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Feminist Organizers' Experiences of Activism

> I don't remember exactly when I heard about it, but I remember the first time I visited the [Everyday Sexism] website, which was not too long after it had been launched. . . . And I clicked on the website and I started reading all these stories of women experiencing sexism day to day and I thought thank God this exists, like, finally somewhere I can send people who tell me to laugh off the grope on the tube, or who accuse me of boasting when I talk about how a guy followed me from the tube stop. Finally, something that gives me a voice that allows me to talk about the way in which I'm harassed on the street all the freaking time. So yeah, I remember that feeling of like, oh, I'm so glad this exists.

The above is an excerpt from our interview with Emer O'Toole, who was one of the key organizers of Everyday Sexism shortly after its launch. Emer was one of 18 key stakeholders we interviewed, who worked across three feminist campaigns: Hollaback!, Everyday Sexism, and Who Needs Feminism? Where the last chapter provided an account of what experiences the public responded to via digital feminist platforms, this chapter interrogates key *experiences* and the affective dimensions of starting, running, and managing a feminist digital campaign. In particular, we provide brief profiles of the activists, the motivations for becoming involved, perceptions of their activities, and the various tactical and self-care strategies they have developed and employed along the way. Throughout this chapter, we develop the following arguments: First, we posit that organizing feminist campaigns involves highly affective, invisible, precarious, and time-consuming labor. Second, we demonstrate how involvement in these campaigns can inspire "feminist awakenings" among organizers. Third, we suggest that while mediated abuse is a common experience, it is not universal; rather it operates on a continuum, and evokes varying responses from its victims, including being

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motivated to continue their activism. Finally, we map how feminist activism is often exhausting and draining, and individual and collective care strategies are needed to prevent activist burnout.

Together, these arguments illustrate the monotony of digital feminist activist work—and the ways that it stands in contrast to the ways internet work is often addressed—for example, the hip glamour of working at millennial companies such as Facebook or Google, which are constructed as fun (free food!), enlightened, and supportive of creativity and innovation. On a macro level, discovering or strengthening their feminist identities and being part of something they feel is important certainly excites organizers; on a micro level, the labor itself, and daily routines are far from exciting, and can instead be "dull and crushing" (Page 2017, 76). The labor involved is often boring—it is fragmented, standardized, and repetitive (Hand 2017). Furthermore, as we will pick up toward the end of the chapter, as feminist activism is both highly exploitative and increasingly marketable, we need to be more attuned to the ways some individuals or groups make substantial profit from these initiatives, while others remain almost wholly uncompensated for their work.

Who Are the Activists?

The 18 organizers interviewed for this research were all women, mostly young, largely white, and middle class, with post-secondary education. They came from the US, Canada, India, Kenya, Australia, and Venezuela, although their activism was at times done outside the country of their birth. Most identified as being heterosexual, but four stated they were queer. Many were aware of their various privileges, and talked about the need for intersectional feminism, which they viewed as an integral part of their activism. All interviews were conducted between November 2014 and May 2015 via Skype, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. At the time of our interview, only 13 of the 18 organizers were still involved with their respective campaign. While most activists had been involved for several years, a few had been active for under one year, and one had been involved for only two months. Others, such as Hollaback! Baltimore's Melanie Keller and the Everyday Sexism's Emer O'Toole stepped back after suffering burnout, moving countries, or taking on full-time work, finding it impossible to fit their activism in with their paid employment. While a more detailed look into organizers' exit from activism will be presented throughout this chapter, as is seen later, one of the first questions asked in each interview was how the person became involved with her respective feminist campaign in the first place.

Getting Involved

Out of the 18 organizers interviewed, 5 could be considered (co)founders of their respective campaigns. This includes Laura Bates (Everyday Sexism), Emily May (Hollaback!), and Rachel Seidman, Ivana Gonzales, and Ashley Tsai (Who Needs Feminism?). While a detailed genesis of these campaigns has been presented in chapter 3, this space will be used to share the involvement of the remaining 13 activists, who at times deliberately took steps to extend their respective campaign, and in other cases "fell" into activism unintentionally or by chance encounters.

Arpita Bhagat from Hollaback! Mumbai explains how she distinctly remembers the first time she "stumbled upon" the Hollaback! website in 2013. After closely following issues around women's safety in India, Arpita "happened to read an article [on Hollaback!], and that's how I realized that there's a whole network of women" working around issues of sexism and safety. Although a Hollaback! chapter had been initially set up in Mumbai, it had been left dormant after its previous leader returned to full-time education. Arpita however was motivated to see it restart. According to Emily May, Hollaback! has never recruited for local chapter sites, but demands that potential leaders go through a rigorous vetting and training program that only around 15 percent of potential leaders complete, to try and ensure the movement remains viable.[1]

Three organizers initially came across the movement via Twitter. After first hearing about Hollaback! through a link on this social media platform, Becky Burns became interested in the movement, and after discovering there was already a branch in her home city of Montreal, volunteered to join the team. In a similar vein, Emily Griffith first heard about Everyday Sexism via Twitter, and responded to a call from Laura Bates seeking volunteers. Although research has shown social media to play a vital role with other feminist campaigns in recruiting organizers (see Castells 2012 Mendes 2015), among the organizers interviewed here, it was not the most important route into activism. Instead, the majority were recruited or encouraged through preexisting social connections including friends and feminist communities. Although these organizers might have initially heard about their respective campaigns via social media or the feminist blogosphere, it often took preexisting networks to bring them in on the organizational level.

For example, London organizer Julia Gray first met Hollaback! executive director Emily May through a mutual friend during a visit to New York City. After going to a baseball game together and hearing more about Hollaback!, Julia was keen to get involved. Upon returning to London, Julia began discussing the movement with her friend Bryony Beynon, and the two decided to launch

the Hollaback! London site. A friend encouraged Wacu Mureithi of Hollaback! Nairobi to become involved after telling him about an experience of street harassment. Melanie Keller of Hollaback! Baltimore explained how she was recruited to the team by her friend who was already a site leader. Only one of my organizers, Jenny Dunne from Hollaback! Dublin, became involved after hearing about the movement via mainstream media—confirming the extent to which modern-day feminists rely less on mainstream media and more on social media and friendship networks to build their movements (see Castells 2012; Mendes 2015).

ACTIVIST EXPERIENCE AND FEMINIST IDENTITY

While many of the activists we interviewed had little or no prior experience with activism, most had been studying or engaging with women's issues for several years. Julia Gray and Bryony Beynon had volunteer experience in Rape Crisis centers before starting Hollaback! London, and Emily Griffith, Emer O'Toole, Genevieve Berrick, and Arpita Bhagat had been writing/blogging about women's issues prior to their involvement with Everyday Sexism and Hollaback! respectively. During her time at Duke University, Ashley Tsai became involved with a number of activities around gender, race, and sexuality. Although not explicitly involved with feminist activism until Who Needs Feminism?, Ivanna Gonzalez had been involved with labor and women's organizing on campus. Despite this, it was only after taking Professor Seidman's course on "Women in the Public Sphere" that she came to identify as a feminist, and realized the work she was doing around labor issues with the National Domestic Worker's Alliance on campus was indeed feminist. As Ivanna stated, taking Professor Seidman's class "allowed me to see the labor work that I was doing back on campus as feminist work. And so that was also really important to me and really important to my development as a feminist." Our interview with Ivanna highlighted the ways that many of our organizers were already interested in activism around many "feminist issues," even if they didn't explicitly use the label. Although some organizers shared their "feminist awakenings" with us without being prompted, this was a question we eventually asked all participants.

FEMINIST AWAKENINGS

Our interviews with organizers revealed a range of different feminist awakenings and relationships with the wider feminist movement. Several organizers first encountered feminist ideas and texts from home, often at a very young age. Genevieve Berrick of Hollaback! LA recalls being "bored" with the books at the school library and started picking up her mother's at home: "So I was reading

like *The Female Eunuch* and that kind of thing, this was like at [age] ten [laugh]." Similarly, when we asked Hollaback! executive director Emily May how long she had been a feminist, she responded, "I was a feminist since I was eight [laugh]." The playful laughter accompanying the recounting of their path to feminism signals their recognition of both the peculiarity and delight of adopting this identity from such an early age. Although Ahmed (2010) for example considers a feminist consciousness one of *unhappiness,* our interviews suggest reflecting back upon their feminist journey can in fact be pleasurable (see also Keller 2015).

While family was an important catalyst for some, in many cases, their exposure to feminism or gender issues came later in life via their university education. Melanie Keller of Hollaback! Baltimore explained how she realized she was a feminist in her third year of college. As she said, "So probably the semester in the middle of taking my first gender studies course, I was, like, oh, yeah, I've been a feminist all along." Similarly, Ashley Tsai admits that: "I didn't even know what feminism was until I went to Duke [University]." While some "discovered" feminism at university, for others, it was a fruitful space where they explored, deepened and solidified their understanding of it, often through the curriculum. Ashley Tsai has a BA in Women's Studies; Genevieve Berrick focused on gender in her BA and MA theses. Jill Dimond did an entire PhD dissertation on feminist activism. When asked about her journey to this path, she recalled experiencing a lot of sexism both during her obtaining of her undergraduate degree in computer science and in the workforce where she was consulting for large corporations such as Microsoft and Amazon. Unsettled by these experiences, she returned to graduate school to "understand what was going on and to try to help fix the problem [of sexism]." After becoming interested in the relationship between technology and gender-based violence, she became determined to use her "skills as a developer to create interventions." She encountered Hollaback! just at the time when they were developing an app that uses GPS-based technology so users can literally "map" their harassment on the site. As she recalled:

> It just so happens that they were making an app at that point, so this is when apps were first submitting [laugh]. And they had hired this pro bono developer, or they were paying them, but he couldn't finish the work. And so, I was, like, I would love to help out. . . . And so, I jumped in and kind of became both a member of their organisation as a volunteer and a researcher.

In addition to developing the app, Jill went on to create the infrastructure to support local Hollaback! sites as well as their HeartMob app, which launched in 2016 and aims to support victims of abuse across social media platforms.

Although several of our organizers, such as Jill, had previous experience with activism, like other contemporary feminist movements, identification as a feminist (or even an activist) was not required to become involved in any of these campaigns. For example, Laura Bates did not identify as a feminist until *after* starting Everyday Sexism. Although she argues she was never *anti-feminist,* the realization that she was a feminist was "gradual" rather than linked to a specific "aha" moment. In a similar vein, Arpita Bhagat of Hollaback! Mumbai explained how she only came to identify as a feminist "after joining Hollaback!" Although she recognized she probably would eventually have come to adopt this label, "Hollaback! made the whole transition happen very smooth and nicely." Despite this, she admits that people in India "take a step back" when she tells them she is a feminist, but persists on using this label. As she explains:

> After working and after speaking to so many women, working with local organisations, and the ongoing conversations, then I realized that if you're not going to claim feminism there is just no way forward, not just for equality in general, but for development . . . into the developmental stage really overall.

This unease with feminism was also expressed by Wacu Mureithi of Hollaback! Nairobi, who was the only organizer who explicitly rejected this label both for herself and the movement. Like Arpita, Wacu explained the ways "feminism" is a very misunderstood word with multiple, often negative meanings in Kenya:

> It [feminism] represents different things for different people. So, what I think of feminism is not necessarily what everybody does think of it. And I don't want to be labelled as never wanting to get married, I just want to believe in an open mind.

Although it's true that in the West, some iterations of feminist politics have gained media visibility and popularity in recent years (see Gill 2016; Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer 2017; Keller and Ryan 2018), previous research has demonstrated the way "feminism," particularly the "white feminism" Wacu discussed, is often viewed as a form of neocolonialism. This involves Western women going to "other" nations, "saving" them, and telling them what to do (see Mohanty 1984). As a result, it is unsurprising to see discomfort with this label.

While Wacu was the only organizer who did not identify as a feminist, our research demonstrated the ways that not everyone who is drawn to campaigns such as Hollaback!, Everyday Sexism, and Who Needs Feminism? explicitly

identify as a feminist before their involvement. One of our key arguments, woven throughout many of our chapters, is that participation in these campaigns can act as a form of "feminist awakening" and "consciousness-raising" about feminism and feminist issues. These "awakenings" are enabled by the "ease" and "openness" of which one is able to access, contribute to, or become involved with these campaigns.[2] This, as Julia Gray describes, is one of the benefits of movements such as Hollaback!:

> So yeah, it started off, you know, we didn't have a clue what we were doing when we first started. But I think that's one of the great things about it, that you don't have to have any particular background or education, you know, this [street harassment] is something that affects people from all walks of life and backgrounds and class. So, I think that's one of the really special things about Hollaback! is that it mobilizes people, yeah, from all different kinds of demographics. And that's what's brilliant about it.

As we will see in more detail later, this concept of "learning as they go" appears to be a key feature and strength of contemporary feminist activism. Although it is easy to suggest that a degree of tech savviness, some basic organizational skills, and the energy to sustain these campaigns are all that's really required for contemporary activism to flourish, it is in fact much more complicated.

For example, although Julia enthused about the ways campaigns such as Hollaback! are open to people from all "kinds of demographics," the similarity among our organizers as mainly young, white, cis-gender, middle-class women with post-secondary education, problematizes techno-utopian celebrations of equality within digital feminist campaigns (see also Duffy 2015). Although our sample of organizers is in no way representative of all digital feminist activists, and while we are aware of campaigns run by and for LBGTQ+, BAME, and other marginalized groups, we are also cognizant of the fact that the labor involved with these campaigns is often time-consuming, privileging those with more time on their hands (young, single women without caring responsibilities) who have a degree of financial security allowing them to sacrifice paid employment for unpaid activism, or those whose paid employment is "flexible" (and thus precarious) enough to juggle activism with paid labor. As we will discuss more thoroughly in chapters 5 and 7, we encourage social media scholars to consider intersections of gender with age, race, class, sexuality, and ability, in terms of who organizes and contributes to these "popular," high-profile feminist campaigns, and the social hierarchies that are imbued within them.

The Labor of Feminist Digital Activism

There is a healthy body of scholarship devoted to "digital labor" (see Jarrett 2015; Andrejevic et al. 2014; Fuchs 2014; Scholz 2013; Terranova 2000), much of which interrogates the exploitation of unpaid laborers who use digital platforms and social media as sites of creativity, leisure, and increasingly, activism (see Duffy 2015; Gleeson 2016; Fuchs and Sevignani 2013). Although scholars have examined digital labor in relation to the ways people produce free content for corporations (see Andrejevic 2009; Postigo 2016; Pybus 2015; Rose and Spencer 2015; Scholz 2013; Terranova 2000), little scholarship has focused on the *gendered nature* of digital labor (for exceptions see Fotopoulou 2016; Arcy 2016; Duffy 2016; Jarrett 2014, 2015), particularly within various digital feminist campaigns (see Gleeson 2016). Later, we outline some of the most common tasks involved with digital feminist activism, labor that is time-consuming, and often invisible, yet paramount to the smooth running of activist campaigns. Like other types of "women's work" such as child care and housework (Jarrett 2014, 2015; Scholz 2013), we argue that the labor that makes digital feminist activism possible is immaterial, affective, precarious, and exploitative, and raises questions about the sustainability of such unpaid labor in light of online abuse, burnout, and other work-life commitments.

Because of the different nature of each campaign, the organizers' aims and objectives, and the ways they divided up their work, our interviews identified a range of jobs and roles in their routines such as:

- Uploading content to sites (sent in via email, Twitter, or direct to the platform)
- Moderating content to weed out "fake" posts or to eliminate oppressive language
- Organizing volunteers and "rota systems" and designing volunteer guides
- Devising offline training initiatives
- Engaging in public talks, events, and media outreach
- Translating content (from English to Spanish, French and Hindi)
- Blogging
- Engaging with contributors
- Designing apps/interface and websites for the campaign

UPLOADING AND MODERATING CONTENT

Out of the activities listed earlier, organizers indicated that uploading content to sites was by far the most common, time-consuming, and often *tedious* work. Although scholarship exists around affects in activism such as empowerment and fun (see Papacharissi 2015), there is little research around boredom or

tedium, which, from our interviews, is part and parcel of activism (for an exception see Gardiner and Haladyn 2017; Page 2017). Rather than spending their time engaged in interesting, glamorous, or high-profile tasks, the labor required for all three campaigns was often mundane, banal, and repetitive. This involved a combination of moderating and "accepting" content that was uploaded directly to the site and copying and pasting content sent via other methods such as Twitter and email. While this task might sound easy enough, interviews with organizers revealed how this task was the most time-consuming and boring, and not as straightforward as it might appear. Many of our organizers shared how there were often hundreds, or even thousands of submissions to approve, and the way the burden increased around special events (such as International Women's Day), or after episodes of media engagement.

For some organizers, the tedium involved in these tasks was not just its repetitive nature, but the labor involved in determining if posts were indeed "legitimate" or not. While organizers explained that "legitimate" submissions included those from contributors who were sincere, "fake" submissions on the other hand were those meant to ridicule or call into question the premise of these campaigns. Ashley Tsai of Who Needs Feminism? shared the way they not only received their fair share of fake submissions, but had to contend with the rise of counter-sites such as Women Against Feminism where contributors took photos of themselves with signs explaining why they *didn't need* feminism, and a fake Who Needs Feminism? site that mocked and diminished the reasons given for why feminism was necessary. As with the other campaigns, the students involved with Who Needs Feminism? quickly learned how to spot fake posts and devise policies where they would exclude contributions if uncertain about their legitimacy. As a result, Ivanna Gonzales from Who Needs Feminism? explained how "sifting" became one of the most important, time-consuming, tedious, and emotionally intensive parts of the process, particularly when encountering trolls or fake posts.

Indeed, these accounts are interesting because they challenge some of the discourses about the digital and digital life, namely, the immediacy, excitement, and newness articulated by the social imaginaries of networked media (Fotopoulou 2016a). In part, this celebratory discourse about the opportunities for digital connections enabled by social media platforms obfuscate the reality of such labor, which is invisible, tedious, boring, repetitive, precarious, and mostly unpaid, yet wholly necessary to develop, maintain, and grow the digital connections needed for a robust online feminist campaign.

While learning to decipher "fake" posts is part of the job description for all three campaigns, so too was editing out racist, ablest, homophobic, or otherwise oppressive details in the contributions. As Everyday Sexism organizer

Emily Griffith explained, this might include editing out racial identifiers of harassers, or other aspects of the contribution, which maintains the spirit of the experience, but ensures racist, ablest, or homophobic comments are not reproduced on these sites. If it's not possible to disentangle the abuse from the comment, Emily explained that they simply did not post it. This policy was also adopted by Hollaback!, and seems particularly pertinent after criticisms of a video titled *10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman* went viral as discussed in chapter 3 (see also Rentschler 2017). The video recounts many examples of street harassment leveled toward actress Shoshanna Roberts (a white woman), mostly by black and Latino men, as a hidden camera filmed her walking down streets of New York City. Although Hollaback! was not responsible for commissioning, producing, or distributing the video, the organization issued a public response that encouraged the public to develop a greater understanding of the ways street harassment is "directed toward women of all races and ethnicities and conducted by an equally diverse population of men" (Hollaback! 2014). In our interview with Emily May, she was very open about the "flawed" nature of the video, but was hopeful some good could come from it. As she noted, "it forced a lot of people who never thought about the way that race intersected with street harassment to think through that" (2015).[3]

ORGANIZING VOLUNTEERS AND ROTA SYSTEMS

Because of the time-consuming nature of their labor, several organizers discussed the ways they established "shifts" or "rotas" to manage it more effectively, and ensure content was ready for public consumption in a timely manner (see also Gleeson 2016). The sheer volume of submissions and a chance encounter is how Everyday Sexism organizer Emer O'Toole became involved with the campaign. After attending a party for the feminist website *The Vagenda,* she met Laura Bates. As Emer recounted, after asking her how it was going, she listened as Laura explained the workload involved:

> And she [Laura Bates] said that it was a lot of work. And she explained to me what needed to be done, which was like transferring these stories into a website, but she couldn't handle it on her own any more, like, she didn't really know what to do. And I said, well, I will help and there must be people out there who will help as well.

In Laura's account of the same meeting, she recalled how she didn't feel able to ask for help, given the vast amount of work involved with the project:

> And I didn't feel like I could ask somebody else for that [to help upload content] . . . And then about a week later, got this e-mail from Emer that had a rota, she said something like, here are your twelve volunteers.

While drawing up a rota might seem easy enough, particularly for someone such as Emer who had a developed feminist network, this was in fact, a highly hidden, yet extremely intensive exercise:

> What I did was, I drew up a volunteer guide that gave very precise instructions for what had to happen, like how to search Twitter for the information you needed; what stuff to include, what stuff not to include; how to tell if someone was trolling. All of these things.

In addition to drawing up volunteer guides and organizing her volunteers, Emer was responsible for replacing anyone who dropped out, missed, or wanted to swap their day. While finding volunteers never seemed to be a problem, the entire organizational process, including keeping track of who had finished their day was extremely time-consuming. Pressure was also added by the architecture of Twitter, in which tweets often disappear after a seven-day period. As Emer explained:

> And if it was getting towards the seven-day period when the tweets would be gone, I would email that person and say, have you done your day? And I'd also have a backup person who, if someone suddenly couldn't do their day for whatever reason, someone who volunteered to be on watch for that week, that they could just jump in and do it, if it needed to be done.

While keeping track of all the volunteers required organization skills on its own, Emer explained the ways time zones complicated matters further. Having moved from London to Montreal during this period to take an academic position at McGill University, Emer had to ensure all volunteers were within the GMT time zone because of the way Twitter worked.

What is significant about our interview with Emer is the detail and complexity of labor involved in maintaining and updating Everyday Sexism—work that is necessary to do daily because of the sheer volume of posts. This work, which Emer explained could take from 30 minutes to "a good four hours," is not only intensive and highly complex, but also invisible, precarious, and unacknowledged. At the time of our interview, Laura Bates estimated that there were 20 to 30 volunteers working on the British version of Everyday Sexism alone, with many more working with other satellite sites in other nations. The invisibility of

this labor is intensified by the fact that their names are not included anywhere on the site. As will be discussed further in the chapter, while not being identified on these sites was at times a preventative strategy to protect oneself from trolling, it nonetheless hides the amount of bodies, time, and labor involved in maintaining such campaigns.

Everyday Sexism was not the only campaign to enlist a rota of volunteers—this practice was also common in Who Needs Feminism?, where the 16 students enrolled on the "Women in the Public Sphere" course at Duke University devised a system among themselves to deal with the overwhelming numbers of submissions to the project. This involved splitting the day up into different time slots, and assigning someone to monitor the Facebook page during that time. As full-time students, Ashley explained how they were "totally unprepared" for how time-consuming the project would be: "It was insane. We were just so overwhelmed. . . . I was monitoring the page pretty much any time I had. So, it probably was more than a few hours [per day]." And while Who Needs Feminism? has over time received a tremendous amount of community support, they also received "pushback," including trolling and the defacement of posters that were displayed around campus. These experiences with trolling will be discussed later in the chapter.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

While moderating, uploading, and sifting through content, as well as organizing volunteer lists seems to dominate a lot of the labor involved in feminist activist campaigns, organizers identified a range of other tasks necessary as well. For example, Hollaback! Baltimore and London both devised their own training programs for local bars and cafes to create safe spaces for women and LGBTQ+ folks respectively (the Safe Spaces program and Good Night Out Campaign). Many of the organizers such as Laura Bates and Emily May regularly blog, write, or speak about their activism, and engage frequently with the mainstream media. Ivanna Gonzalez from Who Needs Feminism? felt personally committed to not only uploading contributions, but typing out each message, and posting it below each submission. Organizers also at times engaged with translating submissions or information from their campaign to other languages. Rachel Seidman (2013) for example noted the way the site received posts in Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, German, and Arabic, which were then translated to English. Genevieve Berrick from Hollaback! LA explained how all material on the site is available in both English and Spanish. And Arpita Bhaghat of Hollaback! Mumbai translates words to Hindi where necessary to make it more relevant to the local population. While these tasks might seem small, easy, and perhaps mundane, when combined, they become taxing, time-consuming, and at times overwhelming. Yet at the same time, this work is politically

imperative. Translating material to Spanish in the US for example, sends an important message about communities of belonging and inclusivity, which is necessary for fostering widespread social, cultural, and political change.

Highly Affective Work

When asked to reflect upon their involvement with each respective campaign, it became clear that organizers share feelings of "deep attachment" and "affective bindings" (Gill and Pratt 2008, 15) to their work. Organizers talked enthusiastically about the "wonder" and "awe" they experienced, and feelings that through their activism, they were changing the world:

> I mean, it was amazing. . . .We really came together and figured out what it was that we felt was missing, and work to change that together. (Ashley Tsai, Who Needs Feminism?)
>
> I think it's been an incredibly sort of empowering and life changing thing to be involved with. (Bryony Beynon, Hollaback! London)
>
> I feel like it has changed the world and I feel like I'm part of something that has changed the world. And I don't care if that's hyperbole, that's what it feels like to me and that's what it looks like to me. (Emer O'Toole, Everyday Sexism)
>
> It's been really good. I feel like I'm part of something important. (Emily Griffith, Everyday Sexism)

Angela McRobbie (2016) calls this type of labor "passionate work," and it's no surprise to see their activities talked about in such terms. Yet, while organizers overwhelmingly felt inspired and committed to their projects, many described the *weightiness* of the work. As Genevieve Berrick from Hollaback! LA shared, "Yeah, so there's a lot of weight to it that feels heavy and helps us push forward at the same time." Genevieve's comment is interesting, because while weight at times can be a burden—a heavy load to bear—she talked about it as also being useful in that it generated momentum needed to carry on forward. Others noted however the exhaustion that being the bearer of such labor entailed, and the necessity of taking breaks, limiting what they take on, and if necessary walking away:

> Yeah, it is really tiring. It is a lot of emotional work and I have to be really careful about what I take on. (Jill Dimond, Hollaback!)

> I was really struggling to cope, and it got to the point where I had to choose between keeping up with the moderation or quitting (Laura Bates, Everyday Sexism)

> [B]ecause I've been involved with activism and done a lot of these kinds of things, like, I have a little bit of a higher threshold than other people do. But it does get tiring and it does get . . . it's definitely emotionally taxing, and you have to take care of yourself. I did have to take a break from it sometimes and we all had to kind of just . . . I think that was part of why we set up those shifts where were monitoring things. Just without even really realising that's what we were doing, we were giving each other that break. (Ashley Tsai, Who Needs Feminism?)

Throughout our interviews, it became clear that the "affective intensities" (see Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2018; Khoja-Moolji 2015, 349) previously described as an emotional "tax" levied onto feminist activism was not merely from listening to stories of abuse, harassment, misogyny, and sexism, but at times came from contributors reaching out with actual pleas for help. Ivanna Gonzalez for example recounted an experience of receiving a detailed suicide plan via the Who Needs Feminism? website. Unsure what to do, Ivanna reached out to some contacts at Duke University, and with the help of a team was able to put together a detailed response. However, as she admits, she was "not equipped to handle this kind of thing," and recognizes that despite getting "different iterations of that kind of cry for help in a lot of the messages that we get," she and her fellow organizers "lack the resources and emotional capacity to provide this type of response for everyone." As other research has found, support is hugely important for activists' long-term health (Gleeson 2016; Hall 2014), but rarely is it put into place—likely because of the grassroots nature of such groups, which lack structure, resources, and training.

Although this type of work was emotionally draining, exhausting, and taxing, organizers also expressed their deep commitment to it. Emer O'Toole shared her struggle to read posts that were unbearable, but feeling it "ethically questionable" to look away. As she explained, not reading a story because it upset her would be:

> [A] way of silencing women to say be quiet, we don't want to hear your story because your story upsets us; your story is just too disturbing for me to listen to right now. And actually, I've heard three of these stories this week and I feel like that's enough stories and I don't want to hear any more. So, your rape, your sexual assault, your sexist experience at

> work, I don't want to hear that, I've heard enough of that. Well, that's a very effective way of silencing women. And I think that's what Everyday Sexism does, it says no, we're not going to be silenced, each and every instance of sexism and harassment matters, and each and every woman who has experienced it should be allowed to speak.

In a similar vein, while admitting that reading stories of harassment, sexism, misogyny, and abuse could at times lead to "secondary trauma," Hollaback! executive director Emily May shared:

> At the same time [as being traumatic], I think there's hope there. I think that stories are how movements start; stories are how movements sustain; stories are how you sort of restart movements once they've sort of died out, right. . . . So, I'm, like, stoked when I see stories, as much as I'm also obviously really saddened by them.

In this section, we have traced the ways the labor involved in digital feminist activism is invisibly, immaterial, precarious, and highly affective. Although we are not claiming that such work is unique to digital feminist activist campaigns, the nature of these campaigns, which require listening, can be as Leah Bassel (2017) argues, a *social* and *political* process. This is particularly true for marginalized bodies who are frequently conceived of as "inaudible, less-than-human and capable only of noise rather than voice" (6). Although the campaigns discussed through this book have a wide range of aims, from shaping public policy to making sexism visible, as is evident from our interviews with organizers, they are also engaging in a *politics of listening* (Bassel 2017). Organizers recognized the value of *listening* to contributors' experiences, regardless of how painful they may be. Listening then is a form of recognition "that counters vicious exclusions that combine race, gender, class and means of rendering people socially abject [. . .] and . . . unheard" (Bassel 2017, 6). It is therefore one way in which narrative resources can be redistributed to those whose voices or stories are rarely heard (Bassel 2017).

Mediated Abuse

In recent years, there has been a growth of scholarship on the abuse and harassment of women online (see Citron 2014; Jane 2014a, 2016; Mendes 2015; Penny 2013; Poland 2016; Powell and Henry 2017). This abuse ranges from the seemingly mundane, to those filled with vitriolic misogyny and death and rape

threats. As discussed in chapter 2, while cognizant of a range of terms in use, we refer to the panoply of abuse directed toward women as "mediated abuse" because it is broad enough to encompass a spectrum of practices, from the mundane to the obscene, or "trolling," because it is the language used by many of our participants.

For this study, around 75 percent of our organizers experienced trolling (n=14), indicating that while it is a pervasive problem, it is not a universal one. And while mediated abuse may be likely to put some people off from engaging with feminist activism, the affective implications such as anxiety, anger, and irritation were also credited for providing a sense of solidarity among organizers, and evidence that their work was important. As Eyerman argued, "Even the experience of fear and anxiety, not uncommon in the midst of protest, can be a strong force in creating a sense of collectivity and be an attractive force in collective actions" (2005 cited in Jasper 2011, 294).

In light of the substantial attention around online sexism in recent years, it is useful to consider *why* some organizers might escape this seemingly inevitable byproduct of being engaged in feminist activism. From our interviews with organizers, we have identified four reasons: first, the relative newness of their involvement in activism; second, the "low-profile" nature of their activism; third, their use of a range of preventative and precautionary measures including removing their name from the activist site; and fourth, restricting what they publish online about feminism or content that challenges submissive femininity. Due to space constraints, we focus on the fourth reason.

SELF-DISCIPLINING SUBJECTS IN DIGITAL SPACES

A number of our organizers stated they had experienced mediated abuse in the past (either on their own or as part of their activism), and as a result, became self-disciplining subjects, using precautionary strategies such as excluding personal information on the campaign website, or keeping their feminist views "hidden" on social media. This also includes being very selective about who they "friend" on restricted platforms such as Facebook, censoring themselves when it comes to feminist politics, or having multiple, anonymous accounts (mainly on Twitter) for their feminism. Hollaback! executive director Emily May explains how she has made a conscious effort to put the organization forward rather than herself, and as a result, hasn't had any mediated abuse that is "really personal." As she goes on to explain, "I've also been really intentional, to the best of my ability, like, putting Hollaback! as an organisation, as a brand, as a whatever forward, instead of me. . . . And I think that's helped to shield me a little bit." Hollaback! web developer Jill Dimond also spoke about her use of these preventative strategies with some regret. But after detailing how, as a

computer science student, she experienced mediated abuse early on, she shared the impact it had on her:

> At the time, I brushed it off, it was like, oh, whatever, it's just stupid doo-doos. But looking back, that really had a big effect on me in terms of how guarded I am on the Internet. . . . And so I think that really kind of prepared me early on to not [laugh] . . . to be really conservative about what I share about myself online.

Jill is certainly not the only target of abuse to "retreat" from digital spheres, and in recent years we have heard of high-profile women such as actress Leslie Jones, food blogger Jack Munro, feminist blogger Jessica Valenti, and singer Nicki Minaj disengaging from digital culture (even if only temporarily) in response to their experiences.

A TAXONOMY OF ABUSE

Given the recent attention paid to mediated abuse, it is unsurprising that scholars have spent time defining and taxonomizing it (see Henry and Powell 2017). Although we did not explicitly ask our organizers to define what constitutes "trolling," they shared with us a wide range of practices, at times fueled by playful prodding, to misogynistic vitriol. For example, Hollaback! Montreal's Becky Burns described experiencing "benevolent trolling," where perpetrators sought to "challenge" organizers in "a playful sort of way." Others, such as Hollaback! Dublin Jenny Dunn described encountering those who sought to discredit the movement by posting comments on the site that "intentionally missed the point." This included comments on their Facebook page such as "women love being catcalled."

Our more high-profile activists such as Laura Bates, Emily May, and Emer O'Toole were more likely to receive larger volumes of (often) highly aggressive gendered and sexualized abuse including death, rape, and psychological threats (directed toward them, their family, and friends) as the norm. Emily May stated that she tended to experience an increase in mediated abuse whenever Hollaback! does media publicity: "We notice a lot also when we do press, I'll get a whole litany of comments about how I'm fat and ugly and stupid. So that was cool [laugh]." In a similar vein, Everyday Sexism organizer Emer O'Toole shared:

> Yeah, I mean, I write about feminist on the Internet. I get rape threats. I have people sending me emails that say things like, hey, you have fans, click on this link, we've made you a fan page. And then I click on the link and it's a conversation about how a group of men are going to rape

> me with a jagged stick, that's been illustrated with a picture of me and the jagged stick. . . . I don't know if you're shocked by what I've just said. Often people are, but also no woman who writes feminism on the Internet is the least bit surprized by the level or kind of male aggression that gets levelled at me.

Everyday Sexism founder Laura Bates also recalled being completely unprepared for the vitriol leveled against her. She described how she was on holiday with her partner and his family when Everyday Sexism began to take off. As she recounted:

> And I just remember being there and having this surreal experience where my phone was just buzzing, and I was on the one hand there having an ice cream in the sunshine with them and then on the other hand people were telling me that they wanted to dismember me.

Furthermore, Laura shared the way perpetrators used various tactics to "psyche her out." For example, they would send her around 200 messages, then pause for three or four hours during which she received an "enormous sense of relief that it was over" to find another torrent of messages with headings such as "oh hey again Laura, thought that we'd gone away?" As she notes, these types of mind games were "quite deliberate."

From our interviews, we see that mediated abuse has been used to represent a wide range of practices—from the seemingly mundane, ubiquitous, or "benevolent" to the vitriolic, violent, and graphic. And while we have plenty of evidence about the *types* of sexism leveled toward women, little scholarship has focused on the affective implications of such abuse.

THE IMPACT OF MEDIATED ABUSE

Scholars such as Emma A. Jane (2014, 2016, 2017) have noted that common reactions to such mediated abuse include: distress, fear, irritation, anxiety, violation, and vulnerability—emotions that resonated with our organizers as well. What scholarship has yet to focus on is the extent to which these emotions continue in the short, medium, or long term, or how these emotions might shift over time (for an exception see Lewis, Marine, and Kenney 2017). Although this was not a primary objective for our research, we know that activists such as Laura Bates have been psychologically traumatized by years of trolling. Laura for example, described how she now regularly suffers night terrors—in which she wakes up fearing someone is in the room—because of the abuse she received.[4] Jill Dimond also shared deep feelings of anxiety, more toward the *anticipation*

of trolling, rather than the trolling itself, which she described as often being "so ridiculous, it was kind of funny at the same time, too [laugh]." A long-term investigation into the (changing) affective registers of online abuse is certainly worth exploring, particularly, as we will show later, because of some surprising findings.

HUMOR AND LAUGHTER

Although humor and laughter were not affects we initially expected to encounter, when going back through the transcripts again with our organizers, we found they used laughter, jokes, and sarcasm time and again when discussing their experiences of online sexism. As scholars have noted, humor can be used as "a social and psychological distancing technique" to relieve anxiety, fear (Sanders 2004, 274; see also Palmer 1994), and can also be used as a coping mechanism to "re-frame" distressing incidents (see Downea 1999; Moran and Massam 1997). This was clearly the case in many of our interviews, and we deliberately bracketed "[laugh]" in direct quotes to showcase its prevalence. In her studies of sex work communities in the UK, Teela Sanders (2004) explores the way humor was often used as a form or *resistance* to harassment, at times even mocking those who they imagine to be trolling them. Within our own study, we found organizers using similar strategies. For example, organizers called trolls names ("dickhead" or "doo-doos"), or poked fun at the unoriginality of troll usernames, such as "asshole troll 5000." Others at times used sarcasm to highlight anger or frustration, for example in the quote earlier in this chapter where Emily May stated, "So that was cool [laugh]," when recounting an experience of being trolled. Among feminist organizers then, humor and laughter are routinely used as a defense mechanism and emotion management strategy (Hochschild 1983) used to make the difficult aspects of digital feminist activism more palatable. It is also possible that as time passes, organizers reconceive traumatic or troubling experiences as humorous, thus mitigating long-term negative implications.

FIRE TO KEEP GOING

Given recent media attention to the ways well-known feminists or women have retreated from social media platforms such as Twitter because of their experiences with online sexism, we were surprised to hear some organizers talk about the way these experiences "galvanized" them and gave them "fire" to keep going. In fact, Emily May uses the abuse leveled against Hollaback! as a means to motivate organizers. As she said:

> I say to our site leaders, you know, these haters, they're a success metric, they wouldn't be bothering you if you weren't threatening the sort of

> inner sexist in them, if you weren't threatening the core of their being. They would just ignore you. You know, it's much better that they're hating you than ignoring you, it's showing that what you're doing is working.

In a similar vein, Who Needs Feminism? organizer Ashley Tsai acknowledged that while being trolled is certainly "difficult," at the same time, it was: "just more fire for us . . . we kind of just took it as fire for us to keep going and doing what we were doing."

While it would be misleading to claim that organizers were simply able to brush off online sexism and mediated abuse or use it as a means of fueling their desire in the long run, that this was the experience of some of our organizers highlights the need for further research into its short-, medium-, and long-term impact. For example, at what point and how long do organizers feel traumatized? How long can organizers feel galvanized by their experiences before burning out? Are there other affects associated with trolling we have yet to uncover? One area that we began to examine here is the practical implications of online sexism—namely devising strategies to manage abusers or limit their exposure to them.

MEDIATED ABUSE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Previous scholars have investigated strategies used by feminist activists to manage trolls (see Herring et al. 2002; Mendes 2015). In doing so, they have highlighted "very real differences and perspectives, strategies and policies when it came to trolls" (Mendes 2015, 177). This includes debate over "When—and where—is it legitimate to draw the line?" (Herring et al. 2002, 372). Strategies included ignoring the comment, blocking, unfriending, responding (as individuals or a community), reporting their experience to the police, and generating new initiatives to support victims of online sexism. Although "deleting," "blocking," or "unfriending" has been viewed negatively as a form of censorship by previous feminist activists (see Mendes 2015), few organizers in this study were opposed to these strategies. When asked if they felt there was anything inherently wrong in censoring or silencing trolls, some organizers, such as Emily May vehemently disagreed:

> I don't think that trolling is free speech, I think trolling actually silences free speech, because it creates a space where the trolls' voices are louder and they're more prized, and everybody else just wants to crawl under a rock, because they're scared it's going to be aimed at them next.

This view was echoed by most organizers, who were aware that trolling is an oft-used tool to silence women (see Lumsden and Morgan 2017).

While organizers had a range of tools at their disposal, it became clear that many stated they were "strategic" in their management techniques. This included making decisions on who was "worth" responding to, blocking, or reporting. As Emer O'Toole shared:

> I've got different strategies depending on who it is. I ignore all the sexual stuff because I don't know what to say. And a lot of the time, if a guy just approaches me disrespectfully on Twitter or whatever, I just block him because I don't feel like it's my job to constantly be educating people.

Although previous research has highlighted the use of a range of management strategies, what emerged from our research was the nuanced ways in which they are deployed. Hollaback! LA's Genevieve Berrick also explained how her response would depend on the type of sexism as well as the platform in which it emerged. Hollaback! Montreal's Becky Burns also stated that her response would depend on the type of harassment. While she might engage with "benevolent" trolls who are challenging, but not abusive, others such as Emer held firm in her decision not to engage with them, despite recognizing there can be value in such encounters.

In terms of *reporting* their abuse, most organizers shared that they "didn't bother" taking the matter further with either the platform itself, or law enforcement officers. This was often because past experiences, or "horror stories" from other women taught them that it was a waste of time. For example, over the years, Laura Bates had reported many instances of abuse to the police, sharing "every time I've ever reported abuse, the police take the details down and then I've heard nothing." Emily May explained how she has a "whole file" of screenshots of abusive messages. Despite reporting threats of violence to the FBI on several occasions, "They didn't do anything [laugh]. Useless." While the platform architecture might enable organizers to easily block or unfriend abusers, some organizers shared the way personal relationships prevented them from doing so. Jill Dimond for example explained how she has an easier time blocking someone on Twitter than on Facebook—mostly because the abusers are friends or family members with whom she already has personal ties.

While the *platform* and *type* of trolling influenced the response of some organizers, *time* emerged as an important factor for others. As Emer explained: "I do enough feminist activism, I don't feel like educating men who are dickheads to me on Twitter. I just don't feel like that is part of how I want to spend my time."

As we will see in chapter 5, sentiments such as these are echoed by many of our "everyday feminists," who are strategic in their efforts to educate others.

Closely associated with *time* was the amount of *energy* organizers were willing to invest. Jill Dimond, who was seven months pregnant at the time of our interview, explained how her management strategies are dependent on how much energy she has, and is willing to spend:

> But, you know, it takes a lot of energy, it really does, figuring out when you're going to engage [with trolls] or what you have time for, or what you feel like is doing activism in everyday life, or if it's just like, yeah, I don't have space for this right now.

In a similar vein, Julia Gray also talked about the ways her decision on how to manage trolls was based on where to commit her limited energy and attention. As she explained, she and her colleague Bryony Beynon at Hollaback! London frequently ignore, block, or delete trolls because "we've got too much else to do than to waste our energy on stuff like that." It is significant that although trolling is often seen as being inherently harmful, many organizers are pragmatic when it comes to trolling, and consciously choose to disregard these messages, or block these individuals, and instead focus their energy elsewhere.

While ignoring or blocking abusers was a common strategy among organizers, many others opened up about the importance of self-care strategies, work-life balance, and burnout.

Self-Care Strategies, Work/Life Balance, and Burnout

For those involved in a range of "caring" practices such as social workers, therapists, health professionals, terms such as "mindfulness" and "self-care" are nothing new. There are many tomes devoted to these subjects (see Collard 2014; Grise-Owens et al. 2016; Smullens 2015). And while these practices have been long-standing for those such as nurses, psychiatrists, social workers, and others "who use their own self as a method of change" (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison 2011), self-care practices are becoming increasingly prominent across a wide range of workplaces, educational systems, and even in relation to activist spaces (see Boehm 2002; Downton and Wehr 1998; Gleeson 2016; Gorski 2015), in order to help alleviate or postpone chances of burnout (Gleeson 2016). While self-care can range from practical measures such as learning to set boundaries or forming communities of support, to engaging in self-care practices such as

meditation and yoga, and community formations, we have also witnessed the rise of short-term "patching" or "coping" exercises such as engaging with "cute" ephemera to momentarily relieve stress.[5]

At the same time, there exists a range of excellent critiques of self-care, particularly around the ways "structural inequalities are deflected by being made the responsibilities of individuals" (Ahmed 2017, 239; see Prugl 2014; Rottenberg 2014) within neoliberal societies. As Catherine Rottenberg (2014) argues, we are witnessing the neoliberalization of feminism in which structural systems that produce inequality are rejected in favor of feminists accepting "full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work–family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus" (420).

While the rise of neoliberal feminism, with its focus on *individual* transformation in lieu of *collective* social and political change is worrying, Sara Ahmed counters that self-care is important because "feminism needs feminists to survive" (Ahmed 2017, 236). Quoting Audre Lorde, Ahmed explains: "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (1988 cited in Ahmed 2017, 237). This is particularly true for those who are marginalized and lack varying privileges—feminists living in a patriarchal world, the poor, or BAME people living in a world of "racial capitalism" for example (Ahmed 2017, 238). Throughout our interviews, the necessity of self-care strategies became not only evident, but integral to what Ahmed describes as part of a feminist "killjoy survival kit," and what Hagan calls a "feminist guidebook" (cited in Butterbaugh 1998, 13). Bound up within these survival kits is a range of coping and self-care strategies, necessary for feminists to continue living a feminist life, and to exist in a world that might not value their existence (Ahmed 2017).

From our interviews, organizers were highly cognizant of the emotional, affective, and embodied labor of feminist activism, and were involved in a wide variety of self-care practices to help offset this. These included playing music, meditation, yoga, reading feminist work, taking a walk in a park, engaging in feminist communities, taking a break from their activism or online activities, and engaging with "cute" aesthetics. In some cases, these practices were highly embodied. Hollaback! London's Bryony Beynon for example explained how she played the drums as part of her self-care:

> So yeah, playing drums is quite like a thing that's fun to do because you get a lot of . . . it's very bodily and you can get a lot of sort of aggression out. And obviously, being socialized not to show aggression, that's a useful thing to be able to do.

For Bryony, playing the drums was helpful not only in letting her "aggression out" in relation to her work with Hollaback!, but as a means of challenging gender roles in which women are socialized to be passive and submissive, and not draw attention to themselves. While performance is integral to her self-care, for her colleague Julia Gray, it was much quieter, though not necessarily less effective. Julia described how talking to others and reading "really helps me work through my thoughts and my feelings. That's my biggest way of dealing with stuff." Reading the experiences of others is also helpful, and Julia described being particularly drawn to poetry and the "works of intersectional feminists"—artists who are able to effectively conceptualize difficult emotions, which according to Julia, "really makes me feel a lot better."

In a few cases, organizers discussed their engagement with "cute aesthetics." Genevieve Berrick of Hollaback! LA for example shared how "I actually have put Facebook statuses up saying, 'Read too much about rape culture by 9.00 am, please send pictures of kittens.'" As Paul Dale et al. (2016) note, this rise of "cute aesthetics" has emerged to help people cope with the rise of neoliberal capitalism and precarious employment. In addition to looking at cute kittens, Genevieve explained how although difficult, her involvement with feminist activism was a form of self-care: "To some degree, Hollaback is the self-care. So, feeling like you're actually changing things and being able to palpably." Although most other organizers needed time away from their activism, as Ahmed (2017) argues: "Protest can be a form of self-care as well as caring for others; a refusal not to matter" (240).

BURNOUT AND WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Burnout is often referred to as "a state or process of mental exhaustion" (Schaufeli and Buunk 2003, 383). Scholars have argued that activists in social change movements are prone to burnout due to their emotional investment in their respective campaign (see Gorski and Chen 2015). As Gorski argues, the "emotional burden" for activists is particularly heavy, because they are aware of the stakes: "the perpetuation of injustice, oppression, and suffering" (2015, 701). As a result, they are particularly vulnerable to anxiety. Gorski and Chen (2015) have outlined that activists involved in social justice causes are at a higher risk of suffering burnout when compared to other activists, and that this is due to what Hochschild (1983) deems to be the emotional investment and labor of individuals associated with the campaign.

While many organizers admitted they were able to "cope" with such self-care strategies, others at times had to "take breaks," or in a few cases, simply give up their activism due to activist burnout (see Gorski 2015; Pines 1994), or the inability to manage it with their work/life balance. According to Maslach and Leiter

(1994), burnout is not "simply a temporary bout with frustration or weariness, but rather a chronic condition that has debilitating and long-term implications" (cited in Gorski 2015, 697). The debilitating nature of burnout was evident in our interview with Everyday Sexism organizer Emily Griffith, who reported how the stress of ongoing engagement with digital feminist activism, along with long-standing mental health issues, forced her to take a break from the project for several months. When burnout was combined with the added stress of managing their activism with overwhelming work and life commitments, the result was that some had to step away from their activism permanently. Fellow Everyday Sexism organizer Emer O'Toole shared how she left the project "suddenly" and "without grace" a few months into taking up her first full-time academic post. This is because, as Emer described:

> I stopped because basically my job was so much more work than I could have anticipated, my first academic position, and I was overwhelmed, and I just couldn't actually do it. Like, I was sitting down to do the volunteer co-ordination and I was kind of going like, oh, having trouble breathing. And I just wrote to Laura and said, "I'm so sorry, I can't do it, I can't even really train someone else up to take over from me. I'm so sorry but here's where everything's at, I just have to bow out right now.

The embodied nature of burnout is evident in the previous passage, as Emer talks about having troubling breathing—the stress of combining activism with her first full-time position being so overwhelming, it literally and figuratively took her breath away. Emer and Emily are both examples of the primary implication of burnout—that activists either scale back on their activism, or abandon it altogether (see Gorski 2015; Rettig 2006). And while organizers acknowledged that stepping away from activism is necessary, it was often relayed to us with regret. For Emer, a major source of this regret was not seeing earlier that that she wasn't coping. However, as she reflected: "But unfortunately, we're not always perfect activists, we're not always perfect feminists, we're not always perfect humans." Emer was not the only organizer we interviewed who found it challenging combining activism with full-time employment. At the time of our interview, Julia Gray of Hollaback! London had just moved to Brighton to take up a full-time job, and was struggling to be as involved as she would have liked. Melanie Keller of Hollaback! Baltimore had only recently given up her role with the organization after moving to Austria to become an au pair. And we know from our interviews with other organizers that they found it hugely challenging to maintain commitments to activism when the demands of employment or other life commitments became too taxing.

A key implication emerging from our research with organizers is the exploitative and precarious nature of contemporary (feminist) activism, which involves largely invisible, immaterial, and un(der)paid labor. As women's work continues to be undervalued and underpaid in various sectors (Grimshaw and Rubery 2007; Jarrett 2014), it is pertinent to highlight unpaid activism as a feminist issue. While a few of our organizers managed to earn some money from their activism,[6] important questions remain about how long they can continue with their activism in the long-term, particularly because most of the organizers we interviewed were young (early twenties), energetic, single, and childless, with "flexible" (e.g., precarious) jobs. Previous research (Gleeson 2016) has found that activists who receive wages for their labor (regardless of how precarious) remained involved with their campaigns for much longer than unpaid activists. And while we have serious concerns about the increased commercialization of feminism (as we discuss in the book's Introduction), the work these activists do is real and undervalued. At the same time, scholars have documented the ways unpaid digital labor, and the content social media users create, including trolling and abusive content, in fact generates huge profits for media corporations such as Twitter and Facebook (see Shepherd et al. 2015). Given that such online abuse is currently *profitable,* these large corporations are unmotivated to curb it. On the other hand, the unpaid digital labor invested by activists goes unacknowledged and unrewarded. Within this context, following advice from Duffy (2015) who advises we take heed from the Wages for Housework campaign in the 1970s, "we should seek ways to mobilize social media producers to advocate for fair compensation based on the realization that many of these activities are value-added work" (712).

Moving Forward

Through our use of semi-structured interviews with 18 feminist activists, this chapter shed light on a range of experiences of those organizing and managing digital feminist campaigns—ranging from how they became involved, to previous experiences of activism, their relationship with feminism, and experiences of online sexism. The chapter also showcased the ways the labor involved in feminist campaigns is highly affective, invisible, precarious, and time-consuming. While organizers shared feelings of deep attachments to their campaigns, they opened up about the tedium and boredom also involved with certain tasks—affects that have so far been understudied. While several of our organizers have identified as feminists for several years before their involvement, it also emerged that activism acted as a "feminist awakening" for some.

The chapter also documented organizers' experiences with mediated abuse, noting that while most encountered some degree, it is not an inevitable aspect of activism, and operates on a continuum—from the mundane to the vitriolic. Furthermore, our research sheds light on some short- and long-term implications—from finding experiences funny, to being galvanized to continue with their activism. And while we argue that mediated abuse is a serious issue, this study provides hope in showing that it is not inevitable. Despite this, mediated abuse needs to be reframed from a personal issue to a political one, which needs collective response to hold perpetrators responsible, institutional support from web providers where trolling takes place, and a range of support structures for victims.

When we as a research team reflect back upon their experiences of activism, it becomes clear that while digital feminist activism can be exhilarating and life changing, it is often exhausting and draining, and individual and collective care strategies are needed to prevent activist burnout. This includes the possibility of compensating activists for their labor, while remaining cautious about the extent to which feminism is commercialized and co-opted within neo-liberal capitalist contexts.