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Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to Studying Digital Feminist Activism

Building from our introduction, which mapped contemporary debates around the status of feminism, including discussions of postfeminism, popular feminism, and fourth wave feminism, including how the digital is positioned in these debates, this chapter explores the multifaceted theoretical and methodological approach taken in this book. We locate this research as unequivocally interdisciplinary, informed by not only media studies, but feminist theory, gender and queer studies, education, sociology, criminology, girls' studies, and cultural studies. As such, we see this work as contributing to a wide body of scholarship across multiple disciplines and audiences.

We start this chapter by outlining an interdisciplinary feminist literature on affect that we have found useful for elaborating the embodied and emotional intensities of practicing feminism activism (Ahmed 2017). We link this to media studies research looking at the mediatization and digitization of affect through connective technologies (Papacharissi 2015), to consider how this creates new feminist political possibilities through diverse digital mediums. Next, we discuss how critical technology studies and the political economy of social media lend key insights into digital media user's experiences, practices, and conventions, and are shaped by the digital environment's underlying infrastructure, which is in turn "shaped by and shaping political, economic, social, cultural, and other institutional forces" (Harvey 2016). Here, we examine theories of digital platform affordances and their attendant vernaculars (Gibbs et al. 2015), which we have found helpful for thinking about a range of shifting conventions that are characterizing contemporary feminist digital activism.

In the last section of this chapter we explain our unique hybrid methodological design, which drew on a range of methods for studying digital cultures (Postill and Pink 2012). These included close observation of several online

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communities, surveys, semi-structured interviews, and qualitative content and thematic analysis. We explain why we employed these diverse and creative methods to capture the complex, nuanced, and often less visible side of everyday digital feminist activism.

Affect and Feminism

In recent years, there has been an "affective turn" (Clough and Halley 2007) in feminist scholarship, which attends to the importance of emotion and embodiment, or "everyday affects," in shaping gendered lives (Ahmed 2017; Stewart 2007). We anchor our research in several key concepts from this large body of work that specifically addresses the relationship between affect and politics, a central concern given our research focus.

Sara Ahmed's work has informed much of our theorizing throughout this book. We draw on Ahmed's (2004, 2010, 2017) conceptualization of an "affective economy" to understand the ways in which feminism is experienced, circulated, and responded to by our study participants. Ahmed uses the example of the feminist killjoy to illustrate how affect sticks to particular bodies, an idea that we build upon through this book as we explore how our participants navigate their affective relationship to feminist politics. Taking a cue from Ahmed's (2017) most recent book, *Living a Feminist Life,* we explore how feminist politics are positioned as a form of problematic "willfulness," in which feminists must learn to manage and negotiate as they practice feminism in their everyday lives. For example, this is particularly apparent in chapter 5 as the Twitter users discuss their experiences of combatting resistance to their feminism. And while Ahmed also discusses the exhaustive nature of being willful and engaging in the "diversity work" of feminism, we follow this line of thought in analyzing the affective labor in which the feminist activists we interviewed regularly engage.

Ahmed's conceptualization of feminists as "affective aliens" is also useful to our project, putting a name to a feeling that many feminists encounter when they engage in feminist politics or challenge everyday patterns of masculine dominance, such as those found in the rape and lad cultures that we document in this book. In chapters 5, 6, and 7, we explore these painful processes of resisting everyday sexism as well as sexual violence, and the emotional toll it takes. Finally, we've found Ahmed's development of the notion of feminist "snaps," or critical breaking points when feminists break with older power relations to stake a claim or voice a protest, to be generative. We find this concept useful for considering key moments where digital culture provides an opportunity to report on experiences of sexism and sexual violence, such as in

#BeenRapedNeverReported, or experiences of coming to feminist consciousness and push back from friends, family, and strangers. Indeed, this idea of feminist snap might aptly characterize the current moment of #MeToo and Time's Up, a consideration we explore in the conclusion.

In our research, we found a complex discursive terrain marked by a range of different ideas and formations of feminism, as our participants struggled with vehement anti-feminism as well as the co-optation of feminism into what we referenced in our introduction as postfeminism (Gill 2007, 2017). Our analysis pays attention to these dynamics in how our participants discuss their feminism, qualify types of feminism and activism, and suggest multiple strategies of feminist digital engagement. We explore the dominant discourses (Gill 2007) that are shaping a range of digital feminist practices such as blogging (Keller 2015), tweeting (Ringrose and Renold 2016b), and Tumblring (Retallack, Ringrose, and Lawrence 2016), seeking to understand the affective dimensions of these discourses as they shape the lived practices of our participants. Our research pays attention to the effusion of different affective registers at play as diverse feminisms are being practiced, performed, and negotiated by our participants. For instance, in considering the meaning and impact of digital feminism in the lives of our participants, we found Clare Hemmings (2012) concepts of "affective dissonance" and "affective solidarity" particularly useful. Hemmings articulates affective solidarity as arising from a shared affective dissonance among women who crave feminist social change. Rather than building solidarity based upon identity politics, Hemmings proposes a collective feminist politics that draws on a shared affective experience that may arise from questioning the status quo. She writes:

> Affective dissonance cannot guarantee feminist politicization or even a resistant mode. And yet, it just might . . . that sense of dissonance might become a sense of injustice and then a desire to rectify that. Affect might flood one's being and change not only how the house and its circumstances are experienced and understood but how everything else is seen and understood too, from this time on. (157)

Hemmings' concept of affective solidarity then, much like Ahmed's writing previously discussed, allows us to consider how the affects produced within our case studies hold the potential to be transformative, while recognizing that this is not an inevitability.

NETWORKED AFFECT

While feminist theories of affect provide a foundation in our research for understanding the practice of living and doing feminism, there is a growing body

of scholarship exploring affect in media cultures, and specifically, how the affordances of digital media are affective. For example, Adi Kuntsman (2012) discusses the "affective fabrics" of digital culture, mobilizing Ahmed's affective economy lens to interrogate the circulation of text and emotion online. Kuntsman introduces the idea of reverberation to explore how text and emotion travel inside and outside of cyberspace, inciting intensifications of emotions, as well as generating new "psychic states" and possibilities for "resistances" and "transformations" (2012, 2). This possibility of transformation through the circulation of text and the different valences of emotion as "affective intensities" via digital networks (Ringrose 2011) is particularly relevant for our study.

Another key text that we draw upon extensively is Zizi Papacharissi's book, *Affective Publics* (2015), which builds upon danah boyd's (2007) work on "networked publics" to articulate how the technological affordances of social networks such as persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability are affective:

> Social media facilitate engagement in ways that are meaningful. Most notably they help activate latent ties that may be crucial to the mobilization of networked publics . . . their impact is always subject to context to how these super surfaces connect to the infrastructural core of a regime be that a democracy, autocracy or a political system in transition. On a secondary level, networked publics are formed as crowds coalesce around both actual and imagined communities. The connective affordances of social media then not only activist the in-between bond of publics but enable expression and information sharing that liberates the individual and the collective imaginations. . . . digital among other media invite and transmit affect but also sustain affective feedback loops that generate and reproduce affective patterns of relating to others that are further reproduced as affect—that is, intensities, that has not yet been cognitively processed as feeling, emotion or thought . . . haptic, optic and tactile, but also the computational capabilities of media invite particular modalities of affective attunement. (Papacharissi 2015, 20–23)

Papacharissi is heavily influenced by Deleuze's notion of bodily capacity and how digital media shapes and attunes these, highlighting the notion of "affective intensities" (see also Ringrose 2011). We explore affective attunement in our research and how different types of digital feminist practices enable specific forms of capacities, including feelings of connection, shared understanding, safety, resolve, and many more. The way the digital spaces enable different capacities depends on the type of digital platform (a website, a Tumblr site, or

a Twitter account or hashtag), which we explore in detail. Papacharissi (2015) argues, "Affect is inherently political. It provides a way of understanding humans as collective and emotional, as well as individual and rational, by presenting these states as confluent rather than opposite" (16). Drawing on a wide range of theories, Papacharissi suggests that affect is particularly useful in understanding politics within digital cultures, as "it does not conform to the structures we symbolically internalize as political," such as conventional modes of protest activism or governmental politics (19). Where Papacharissi looks at Twitter content and media representations, this study draws on affect to explore the qualitative dimensions of experiences of living and practicing feminism in digital spheres as well as the affective aspects of anti-feminism and postfeminism as we see this playing out in our research.

The concept of "networked affect" (Hillis, Paasonen, and Petit 2015) is another influential concept for this study, which references the networked capabilities of social media, which has disrupted conventional boundaries between the individual, the social, and the political through vast webs of connective streams of consciousness. Ken Hillis, Susanna Paasonen, and Michael Petit (2015) argue that the technological is not only instrumental, but generative, of new forms of intensity, sensation, and value. This is extremely important for considering how feminist consciousness is expanded and extended through its speed and connectivity "in the network" (Rentschler and Thrift 2015, 331). Intensity, sensation, and value help us think about the ways digital technology changes the degree and nature of experience of feelings or emotions and the ways feminists are using digital networks to communicate and participate in resistance and political debate. Sensation, meanwhile, directly disrupts the idea of an online/offline divide and the digital as only experienced cognitively, paying attention to the sensations of the embodied digital technology user that shape how they experience feminism through digital networks, as we will aim to do.

Hillis, Paasonen, and Petit's framework applies the actor-network framework of Bruno Latour (2011) to explore how the individual who is plugged into digital devices is always *more than* human and *more than* an individual, further noting that agency is distributed not only between humans but between humans and technology: "actors are in a state of constant interaction, learning and becoming and are always connected to other actors and factors" (in Hillis, Paasonen, and Petit 2015, 10). We apply this lens to interrogate how networks create new forms of more-than-human agential relations among feminist activists. Examples in our book show hashtag connectivity being digitally generated *between feminists* through uses of Twitter to engage in feminist campaigns against sexual violence (see also Rentschler 2014). We can also see how the digital networks enable the solidifying of group experiences of feminism through our teen feminists who use Twitter and chat functions to communicate and develop their feminist views

beyond the material spaces of school, and even operate a joint Twitter account that creates a collective digital identity. We document how this is experienced and negotiated given the extension of their school feminist group into a visible public Twitter presence that generates a range of affective peer conflicts.

Value and networked affect indicate a complex set of relations ranging from how specific platforms are designed to capitalize on key facets of users' identity. For instance, we reflect on how some platforms are "friendlier" to feminism and specific age groups. Moreover, we think about how new regimes and modes of engagement are promoted via some digital networks, such as new cultures of disclosure of sexual violence enabled on Tumblr or Twitter, or new forms of feminist humor and languages of resistance made possible through Twitter affordances (see also Mendes, Keller, and Ringrose submitted; Rentschler and Thrift 2015; Ringrose and Lawrence forthcoming).

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEDIATED AFFECT

There is a robust body of scholarship addressing the political economy of digital culture, including social media. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive overview here, later we highlight key ideas from this literature that is most pertinent to our project. Much of the political economy research challenges the optimistic perspective on Web 2.0 digital culture as participatory, democratic, and collaborative (see Bruns 2008; Jenkins 2006; Shirky 2008), and instead questions the ways in which ownership structures and their ideological power shape both the media technologies and their uses. To wit: Christian Fuchs (2009) argues that social media platforms have both an ideological character and a commodity form. He describes how platforms operate ideologically to advance capitalist individualization, accumulation, and legitimization via the privileging of the individual profile and the false pretense of social media as a democratic forum. He writes:

> If democracy is understood as the production of information by all that has no significant political effect and leaves dominant power structures untouched, then an ideological way of legitimating existing modes of domination is present. Everyone can then voice his or her opinion on the Web, but nobody will really care about it because the real decisions are still taken by the elite groups. The information produced then constitutes an endless flood of data, but not significant political voices. (83)

Jodi Dean (2005, 2009, 2010b) makes a similar argument with her concept of "communicative capitalism," highlighting the ways in which democracy and

capitalism have converged within networked communications and entertainment media, often depoliticizing politics in the process. Communicative capitalism, according to Dean, is marked by the process of celebrated democratic values taking material form in networked communications technologies:

> Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion and participation come to be realized in and through expansions, intensifications and interconnections of global telecommunications. But instead of leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence, instead of enabling the emergence of a richer variety in modes of living and practices of freedom, the deluge of screens and spectacles undermines political opportunity and efficacy for most of the world's peoples. (2005, 55)

For Dean (2005), it is the constant circulation of (media) content coupled with the fantasy of participation and the ability to feel "political" through practices such as signing an online petition that forecloses any real prospect for social change. The critical technological approach to social media and its means of extracting value and new markets from users is relevant for our research, and many of our findings complicate some of Dean and Fuch's assertions. Indeed, as we outline in chapters 4 to 7, although most of the digital feminist activism we study may result in no tangible changes to policy or law, it directly changes and shapes the experiences, interactions, expectations, and views of our participants' everyday lives in profound ways.

Although we may diverge regarding some of the ideological dimensions of social media, our research raises concerns about the unpaid immaterial labor that social media users produce for platforms such as Facebook. Fuchs articulates how in engaging with these platforms, even for activist purposes, audiences become a commodity sold to advertisers through monetized data that generates substantial profit for media companies (see also Terranova 2000). Tamara Shepherd (2014) and Kylie Jarrett (2014, 2015) argue that the commodification of social media audiences must also be understood through a gendered lens—arguments that we find compelling. According to Shepherd (2014), the commodity audience produced through social media is explicitly gendered, whereby gendered stereotypes are mobilized to produce user categories that are then targeted through gendered advertising. Jarrett (2014, 2015) also points out how the immaterial labor embedded within social media practices must also be understood as gendered labor in that it is often invisible, unpaid, and affective. The affective intensities of engagement in social media for Jarrett hold (an often unrecognized) value in capitalism, which she describes in relation to clicking the "Like" button on a friend's Facebook status:

> The affective intensities generated in these interactions provide a reward, and through that a legitimacy, for continued engagement with the site. These seductive pleasures, which are legitimate disciplining in neoliberal consumer capitalism, work to encourage continued contribution to the site, assuring the dominance of Facebook in terms of its market dynamics of data mining and brand-value. But these affective intensities also encourage the further generation of such sensations within commercial contexts. (23)

In this sense, we must recognize how affect works simultaneously, in both radical (such as in affective solidarity as we discussed earlier in this chapter) and status quo ways, a tension that we grapple with throughout this book.

José van Dijck (2013) also draws on political economy to argue it is the curated social connections produced by and through social media platforms that are particularly profitable for social media companies. Writing about the sophisticated algorithms used by companies such as Facebook, she maintains that "sociality coded by technology renders people's activities formal, manageable, and manipulable, enabling platforms to engineer the sociality in people's everyday routines" (12). By commoditizing relationships, connectivity serves as an important resource for companies, generating key data that is monetized and sold to advertisers. In this sense, van Dijck, much like Latour, reminds us that the connections we create online—whether through Facebook "shares," Twitter "followers," or Instagram "likes," are not solely the product of our human and rational agency, and that profit motives undergird the ways in which we are steered by algorithms to engage (or not) with particular digital content.

These political economy critiques suggest that we need to be cautious in celebrating the opportunities created by social media to engage in feminist political action. Indeed, when a feminist hashtag goes viral, such as the #BeenRapedNeverReported hashtag (see chapter 6), it is profitable for Twitter. Likewise, as Shepherd et al. (2015) highlight, online hate (including misogyny, racism, and homophobia) is *also* profitable, creating value for platforms that work as a disincentive to enact policies that combat such practices. Consequently, we approach our analysis mindful of theses tensions and with a particular eye toward the types of sociality engineered by platforms, a topic we turn to in the following section.

AFFECTIVE PLATFORM VERNACULARS

While scholars have been writing about "online feminisms" for the past several years, there has been little analysis of the multiple practices of *doing* feminist activism that have emerged out of differing digital platforms such as Tumblr,

Twitter, or Instagram, each unique in terms of their sociotechnical affordances (see Retallack, Ringrose, and Lawrence 2016; Kanai 2016; Ringrose and Lawrence, in press). Indeed, as scholars such as Carrie Rentschler and Samantha Thrift (2015) point out, "social media platforms may foster different ways of doing feminism" (350). In acknowledgment of this, this book deliberately focuses on a range of case studies that account for different ways of doing feminism, ranging from participating in highly visible feminist campaigns (such as Hollaback!) to micro-, hidden, and "quiet" forms of activism (such as closed WhatsApp group chats). We also carefully selected case studies that operate across various platforms, including websites, blogs, Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook—platforms that are underpinned by varying technological structures, or affordances.

This concept of "platform vernacular" (Gibbs et al. 2015) refers to a range of common conventions (including discursive, stylistic, and visual) that develop among specific digital spaces. Platform vernaculars become a key concept used to understand a multitude of feminist engagement via differing social media platforms. Although designers certainly imagine the ways users will engage with the platform itself and others on it, scholars such as Katie Warfield (2016) argue that platform vernaculars emerge from *within* social networks, whereby meaning and affective value become constituted and established through both use and context. Alexander Cho (2015) also elaborates on this idea, mapping how the platform vernacular of Tumblr produces particular affective engagements among queer users. In describing the way in which Tumblr privileges reblogged images that circulated quickly throughout the network, Cho writes:

> The authorial locus on Tumblr is not the act of creation; it is the act of *curation*. The experience of Tumblr is less like reading a LiveJournal blog and more like walking through a million different constantly shifting galleries—both may contain serious emotional heft and personal investment, but the latter relies much more on aesthetics, intimation, sensibility, and movement—in short, affect. (46)

Here, Cho's analysis points to the particularities of Tumbler's sociotechnical affordances in producing distinctive affective registers that are an integral part of the Tumblr experience.

This concept is also useful from an intersectional view point, in thinking about *who* is able to speak (or not), about which issues, on which platforms. We must also recognize that there is not a *singular* vernacular practice, but many that develop among platforms, and they change over time. As a result, although our

analysis focuses on the dominant vernaculars, we will draw attention to counter-vernacular practices as they emerge.

So far, this chapter has laid out key theories that inform and influence our approach to and analysis of data. The rest of this chapter lays out our methodological approach and further detail about case study selection.

Methodological Approach: Researching Digital Feminism and Affect

At its core, this project is interested in understanding digital feminist activist practices—from the experiences of organizing and participating in them, to how digitally mediated activism shapes offline activist practices. As an interdisciplinary research team who come from media, cultural studies, and education, we were simultaneously interested in analyzing activist practices that were large-scale, well organized, and/or highly visible within the public sphere and those practices that were more low profile, invisible, and/or hidden from public view. As a result, informed by varying disciplinary approaches, we drew together a range of methodological tools that form a unique "research assemblage" that operate as distinct yet connected case studies to capture a wide range of complex and nuanced practices among feminist activists (Ringrose and Renold 2014). In studying feminist activist practices, we aim to not only understand these as indicative of the ways in which digital technologies are increasingly used to document and challenge rape culture, but in which these everyday experiences are now mediated. As a result, we employ an "in situ" (Gray 2009) approach to studying media, whereby the object of study is not solely the media text itself, but "the processes and understandings of new media among people within the contexts of their use" (126–127). By adopting this methodological approach, and by drawing from a range of diverse methods and starting points, we are better able to map complex relationships between users' multiple media engagements and their social and cultural context, thus enabling us to better understand digital media from our participants' perspectives.

In this sense, while there has been a growth of scholarship examining *how* and *why* feminists are using digital media technologies to respond to sexism, misogyny, and rape culture (Keller 2015; Mendes 2015; Rentschler 2014; Thrift 2014), little is known about their *experiences* of such engagement (for exceptions see Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose 2018; Ringrose and Renold 2016a). This book fills this gap via the use of ethnographic methods, including close observation of online communities, surveys, and semi-structured interviews, in conjunction with qualitative content and thematic analysis, to better understand digital

feminist activist practices. Before explaining the rationale for our approach and talking about our use of methods, we will first outline the study's conceptual design.

A STUDY MAP

As many scholars will attest, the conceptualization and design of any given project is challenging. This was certainly the case for this research. Based on a 21-month study funded by Britain's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), we were interested in both "mapping" the diversity of contemporary feminist digital initiatives and understanding the experiences of those involved. To provide some context: when we began to conceptualize this project back in 2012, highly visible feminist campaigns such as SlutWalk and Hollaback! were grabbing national and international headlines, and going viral in the feminist blogosphere. At a time when feminism is clearly "having a moment" (Gill 2016, 611), the surge of digital feminist initiatives provided both an exciting opportunity to explore both the highly visible and hidden feminist campaigns, which we knew were taking place globally. Although as a research team we had expertise in studying media representations of feminist activism (Mendes 2011, 2015), and the experiences of small, unrepresentative groups of feminist leaders and activists (Keller 2012, 2015, 2016; Mendes 2015; Keller and Ringrose 2015; Ringrose and Renold 2012, 2014; 2016a), we were interested in combining our related, yet diverse expertise to produce a larger, complex, and more nuanced conceptualization of digital feminist activism than what we had thus far seen in existing research.

We chose a case-study approach because it provides scholars with a wide range of tools to study complex social phenomena (Baxter and Jack 2008). As an "in-depth multifaceted investigation," case study approaches use a range of tools to closely study a phenomenon, often drawing from multiple data sources and methods (Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg 1991). While case studies can be selected because they are representative of broader phenomena, they can also be chosen because they are unique, hidden, or under-researched (Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg 1991). A case study approach was thus ideal for this project because it enabled us to investigate multiple digital feminist campaigns, with varying levels of visibility, with different user-types, and using a range of data sets and methods as necessary. For example, while previous research has focused on feminist leaders or groups and those who consider themselves to be feminist activists (see Keller 2015; Mendes 2015), we were also interested in those who may have only occasionally participated in feminist digital activities, and who may not consider themselves or their actions "activist" in nature (Ringrose and Renold 2012, 2016a). We were also committed to capturing those who participated

in or organized high-profile campaigns, as well as including those whose work remained largely hidden or unnoticed.

Indeed, it is worth remembering that feminists have long been engaged in "quiet" forms of activism—activism that seeks cultural or ideological, rather than overtly political or economic changes (see Shaw 2012a; Maddison 2013). Women have, and continue to be, excluded from the traditional public sphere (Young 1997). With the rise of toxic masculinity and MRA rhetoric, women continue to be intimidated by men in both on and offline spaces, with the aggression leveled toward them leaving many feeling unsafe and vulnerable (see Ging 2017). As a coping strategy, many have turned to "quieter" types of activism to avoid drawing unwanted attention to themselves (Clark-Parsons 2017; Mendes 2015). This has historically included practices such as women-only consciousness-raising groups, diary-writing, zine writing, fiction, theater, craft circles, graffiti, culture jamming, and more recently, digital tools such as blogs, websites, and social media platforms. Via our connections with feminist groups in school settings, we were therefore also keen to include some of the "hidden" uses of social media by young people to call out sexism, including closed Facebook, WhatsApp, and iPhone groups and low-profile Twitter handles. These are prime examples of activist practices that we know to be prominent through our professional and personal networks, yet are challenging to access as researchers and have gone undocumented in existing literature.

In addition to including both the "hidden" and "highly visible" feminist campaigns, we purposefully selected those that made use of a range of digital platforms including blogs, bespoke websites, Tumblr, Facebook, and Twitter. While all our case studies originated in the US, Canada, or the UK, many reached beyond national borders, and solicited participation from women, girl, and men all around the world. As white, middle-class, cis-gendered women, we also deliberately sought out case studies that, at least on the surface, spoke about issues such as intersectionality, and privileged a wide range of voices and experiences. Nonetheless, we recognize that these six case studies are by no means fully representative of the rich and diverse range of feminist activism, particularly by women of color, LGBTQ+, and non-English speaking communities.[1] Furthermore, despite their public claims to intersectionality, we acknowledge criticisms of some of our chosen campaigns, such as Hollaback!, for in fact *reproducing* white feminist frameworks around street harassment (see Rentschler 2017). While aware that our sample omits key campaigns that center explicitly on Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) or LGBTQ+ identities, we argue that given restrictions in labor, time, linguistic skills, and money, these six case studies nonetheless present a useful starting point through which we can understand digital feminist practices and their affective dimensions. The six case studies selected for this project and their rationale can be seen in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 **List of Case Studies, Reason for Selection, and Methods Used**

Case Study	*Reason for Selection*	*Methods Used*
Hollaback!	Anti-street harassment project; selected because of its visibility in the mainstream media and feminist digital cultures. It also professes to have an intersectional understanding of street harassment	Semi-structured interviews; qualitative content analysis; textual analysis
Everyday Sexism	A website and hashtag where participants can anonymously share experiences of sexism; selected because of its visibility in the mainstream media and feminist digital cultures.	Semi-structured interviews; qualitative content analysis; textual analysis
Who Needs Feminism?	A Tumblr and Facebook site where people share images of signs explaining why feminism is still relevant; visibility in the mainstream media and feminist digital cultures, and because this project seemed particularly appealing to school age girls.	Semi-structured interviews; qualitative content analysis; textual analysis
Twitter anti-rape-hashtag #BeenRaped Never Reported	Selected because of their visibility in the mainstream media and feminist digital cultures.	Semi-structured interviews; online observations; qualitative content analysis; textual analysis
Everyday Twitter Feminist Communities	Rather than focusing on any particular campaign, we recruited self-defined feminists from Twitter. These used a range of digital platforms but primarily Twitter to challenge rape culture.	Survey; email interviews; in-depth Skype and face-to-face interviews; online observations; textual analysis
School-based Feminism Club	Young feminists challenging rape culture within institutionalized school contexts. Including girls from a school-based feminist club who operated a joint Twitter account, demonstrating online/offline experiences of rape culture.	Focus groups; Skype individual in-depth interviews; online observation; textual analysis

Although establishing the conceptual framework and rationale for this study was one challenge, figuring out how to approach our case studies was also difficult. As a result of the various nuances among our six case studies, their intricate differences, and the general "messiness" of studying digital cultures (Postill and Pink 2011), we necessarily adjusted our sample size, sampling techniques, and methods to maximize the data for each case study. Our multipronged approach left us with an abundance of highly rich data—thus, in addition to making important theoretical and methodological contributions, it also makes an important empirical contribution to our understanding of contemporary digital feminist activism.

Because of the methodologically pioneering nature of this work, we discuss our use of methods later in this chapter, but use each chapter to outline in greater detail how each case study was designed, and the research carried out. Our concluding chapter brings together insights gleaned along the way, so that future scholars can better understand how we might study digital media cultures that are often fluid, dispersed, and challenging to access as researchers.

A FEMINIST APPROACH TO RESEARCH

It is unsurprising, given the focus of this book, that the research was approached using feminist perspectives and methodologies. As Sue Curry Jansen (2002) suggests, gender shapes much of our life experience and should be a major consideration, not a variable if we are to understand "the multiple and multifaceted ways that gendered patterns of communication and gendered distribution of power are variously constructed and replicated by different social institutions and structures of knowledge" (37). According to Marjorie L. DeVault (1996) feminist research is that which incorporates or further develops feminism's insights. Our explicit focus on feminist resistances to sexism, harassment, misogyny, and rape culture align with this approach, and while we are excited by much of the activism we've studied, we remain committed to critical analysis of our chosen case studies.

It is of course important to recognize that both experiences of and resistances to rape culture are influenced by the intersectional nature of oppression, which operates along a number of axes including, but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and class (see Crenshaw 1991; hooks 1981; Loza 2014; McCall 2005). Although intersectional analyses have always been important, some have argued that in an age of Trump and Brexit, which prioritize exclusionary politics and policies, is more necessary than ever before (Gill 2017; Gökarıksel and Smith 2017). This is particularly true in light of continued criticisms surrounding the whitewashing of contemporary feminist protests, and the erasure of non-normative figures within media representations (see Boothroyd et al.

2017; McNicol 2015; Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood 2017). An intersectional analysis thus allows us to think about which feminist issues are (in)visible, and how rape culture manifests itself, is challenged, and experienced among different communities, while thinking about issues of embodiment in supposedly disembodied spaces.

As such, we add our voice to those who argue the need to conceive of digital spaces as *real* spaces and built environments, in which the "disadvantaging of particular groups is not incidental but the logical product of designing our online spaces for certain publics at the exclusion of others" (Harvey 2016, 1; Penney 2013; Warfield 2016). This study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that problematize simplistic binaries between "online" and "offline" life (see Clark-Parsons 2017; Jensen 2012; Rentschler 2017; Ringrose and Harvey 2017) and showcases the slippage of experience and affect between them.

Finally, feminist research has been distinguished for its promotion of a reflexive tone—a tone that forces researchers to place their own histories and experiences inside the cases they explore, the questions they ask, or the people they study. This reflexivity provides context to why the data is approached in a particular way, as well as sheds light on their analysis of subjects, or topics under study (Harding 1987). Because women's voices have historically been excluded from much scholarship, a key element of feminist scholarship is to find out more about women, and to give a fuller and more accurate account of society by including them, their experiences, and voices (DeVault 1996; Nielsen 1990). In this case, we are not simply interested in giving voice to women, but to *feminists,* regardless of gender. Indeed, ours is the first study to include some empirical evidence from self-defined male feminists, and the various challenges they encounter as they live feminist lives. Because of the complexity of our research design, and our desire to capture "multiple dimensions of social life" (McCall 2005, 1772), we have drawn from a range of interdisciplinary tools and approaches to capture the experiences, voices, perspectives, and representations of activists and activism, which we outline in following sections.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

The employment of ethnographic methods to explore social relations through Web 2.0 platforms and other new media technologies is a fast-developing field (boyd 2007), offering researchers the opportunity to "contextualise media engagements as part of a broader social terrain of experience" (Gray 2009, 14). Feminist researchers have long favored ethnography as a methodological approach that allows for active listening, relational knowledge, and reflexivity as a significant part of the research process (DeVault and Gross 2007; Rubin and Rubin 2005). As feminist researchers, we find this ability to understand media

use within a broader cultural and social context to be essential to understand feminist media activism's transformative potential—a key project goal.

One of the primary ways in which we employ ethnographic methods in this project is through our use of close observation of the feminist communities forming around each case study. This at times involves "liking" a feminist campaign on Facebook, following a particular Twitter handle or hashtag, or regularly "checking in" on a website to keep updated on new content. According to John Postill and Sarah Pink (2012, 130), following or liking is an important act because it "opens you directly to the sharing of others," and thus allows you to see how others interact with these accounts. These "entangled" processes (Postill and Pink 2012) are essential for researchers to immerse themselves into the cultures they are studying (Deacon et al. 1999), and we as researchers frequently shared and "archived" key events or initiatives via our own Digital Feminisms Facebook page and Twitter handle.

Semi-structured interviews have also been a preferred method for the growing body of research on girls and young women (see Currie, Kelly, and Pomeranz 2009; Keller 2012, 2015; Ringrose 2013; Taft 2011; Zaslow 2009). Feminist researchers have used semi-structured interviews as a means of privileging, defending, and promoting the voices of research participants (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2008), many of whom are traditionally marginalized due to age, gender, class, sexuality, occupation, race, and so forth (Keller 2015). Jessica Taft (2011) argues that ethnography provides more "detailed, textured, and complicated data that is lively and engaging [and] incorporates the voices of a group whose words and ideas are not quite what most readers expect, giving space for their own understandings and interpretations" (193). Consequently, we employed semi-structured interviews with 82 girls, women, and men to gain an understanding of how feminist organizers and participants felt about and conceptualized their participation in digital media initiatives. These perspectives are essential to analyze how participation in online feminist activism shapes the everyday experiences of the women and girls involved.

Although most interviews were conducted one-on-one, in our school-based research we conducted three group interviews with 16 research participants; alongside in-class observations of a London secondary-school feminist group. This aspect of our research is extremely salient since access to institutionalized spaces such as schools is difficult to secure, and only achieved by drawing upon our previous contacts with school leaders. Here we used digital methods such as scroll back on the participants' mobile phones to capture salient content in screen captures (Robards and Lincoln 2017). Chapters 5 and 7 also provide insights that were difficult to access as researchers, because we took an open approach to surveying self-defined feminist activists via Twitter, gaining research access to girls, women, and some men whose "everyday" feminist practices and

views may never be represented through news media or even high-profile feminist platforms.

In addition to our use of ethnographic methods, we also employed qualitative content and thematic analysis on a discreet sample of digital data for four of the digital feminist campaigns (Hollaback!, Everyday Sexism, #BeenRapedNeverReported, and Who Needs Feminism?). This was done to provide insight to our first research question: What experiences of harassment, misogyny, and rape culture are girls and women responding to in digital spaces?

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

As a popular quantitative tool within (feminist) media studies, content analysis is often employed to analyze large amounts of data, its meanings, symbolic qualities, and content (Deacon et al. 1999; Krippendorff 2004). Content analysis also establishes a procedure to find what is relatively constant and what might change over time, which can provide important insight into key features, discursive and thematic patterns, problems, and solutions in online activist practices. Because all content has been subjected to the same explicitly defined criteria, content analysis ensures a degree of reliability in establishing media patterns and representations (Deacon et al. 1999). As a widely used tool, content analysis can be quantitative or qualitative in nature.

Quantitative content analysis generally involves statistical analyses of the data using complex models and measures. Qualitative content analysis on the other hand still involves coding data but does not undergo rigorous statistical analysis (Bhattacherjee 2012). Instead, qualitative content analysis is interested in presenting simple frequencies on aspects such as themes, frames, discourses, tone, and so forth, which are used to complement and provide a frame of reference for other forms of textual analysis, such as thematic analysis. Unlike some recent studies (see Papacharissi 2015), this project does not adopt a "big data" approach—instead, we have drawn a relatively smaller sample size to enable more qualitative analysis of data. In total, we analyzed over 800 pieces of digital content including tweets, Facebook posts, blogs, Tumblr posts, and other submissions to digital feminist campaigns. In most cases, we used various random sampling strategies to collect this data, while in other cases, we asked research participants to purposively select highly rich media texts to highlight both the everyday and extraordinary accounts of their activism. While we are hesitant to make generalized claims from our data, it nonetheless provides us with some understanding of emerging trends and practices in relation to the types of experiences shared in digital spaces.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a popular method used across a range of disciplines, which seeks to identify and analyze patterns of meaning in data (see Braun and Clark 2006; Joffe 2012). Historically, thematic analysis emerged from other textual methods such as content analysis, which also seeks to establish categories in texts (Joffe 2012). However, unlike content analysis, which only analyzes what is manifest in the content, thematic analysis was developed to identify *latent* content. As a result, it is a useful method for analyzing the affective and symbolic meaning in data (Joffe 2012, 210). Thematic analysis is also a good fit for this project because it can be applied across data sets, including textual artifacts and interview transcripts. Within this study, all data, including digital artifacts, open-ended survey responses, and semi-structured interviews, were analyzed using thematic analysis.

While digital feminist activism has been a popular topic to study over the past several years, there has been little scholarship that has critically interrogated the difficulty in studying such practices. We have highlighted some of these challenges here, while offering a unique multifaceted theoretical and methodological approach that aims to meet these challenges in order to capture the diverse, ephemeral, and affective practices of doing digital feminist activism. In this sense, we contribute to a growing body of scholarship concerned with feminist digital methodologies (Bivens et al. 2016, 2017) in addition to providing key empirical data about how girls and women are engaging with practices of digital feminist activism in twenty-first century media culture.