been *abused*?'" Here we see, as Hannah Retallack (2016) has noted, a contradiction being drawn between wearing a short skirt and holding feminist views as a teen girl, and having this offered as proof that they are not genuine feminists. There is an insinuation that the short-skirt-wearing girl has not actually experienced any real abuse. The supposed official feminist context seemed to be used to disregard the everyday sexism that girls experience at the micro-level.

Fundamentally, the existence of the feminist society was merely *tolerated* by peers, most teachers, and the administration. The girls' confidence to speak about feminism among their peers and teachers was highly strained, if not undermined, and this limited their ability to do so. For instance, Chloe admitted, "If I am talking to someone who has a high status, like cooler than me, I will sort of step down a bit," specifying that she found it difficult to argue with boys she identified as "good friends" or others whom she per-

ceives "to be more intelligent, or popular." Lobna, likewise, described how her English teacher rejected her comments about sexism in news clips on YouTube when she described noticing that commenters criticized only female anchors for their physical appearance. The woman teacher firmly disagreed and maintained that men also experienced similar treatment about their looks. Lobna described her confusion at the way "she just shut me down!" and frustration at the frequency of these kinds of occurrences during which feminist arguments and critique initiated by the girls were unwelcome inside the classroom. In the girls' narratives there were few instances of adults inside or outside of school validating their feminist views. In fact, none of the girls could cite an older feminist role model whom they knew personally. Rather, they viewed adults mainly as obstacles to their developing engagement with feminism.

Selfie Citizenship and Ha-Ha-Hashtag Feminism

All the girls perceived social media as a useful space in which to learn about feminism. For example, Moira noted Facebook's accessibility in reference to how she "involve[s] feminism in [her] everyday life because when [she goes] on [her] phone, it's *there*" while Chloe was a fan of Instagram and Twitter, using these platforms to follow other feminists. Individually, the girls preferred certain platforms to others but what we found significant, and something we had not understood prior to conducting the research at Brownsmith, was that these girls shared a common critique of online feminism. What we found surprising is that they did not acknowledge social networking or the use of digital technology as truly legitimate or effective forms of activism. Lobna, for instance, criticized the limiting scope of blogs written by teenagers because "they're just saying 'I'm angry that this happens,' but they're not trying to educate anyone on it." Moreover, she felt that the "online rants" of "radical" young feminists "only [got] the attention of other people who feel angry about the same thing" and therefore existed within a limited network. Lobna also used Twitter frequently, but disliked how it revolved around trending topics; she said, "I feel like you can't learn much with a trend because again, it's one of those things where everyone agrees with each other." She argued that Twitter was a simplistic source of feminist learning—for her its accessibility and focus on trending events made it a weak form of activism. She rarely used her Twitter account to post original posts, but a historical overview of her Tweets showed that in the

fall of 2014—coinciding with the founding of the feminist society—the feminist content of her retweets increased noticeably. Retweeting a range of feminist, anti-racist, and anti-homophobic comments offered Lobna a way to engage with social justice ideas. Twitter provided a quick way to retweet or like content or talk back to sexism. For example, Lobna expressed her frustration with and dismissal of boys' sexualization of girls and retweeted the following meme:

> boy: wyd? (what are you doing?)
>
> me: about to go in the shower
>
> boy: without me? ;)
>
> me: bippity boppity back the fuck up (text written against image of animated princess)

Her retweeted meme demonstrates her developing use of feminist sarcasm through engaging with feminist meme culture or what Carrie Rentschler and Samantha Thrift call "networked feminist humor" (2015: 329). This meme showcased a traditionally docile girly princess with the speech bubble saying "back the fuck up." Lobna did not regard this, however, as "proper" activism; she felt that that would involve sustained physical interaction with others, and described feeling as though she was simply venting online. This concern about the limits of online feminism and audiences was key to her desire and need for in person debate through the feminist society but also with informed adults and teachers.

Violet did not use Twitter but regularly reblogged (reposted) Twitter screenshots on Tumblr. Her Tumblr page was a rich repository of information that interconnected with and amalgamated bits of other digital platforms. One of her posts included a reference to a humorous feminist term, "mansplaining," which points to the way a man might condescendingly explain something to a woman, particularly about a subject about which she is already knowledgeable. Tumblr is now widely recognized as a platform particularly friendly to gender diverse, LGBTQ, and feminist youth because it does not enable a stream of negative comments as does Twitter. Rather, the blogger selects and reblogs items that reflect her unique interests and opinions, which, as Warfield (2016) has explained, are then shared on her own page. While Tumblr followers can comment on posts, the user can choose to make certain comments visible and others not. This is an important consideration because it suggests that Violet could post entries without having to moderate negative reactions expressed by those who disagreed with her feminist politics. The topics of her posts ranged from mental illness to

hate crimes and from LGBTQ rights to feminist content, including reblogging a viral post from the "I need feminism because" Tumblr, which highlighted the institutionalized sexism of school dress codes.

> X: I need feminism; because the bra straps of a twelve-year-old shouldn't make a 40-year-old married principal with two daughters 'uncomfortable'
>
> Y: So am I allowed to walk around adult women who are mothers and grandmothers at work with my cock out or what
>
> Z: in what world is someone's dick equivalent to a fucking bra strap
>
> X: it's chill, he's just comparing by width

This tweet exchange was made into a meme and widely circulated. Violet uses the reblog to demonstrate her awareness of sexist and slut-shaming cultures at school and to ridicule the ignorant response from a boy who compares his penis to a bra strap. Like Lobna, and in line with Rentschler and Thrift (2015), we see Violet participating in a shared insider joke via viral feminist meme culture. Screenshooting functions enable users to post across multiple blogospheres, creating networked links while Tumblr blogs give permanence to their ideas and articulated emotions about feminism.

These media serve as a strategic tool and initial means of exploring slut-shaming and rape culture, some of the most difficult embodied issues that girls face at school. Recall Chloe's discussion of how the feminist society members were criticized as illegitimate feminists for wearing short skirts at school and how girls' experiences of sexism were mocked and discounted in the supposedly staunch feminist context of a girls' school like Brownsmith. Unable to easily manage this tension in the physical space of school, Chloe practiced different forms of online sexiness mixed with discourses of self-empowerment on Instagram often accompanied by explicitly feminist messages inspired by the "body positivity movement" (Sastre 2014: 929). In one such captioned photo, Chloe, modeling a backless dress she had purchased, wrote,

> I buy clothes that make you go from self loathing to self loving [red heart emoji] soz brought this dress out again bc it makes me feel like I'm walking on water [thumbs up emoji].

This post received a range of appreciative comments from her female-identified followers.

> A: [2 heart-eyed smiley face emojis, fire emoji]
>
> B: wtf, I don't appreciate this kind of sexiness on my Instagram …
>
> C: [4 peach emojis]
>
> D: I APPREICATE THIS SEXY OMG DAAAAMN

E: cute smile
F: [3 heart-eyed smiley face emojis, okay sign emoji]
G: Well damn girl

Rosalind Gill and Ana Sofia Elias question whether the body-positive discourse of "love your body" (2014: 180) has become hegemonic through advertising genres that encourage girls to love themselves but only under the familiar conditions of feminine perfection that do not challenge heteronormative beauty standards. This framework might position Chloe as simply reproducing the same sexy look as legitimated in dominant visual discursive frames. Posting on social media, however, is not the same as professional advertising, and the web of posts though which girls celebrate and appreciate each other was entangled with explicitly feminist content that linked their understandings of body positivity to feeling good about their bodies rather than feeling shame. Indeed, Chloe uses an overtly feminist critique of body loathing while also including a lighthearted apology ("soz" slang for "sorry") to excuse herself for daring to post the sexy selfie, indicating the complexity of navigating peer comments on Instagram. Her friends communicate their appreciation through the peach, fire, and heart smiley face emoji symbols acting as "a means of textually mediating affect that would otherwise be conveyed through facial expressions or tone of voice" (Passonen 2015 cited in Retallack et al. 2016: 14), in this case conveying enthusiasm. Moira made a similar post in an out of focus image posing with two girls at a nightclub. "Blurry but it doesn't matter because you don't need clarity to see natural beauty. Lol #bant x." The caption highlights her own awareness of the boldness of virtually performing confidence but the "lol" ("Laugh[ing] Out Loud") implies that she is laughing at herself as does the hashtag bant (abbreviation for "banter"). The hashtag offers a connective way to plug into a wider discussion and try out body confidence online, with humor and irony about sexy selfies. We witness a vibrant micro-community space in which girls' selfie culture is not reducible to feminine rivalry but serves as a powerful platform for friendship and feminist politics. Indeed, rather than separating out these forms of everyday micropolitics as non-feminist, we understand the girls' digitally mediated sexy self-representation and demands that they not be slut-shamed as a critical component of their developing feminist subjectivity, or what Kuntsman calls in the title of her book "selfie citizenship" (2017) that speaks back to the harsh regulations of feminine embodiment in school contexts.

Conclusion

The rise of school-based feminist societies in schools across the UK indicates that girls are increasingly carving out activist spaces, but these feminist groups are no "easy road to empowerment" (Ringrose and Renold 2016b: 106). Girls from the Brownsmith feminist society felt, for the most part, illegitimate and even at times reviled in their identities as feminists at school. The girls began the society energetically but their motivation declined as they faced tensions from teachers and peers. The disconnect between their online and school feminism played a significant part in the gradual collapse of their society. The girls prioritized the formal education setting—a classroom environment under the guidance of a certified sociology teacher—as a more valued context for legitimate learning about feminism. Engaging with feminism in virtual spaces was considered a puerile and faux form of learning, a peripheral sphere for teenagers to rant about their individual and trivial problems. The failure of the school to deem non-academic pedagogies via social media engagements as important—even transformative—sources of learning proved damaging. While explaining her entry into feminism, Violet made one of the most revealing and poignant statements in this research: "You either stumble upon [feminism] or it is introduced to you. It's sort of like luck or coincidence … I don't know, it's not something that we get encouraged to look into."

In closing, we wish to turn to Julianne Guillard's recent research on how social media builds feminist consciousness among students in undergraduate women's studies classrooms as inspiration for moving forward regarding the possibilities in schools. Guillard demonstrates how "peer sub-groups strengthen with the introduction of blogging and forum posting" which can offer "virtual safe spaces [that] expand the traditional feminist classroom enclave, or 'safe space'" (2016: 612). She found that students' use of Tumblr feminism enabled greater comprehension of course topics and awareness of social justice issues. While these results were promising, she also found that increased online involvement did not lead to greater connection among students. This element had to be constructed through pedagogical involvement and instructor guidance. Guillard's findings show the dramatic potential of social media for encouraging activism through incorporation and intra-action in formal pedagogical contexts. However, as we have articulated, these processes are not well understood in UK schooling at present because of how mobile technology is positioned as dangerous across school policy and because of the ambivalent (at best) and hostile (at worst) positioning of fem-

inism in curricula and as an extracurricular activity. Because of these tensions, there remains a seemingly insurmountable difficulty in translating the forms of learning about feminisms online into the school environment. Indeed, although the girls found social media accessible and useful for discovering feminism as well as articulating their views they were adamant that as Violet put it, "We need more guidance to say like, 'If you are interested, this is a good website, this isn't such a good website.' Or just to think about it at all."

We suggest that leaving it up to luck to learn about gender equalities is not only insufficient but harmful to girls. A paradigmatic shift from school policy that positions social media as space of risk and danger to one of treating it as an opportunity for learning and engagement about civic participation and social justice, as Kath Albury and Paul Byron (2016) point out, is necessary. There are manifold ways in which the exploratory aspects of social media for feminist pedagogy fit into wider concerns about critical consciousness. We and others like Keller (2015) and Retallack et al. (2016) have demonstrated that social media platforms are important spaces of learning that enable the wider understanding and sharing of informal and culturally accessible takes on the various forms and possibilities of feminism. These virtual spaces can offer girls opportunities to explore their identity and society by providing spaces in which they feel unencumbered by overwhelming expectations and negative stereotypes surrounding teen feminists In Real Life, particularly at school.

Following Guillard, if school teachers, curriculum writers, and policy makers created spaces for understanding social media as a legitimate pedagogy and activism by including digital technologies in the formal curriculum and by providing informed adult guidance on navigating social justice-oriented online content, then perhaps some of the dilemmas facing teens when they do gender equality work at school could be more easily navigated. Of course, the question remains as to whether or not schools wish their students to be socially informed critical thinkers who challenge the status quo and "stumble into" issues like feminism in the first place.

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Notes

1. Pseudonyms have been used throughout.
2. The research at Brownsmith is part of a wider project exploring Feminism in Schools supported by the Gender and Education Association. This project and its collaborators are currently working with feminist clubs/societies in ten schools across England and Wales. For more details of the methodology see Ringrose and Renold (2016a).

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