

DOING IT OURSELVES: THE NETWORKED PRACTICES OF FEMINIST MEDIA ACTIVISM

Rosemary Clark-Parsons

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Supervisor of Dissertation

Guobin Yang, Grace Lee Boggs Professor of Communication and Sociology

Graduate Group Chairperson

Guobin Yang, Grace Lee Boggs Professor of Communication and Sociology

Dissertation Committee

Jessa Lingel, Assistant Professor of Communication

Victor Pickard, Associate Professor of Communication

Sarah Banet-Weiser, Vice Dean, Director of the School of Communication and Professor of

Communication, University of Southern California

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ACTIVISM

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*For Alice, Josephine, Emanuela, Theresa, Clara, and
our Robyn,
who every day give me hope for a more feminist future*

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When I began considering the kernel of an idea that would grow into this dissertation project in the fall of 2013, my first semester in graduate school, well-intentioned faculty and colleagues questioned whether feminism was a relevant or timely topic. Later that year, I watched, at times in disbelief, as Beyoncé put the word “FEMINIST” in lights on the Video Music Awards stage, as viral feminist hashtags burst on to the scene, and as “femvertising” became the cutting edge of commercial marketing. In five short years, so much has changed across the political and cultural landscape of the United States. Chief among these changes has been the popular embrace of feminist ideas and rhetoric, even as our political institutions actively work to undo feminist policy gains and forestall feminist futures. Today, while we regularly brace ourselves for the relentless deluge of bad news for civil rights under the Trump administration, it is at the same time nearly impossible to go a week without hearing the word “feminism” mentioned in a mainstream news outlet or hashtagged on a social media platform.

This project emerged from my own desire as an activist to make sense of what this often confusing moment might mean for feminists and gender justice movements. But it would not have grown from a kernel into a dissertation if it had not been for the feminist activists in Philadelphia, who so generously gave me the opportunity to work alongside them and tell their stories, or for the long list of people who believed, tirelessly, in me and in this project from the very start.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my five smart, hilarious, and brave nieces – Alice, Josephine, Emanuela, Theresa, and Clara – and to our own daughter, Robyn, whose arrival we anxiously await at the time of this writing. Whenever I lose hope or energy, I think of the six of you and keep pressing forward. My wish for you girls is that you will find your passion and pursue it, even when it's hard, even when the future is uncertain, and even when others say you can't do it. I hope some day that the activists whose stories I tell here inspire you to fight for what is right and to be yourself, even in the face of adversity.

ABSTRACT

DOING IT OURSELVES:

THE NETWORKED PRACTICES OF FEMINIST MEDIA ACTIVISM

Rosemary Clark-Parsons

Guobin Yang

Feminist organizing in the United States is undergoing a paradigm shift. Whereas 1960s-era feminism unfolded through the in-person activities of formal organizations, today, feminist movements are mediated and *networked*. Contemporary feminism manifests as hashtags, blogs, print zines, digitally coordinated protests, online communities, and more. Case studies of recent movements suggest that, for feminists, to be networked is to be both politically empowered *and* politically vulnerable. At the same time that emerging media platforms enable activists to quickly reach wide audiences at little or no expense, networked movements face online harassment, commercial cooptation, and activist burnout. This qualitative study examines how feminists are navigating the double-edged nature of networked activism. In particular, I demonstrate how feminists are drawing on networked media to organize resistance, mobilize protests, and cultivate communities, all while juggling the affordances and limitations of their media tools. Data for this study come from an ethnographic analysis of grassroots feminist media activism in the city of Philadelphia, textual analyses of national and transnational feminist media campaigns, and interviews with and archived reflections from activists. Through this data, I argue that feminists' negotiations among media platforms, the political context, and their intersectional values produce a particular activist praxis. I call this praxis *do-it-ourselves (DIO) feminism*, an organizing paradigm

that draws on networked media to build feminist movements from the ground up that reflect feminist values and meet the challenges of the current climate. Faced with an electoral system and a history of collective organizing that has failed to address intersecting systems of oppression, DIO feminists do not rely on existing political institutions. Instead, they draw on networked media to create their own communities, discourses, and protests, cutting out the middlemen of political leaders, organizations, parties, and policy-makers and integrating protest into everyday life. Feminists' turn toward diffuse, decentralized media networks and away from formal organizations raises questions about movement accessibility, sustainability, backlash, impact, and cooptation. But the do-it-ourselves praxis is a distinctly feminist form of networked activism that models new possibilities for what collective action and social transformation can look like in the networked era.

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CHAPTER 1 – Introduction: Hope for a Feminist Future

Throughout the first year of Donald Trump’s presidency, journalists and commentators across the United States declared 2017 “The Year of Women.” Despite the “textbook sexism” (Ghitis, 2017) that riddled his campaign rhetoric, the rise and fall of the first woman presidential candidate nominated by a major party, and the election of what feminist icon Madeline Albright has described as “the most undemocratic president in modern American history” (Ehrlich, 2018), when January brought with it both a new year and Trump’s inauguration, editorials promised that women would command the social and political landscape in the months to come. A contributor for *The Huffington Post*, for example, confidently explained “Why 2017 Will Be The Year Of Women,” assuring her readers in March that “While recent events are a constant reminder of the challenges facing women in today’s world, I am more convinced than ever that 2017 will be our year” (Jain, 2017). Citing the Women’s March on Washington and the worldwide protests it inspired, the feminist “reckoning” (Valenti, 2017) brought on by the #MeToo movement against sexual violence, and record numbers of women running for office, year-in-review headlines published in December implied that these earlier prognostications had been correct: “2017: The Unexpected (and Inspiring) Year of Women” (Dvorak, 2017); “The Year of Women, in Policy and Politics” (Epstein, 2017); “A Timeline of the Year of Women” (Boston Globe, 2018); “Did You Hear Her Roar? 2017 was Unquestionably the Year of the Woman” (Shamus, 2017). One piece published in *Vox* argued that a relationship existed between women’s improbable ascendance and a recent surge in women-centric film and television narratives within U.S. media culture:

“2017 was the year of women’s anger, onscreen and off” (Grady, 2017). The pattern would continue into the future. A year-end piece published on *CNN*’s website guaranteed that “2018 Will be the Year of Women” (Schnall, 2017), while a cover story for *Politico* looked farther into the unknown, eyeing the next presidential election: “Why 2020 Will be the Year of the Woman” (Scher, 2017). This brash of trend stories indicates that women are having a “moment,” in the streets, online, on television, and in politics, in spite of the odds they face.

And the odds are undeniably against women. The same news outlets that have heralded “The Year of Women” have made it clear that, under President Trump, women and all other marginalized groups, including people of color, immigrants, LGBTQIA+ people, Muslims, people with disabilities, and laborers, are under attack.

Within hours of being signed in as President of the United States, Trump began dismantling Affordable Care Act, President Barrack Obama’s signature legislation which aimed to make healthcare accessible and affordable to all, even those with preexisting conditions (Luhby, 2018). Later, Trump halted Obama’s Equal Pay Rule, ending the requirement that large companies report how much they pay workers by race and gender (Khim, 2017) and proposed budget cuts to the National Domestic Violence Hotline and programs under the Violence Against Women Act (Planned Parenthood Action Fund, 2017). In his first month in office, Trump revived a Reagan-era “global gag rule,” blocking foreign nongovernmental organizations that receive U.S. family planning aid from providing abortion services or information about abortion to their patients (Wilson, 2018). In May of 2018, the Trump administration enacted a similar “domestic gag rule,” prohibiting federally funded reproductive clinics, such as Planned Parenthood, from

providing information about abortion or sharing office space with abortion providers (Siddiqui, 2018). That summer, the U.S. government, under Trump's orders, began separating families seeking asylum by crossing the border illegally, even going so far as to remove nursing infants from their mothers (Kirby, 2018). Meanwhile, the Supreme Court, weighted toward conservative opinions thanks to the Trump-appointed Justice Neil Gorsuch, voted to allow pro-life "crisis pregnancy centers" to masquerade as abortion clinics (Liptak, 2018), to uphold the president's travel ban on Muslims (Liptak & Shear, 2018), and to end the practice of mandatory union dues, delivering a sharp blow to organized labor in the process. With Justice Anthony Kennedy's impending retirement — itself a carefully plotted Trump administration victory — the court is now positioned to destroy the 1973 landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion (Litman, 2018). And this is just a sampling of this administration's ongoing systematic rollback of civil rights and socially just legislation.

How could 2017, 2018, or even 2020 be "The Year of Women" against this backdrop of institutionalized white male supremacy? Why can commentators envision a feminist future, precisely at a moment when women's futures, especially the futures of women of color and working class women, seem so bleak? What could explain this contradiction?

In spite of everything, there remains reason to hope because feminist activists have been, over the course of the past several decades, drawing on a diverse repertoire of media tactics to reinvigorate feminist politics and organizing for the twenty-first century. At precisely the same time that their values and hard-won legislative victories have been under attack, U.S. feminist movements have also been undergoing a revitalization,

spearheaded by media-savvy activists. This revitalization project stemmed first from the punk paper *zines* of the 1980s and 1990s before blossoming into the early feminist blogosphere and, later, the viral networks of digitally mobilized protest actions like the global Women’s Marches and “hashtag feminism” campaigns like #MeToo. The country has been witnessing the steady growth of what some have referred to as feminism’s “fourth wave” (e.g., Munro, 2013; Schulte, 2011; Solomon, 2009), riffing on the oceanic metaphor long used to periodize U.S. feminisms’ ebbs and flows.¹ But while this “wave” has descended from the tides and currents of previous generations, a key feature distinguishes this cohort from its antecedents. At their peaks, an array of formal organizations and grassroots collectives with clear leaders alongside a number of distinct voices and luminaries structured the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and the third-wave feminism of the 1980s (Reger, 2012). Today, however, U.S. feminist movements revolve around *media* and the everyday makers, users, and consumers behind them.

This new mode of activism can be understood as *networked feminism*, a feminist protest paradigm that replaces the leaders, finances, and people power of formal, big-name organizations with a variety of media practices, digital and otherwise. Here, “networked” refers to the communicative media these feminists draw on, from the production and circulation of alternative print media to the participatory web of social media platforms. As Beth Coleman (2011) argues, “networked” also captures both the

¹ Feminist activists and academics have used the wave metaphor to chronicle the history of U.S. feminist movements since the 1960s, with the fight for suffrage labeled as the first, the 1960s women’s liberation movement as the second, and the contemporary generation as the third or even the fourth wave. Scholars have argued that the metaphor flattens the multiple trajectories of women’s rights activism, whose many histories have unfolded simultaneously in communities across the country. See Hewitt (2012) for more on the history and debates surrounding the wave metaphor.

technological affordances — the ability to communicate and receive messages through a distributed transmission system — and social affordances — the ability to experience a sense of connection with others across time and space — of feminists’ media tools. Both sets of affordances combine to enable new social formations and practices. And, following Jessa Lingel’s (2017a) unpacking of the term, I use “networked” to refer to a “sociotechnical assemblage” (p. 15) of people, their technologies, and their technological practices that includes digitally mediated arenas while also extending well beyond them to encompass print media, in-person communal spaces, and face-to-face meetings and actions. Through this assemblage of platforms, affordances, sites, and practices, networked feminists have mobilized global protest actions against the current administration, inspired viral conversations about sexual violence (Rodino-Colocino, 2014), initiated boycotts against sexist media representations (Clark, 2014), and more, all without the resources of formally structured organizations. Previous generations struggled to shoulder their way into the spotlight of commercial media attention (Steiner, 1992). But through the highly public nature of social media platforms, networked feminist campaigns gain visibility quickly, their political dissent converging with news and entertainment media outlets and spilling over onto the popular culture stage (Banet-Weiser, 2015b). The result has been the rise of an undeniably *feminist* media culture, one that has jumped from the closed-doors meetings of Women’s Liberation groups and the countercultural margins of alternative press publications and into the mainstream. With feminism in the streets and on our screens, hope for feminist futures feels plausible, even under the Trump administration.

Feminists' turn away from formally structured organizations and toward media reflects the broader digital reconfiguration of social and political life. Like the communication technologies that preceded it, the internet has transformed the public sphere, from the macrosocial systems of state politics, global economies, and civil society to the microsocial interactions among family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 1996; boyd, 2007; Friedland, Hove, & Rojas, 2006; Tufekci, 2017). Digital networks, rather than formal and informal associations, organizations, and institutions, are increasingly becoming the organizing principle and building blocks of society (Castells, 1996; Friedland, Hove, & Rojas, 2006). The twenty-first-century public sphere is, as Zeynep Tufekci (2017) puts it, a *networked public sphere*, a “complex interaction of publics, online and offline, all intertwined, multiple, connected and complex, but also transnational and global” (p. 6). At the same time that digital networks are altering the technical means through which we communicate within the public sphere, they are also recasting our social sense of connection and community in network terms, and with it, the “logic of how and where we can interact; with whom, and at what scale and visibility” (Tufekci, 2017, p. 11). This networked “logic” extends well beyond digital platforms to permeate life “offline,” as the internet becomes more and more embedded in everyday experiences of the world (Hine, 2015; Lingel, 2017a).

Social movements, as both publics in their own right and collective attempts to intervene on the public sphere, take on new forms, tactics, and trajectories within the networked public sphere (Tufekci, 2017). Across the political spectrum, the networked logic of the digital age is changing how movements mobilize and whom they reach. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012) describe the digital reconfiguration of

activism as the shift from *collective* to *connective* action. Whereas “the logic of collective action” involves strong organizational coordination of actions and messages, “the logic of connective action” involves little or no organizational coordination. Within the logic of connective action, *networked activism* becomes the tactic of choice and communication networks become key organizing structures, with diffuse assemblages of digital media users and outlets taking on roles comparable to activist leaders and organizations.

Responding to this shift, researchers working at the intersections of both media and movements and media and gender have studied the relationships among digital platforms’ features, the U.S. political context, and activists’ political goals to debate the efficacy of networked activism. Networked activism can be found across a variety of social movements and activist campaigns. But as existing scholarship demonstrates, the digital reconfiguration of protest and the public sphere presents particular opportunities and challenges for feminists.

On the one hand, research in both areas suggests that digital platforms reduce barriers to entry, making it easier not only for diverse constituents to participate in an activist campaign, but to play a meaningful role in shaping its core message and tactics. Social movement scholars have demonstrated the role digital networks play in informing activists of the logistics of protest (Gerbaudo, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012), sharing collective feelings of outrage and hope (Castells, 2015), decentralizing movement leadership (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; González-Bailón, 2014), and decreasing the costs of organizing and joining a movement (Earl & Kimport, 2011). Importantly for contemporary feminist activists, whose guiding normative framework is *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), feminist media studies scholars have argued that networked

activism enables more inclusive feminist spaces, where activists can collectively develop feminist identities, actions, theories, and histories (Keller, 2016; Mendes, 2014; Rentschler & Thrift, 2015; Brown, Ray, Summers, & Fraistat, 2017; Daniels, 2016; Kendall, 2013; Kuo, 2016; Loza, 2014; Rodino-Colocino, 2014; Tynes, Schuschke, & Noble, 2016). In these spaces, feminists share and identify linkages between personal experiences of injustice, updating the 1960s-era feminist slogan, “the personal is political,” for the digital age. But unlike the most prominent organizations of 1960s feminism, which were often dominated by white college-educated women, social media platforms offer new opportunities for activists standing at the intersection of multiple, overlapping oppressions to build coalitions, deconstruct interlocking systems of power, and critique exclusionary activist practices (Noble & Tynes, 2016). Digital media platforms, in other words, are easily adapted to contemporary feminists’ political goals and values, offering new spaces for political engagement at a time when marginalized communities are increasingly disillusioned with traditional political institutions and channels (Baer, 2016; Tufekci, 2017). When successful, the networked diffusion of activist campaigns through social media platforms pushes these diverse voices into the mainstream media spotlight, where they have the potential to significantly alter the discourses surrounding and, in turn, the responses to social justice issues (Shaw, 2013; Young, 1997). After several decades of repression (Faludi, 1991; Gill, 2016; McRobbie, 2004), feminist activists’ media savvy has even ushered in what some commentators call an era of “popular feminism” (Banet-Weiser, 2015b; Zeisler, 2016). Feminist ideas, rhetoric, and figures, once restricted to alternative circles, have suffused popular culture

and mainstream media, garnering an unprecedented degree of visibility for feminism in the U.S.

But while digital media users have increased movements' accessibility, diversity, and visibility, feminist media studies scholars argue that networked activism has simultaneously left feminists vulnerable to backlash. Social media may have given feminist activism a more prominent national profile, but they have also provided an outlet for what Sarah Banet-Weiser and Kate Miltner (2016) call "networked misogyny," a highly visible form of white male supremacy that works to block marginalized groups' participation in political discourse through online harassment. In the current political context, where neoliberal ideology has taken on hegemonic status, theorists of postfeminism argue that feminism's networked hypervisibility also leaves feminist politics open to cooptation. As feminist rhetoric and ideas become "popular" and circulate through commercial media, activist messages of empowerment are often repackaged to support marketplace values of individualism, choice, and consumption, rather than collective politics (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017). This commodified form of popular feminism "turns the idea of the personal-as-political on its head" (Gill, 2007, p. 153) and reduces the political to the personal. In turn, critics have also questioned whether feminists' shift toward networked activism and away from more traditionally organized collective action punctuated by leaders with well-defined platforms has come at the cost of achieving long-term institutional change (Banet-Weiser, 2015a; Fraser, 2013). Feminism's "new luminosity" (Gill, 2016, p. 614) in U.S. media culture has done little, for example, to forestall the anti-feminist backlash made manifest in the Trump administration's policy efforts. Further, as critical scholarship on networked

activism demonstrates, activists must navigate the structural constraints of corporately owned social media platforms, which raise concerns about surveillance, accessibility, and censorship (Youmans & York, 2012). And while digital networks enable movements to mobilize more quickly than ever before, activists are at times left without the collective solidarities, leadership structures, decision-making capabilities, and capacities for tactical innovation necessary for sustained struggle (Tufekci, 2017).

Taken together, these bodies of scholarship suggest that for feminists, to be networked is to be *both* politically empowered — to have access to a potentially global audience through new, low-cost, digital modes of protest without the limitations of traditional political institutions — *and* politically vulnerable — to be subjected to violent harassment, neoliberal cooptation, and activist burnout without the capacities or support of a traditionally organized movement. The contradictory confluence of “The Year of Women” and Trump’s first years in office is tied up with the double-edged nature of networked feminism. Paradoxically, digital networks are, to borrow Angela McRobbie’s (2004) phrase from her study of early-millennium feminist media cultures, *doubly entangled* in the rejuvenation *and* suppression of feminist politics.

Little research, however, addresses how feminist activists navigate this paradox. While existing scholarship offers critical analyses of the *structures* of political opportunities and constraints surrounding networked feminist activism, it tells us little about the perspectives, experiences, and *agency* of actual activist practitioners. Their voices are often missing from both popular press declarations of the dawning of women’s “time” and academic studies of the assemblages of activists and media technologies that have ushered in this moment. If 2018, 2019, 2020, or any year is to be the “Year of

Women,” we need a better understanding of how feminist activists are navigating this contradictory political context and complex media landscape. How are feminists using media to craft an activist praxis that reflects their intersectional values *and* responds to the challenges of today’s political context? What strategies do they use to navigate the double entanglements of networked activism? How does this generation of feminist activists imagine the role networked media play in political liberation? And finally, what are the implications of feminists’ media practices and politics for the face and reach of contemporary feminism in particular, and social movements more generally?

This study approaches media not as merely texts or tools, but as *practices*, and in the process, centers feminist activist-practitioners — their voices, actions, and perspectives — to address these questions through a mixed-methods qualitative analysis of contemporary U.S. feminists’ media tactics. In particular, I examine how feminists are drawing on networked media to reconfigure their methods for organizing collective resistance, performing protest actions, and building safe communities, such that their activist work, in process and product, both reflects their values and meets the demands of the current context, all while juggling the affordances and limitations of their media tools. On a pragmatic level, honing in on U.S. feminist activism narrows down a global plurality of movements with varied political philosophies, histories, and tactics to collective action and discourse within a particular geographic region. It also allows me, as a feminist academic living and working in the U.S., to more easily tap into feminist networks and observe and talk with feminist activist-practitioners. At the same time, the geographic boundaries on this study also bring into view a wide range of different practices across a variegated political spectrum, from liberal feminist critiques to more

radical feminist calls for social transformation. Moreover, U.S. feminists have been key pioneers in the global practice of networked feminism; they were among the first to use blogs as vehicles for fostering internal dialogue and mobilizing street protests (Everett, 2004). Through the Western domination of global media flows, their voices and actions have often, for better or worse, risen to prominence as models for activists organizing in other national contexts. Existing scholarship has produced a detailed record of individual case studies of networked feminism. With U.S. feminist media activism as my focus, my goal is to develop a theoretical framework that illuminates connections and similarities across individual cases and creates opportunities to reflect on best practices in feminists' ongoing struggle for social justice.

Data for this study come from a multi-sited ethnographic analysis of localized feminist media activism in the city of Philadelphia, textual analyses of national and transnational feminist media campaigns, and in-depth interviews with and archived reflections from activists who participate at both levels of networked feminism. In all, there are six case studies at the heart of this project: 1) the 2017 Women's March on Washington, which inspired a global wave of protests on Trump's Inauguration Day; 2) Philadelphia's annual March to End Rape Culture, the city's local chapter of the international SlutWalk movement; 3) the #MeToo campaign, which went viral toward the end of 2017; 4) Girl Army, a Philly-based feminist Facebook group; 5) the U.S. feminist zine community, a nationally dispersed network of print media-makers; and 6) Permanent Wave Philly, a grassroots feminist music and arts collective. Together, they represent a set of what Lingel (2017a) calls *networked field studies*, linked not only "by a shared interest in addressing a particular set of questions" (Lingel, 2017a, p. 13), but through

participant overlap. Practitioners in each field site participate or have participated in *at least* one of the other five field sites; for example, the organizers behind Philly's March to End Rape Culture participated in the city's local Women's March, used the march's social media accounts to amplify the #MeToo campaign, connect with other area feminists through Girl Army, create zines, and have attended or even helped organize Permanent Wave events. My study of feminist activism began with the march and I, in the spirit of anthropologist George Marcus' (1995) take on multi-sited ethnography, "followed the people" (p. 106) from one site to the next, mapping a web of networked feminist practices that scale up from the hyperlocal to the global. While I do not claim to offer a representative or generalizable view of all U.S. feminist media, this multi-sited approach offers a detailed and situated account of a variety of practices that, as evidenced by the overlap in my field studies, are central to the networked feminist repertoire.

Through this data, I argue that feminists' negotiations among digital media platforms, the political context, and their intersectional values produce a particular activist *praxis*, or embodied relationship between their political goals and political actions. I call this praxis *do-it-ourselves feminism*, an organizing paradigm that draws on networked media to build feminist politics, actions, and spaces from the ground up that reflect feminist values and meet the challenges of the current climate.

While networked feminist campaigns vary in form and content, from hashtags and zines to street protests and communities, they share a do-it-yourself ethos, a common orientation toward crafting new solutions regardless of activists' level of experience or available assets. But unlike traditional *do-it-yourself* projects, *do-it-ourselves feminism* is not an individualistic or self-serving endeavor (Dawkins, 2011; Lee, 2014; Luvaas,

2012). By contrast, while campaigns may sometimes start with the actions of one person, DIOF is a fundamentally *collective* endeavor, that grows *not* through the aspirations and enterprising of a single leader, but through the energy and solidarity of a group. Its practitioners possess a rebellious spirit that thrives on the type of cooperative creativity that emerges when either collective outrage, a collective need, or both combine with a collective commitment to change, limited access to organizational resources, and a certain degree of networked media know-how. Faced with an electoral system and a history of collective organizing that has failed to address intersecting systems of oppression, DIO feminists do not rely on existing political structures or institutions; instead, they draw on networked media to build their own communities, discourses, and protests, cutting out the middlemen of political leaders, organizations, parties, and policy-makers and integrating protest into everyday life.

Over time, feminist activists have exercised and sharpened this praxis to build a reflexive organizational logic that prioritizes the validation of everyday experiences of injustice and prefigures the intersectional values of difference and inclusion. The do-it-ourselves organizational logic can be found at work in networked feminist protest actions that, like the Women's March, the March to End Rape Culture, and the #MeToo campaign, enable the open expression of personal narratives, unfiltered by the purview of any one movement leader or institutional gatekeeper. Its self-starting nature also characterizes networked feminist communities like Girl Army, the feminist zine scene, and Permanent Wave, whose members come together online and off to build safe spaces that center otherwise marginalized voices. As is the case with other networked activist movements, DIO feminists' turn toward diffuse, decentralized media networks and away

from formal organizations does raise questions about movement accessibility, sustainability, backlash, impact, and cooptation. But the do-it-ourselves praxis is a distinctly feminist form of networked activism that models new possibilities for what political activism and social transformation look like in the networked era.

Literature Review

Scholarly approaches for theorizing the liberatory potential and political dynamics of networked feminism have shifted over time.

Early cyberfeminist thought, inspired by Donna Haraway's (1985) writing on the subversive potential of a cyborg future, took on a utopian view of the internet as a space where women could leave gender and the body behind. In her 1997 book *Zeroes + Ones*, Sadie Plant, the leading figure in the popularization of cyberfeminism within and beyond the academy, argues that the textual, multiprocessing world of cyberspace lends itself to "the female" (p. 23), who is inherently more expressive and a better multitasker than the male. These conditions would, Plant conjectured, bring about a revolution, in which the yonic, nonlinear zeroes of the binary code behind basic programming language would displace the phallic, linear ones, pushing toward a digital future characterized by an equal distribution of power and resources. Plant's writing radically reconfigures dominant conceptualizations of technology as inherently masculine (Wajcman, 2004). Her work and the work of her early cyberfeminist peers, however, has been rightly critiqued for not only reifying essentialist notions of gender, but also for ignoring the ways in which gendered body politics and their intersections with race and other axes of identity are reinscribed online (Daniels, 2009). The unbridled techno-optimism behind less radical cyberfeminist approaches quickly fell out of favor when compared with the reality of early cases of online harassment, websites enforcing traditional gender roles, and the

exploitation of computer manufacturing plant workers in developing nations (Daniels, 2009).

A more critical and intersectional approach to studying networked feminism grew out of this critique. Scholars began focusing on how, contrary to the notion of leaving the body behind, feminist activists were using media, digital and otherwise, as key spaces for deconstructing and contesting body politics. This entailed a shift away from essentializing notions of gender and gender-based oppression and toward a more diffuse, everyday, highly contextual conceptualizations of power and resistance. Scholars engaged in this turn retained U.S. feminists' historical emphasis on *the personal as political* while also adopting an intersectional analysis of how systems of power overlap to produce particular subjective and material experiences of the world. This more recent wave of scholarship on networked feminism has centered *discourse* as a primary concern for the field. Drawing on Foucault's (1991) theorization of discursive power, a growing body of research has highlighted the ways in which feminist activists use media to deconstruct and challenge the taken-for-granted norms that govern everyday life, normalize oppressive experiences, and privilege some voices while marginalizing others. Their research reflects U.S. feminism's historical emphasis on discursive activism (Young, 1997), outlined in the Introduction, while also pointing to the especially high degree of mediation that sets this generation of feminist activism apart from previous ones.

Above all else, scholars frame self-produced, alternative, feminist media, from the zine scenes of the 1980s to today's burgeoning world of online feminism, as tactics for challenging hegemonic discourses about gender and sexuality, especially those

promulgated through commercial media representations. Piepmeier (2009) and Zobl (2009) describe feminist zinesters' practice of cutting and pasting images from commercial print media to critique them and offer alternatives as a vital form of countercultural production. In recent years, Twitter hashtags have been especially central to feminist media critique; feminists have initiated hashtag campaigns to intervene on degrading or oppressive representations of gender and sexuality in advertisements (Clark, 2014), news media (Meyer, 2014), and the entertainment industry (Horeck, 2014). Hashtag feminists have been especially effective in debunking the victim-blaming myths that characterize news coverage of sexual assault and domestic violence (Clark, 2016; Rentschler, 2015; Rodino-Colocino, 2014; Thrift, 2014) as in the case of #WhyIStayed, and in challenging stereotypical or offensive representations in advertisements, as in the case of #NotBuyingIt (Clark, 2014).

Scholars also describe feminist media as giving voice to the voiceless and making visible oppressive, everyday experiences normalized into invisibility. Licona (2005), for example, argues that feminist zines open up productive third spaces for authors who fall outside the boundaries of white, heterosexual masculinity and who, consequently, might not otherwise have access to or find representation in media outlets. Visibility and recognition also play key political roles in Carrie Rentschler's (2014) theory of digital feminist tactics, like hashtag feminism, feminist blogging, and the anti-street harassment mobile app Hollaback, as "feminist networks of response-ability to rape culture" (p. 68), which cultivate the capacity for collective responses to individual experiences of sexual violence. Baer (2015) highlights a similar dynamic through her case study of #YesAllWomen; hashtag feminism and other digital feminist tactics, she argues, are most

effective when they articulate “body politics experienced in a local context” at a “translocal and transnational” level (p. 18).

As outlets for free expression, feminist media are critical spaces for developing feminist identities, politics, theories, and histories. Piepmeier (2009), Chidgey, Payne and Zobl (2009), Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004), among others highlight the ways in which zines offer open and accessible spaces for the negotiation of complex feminist identities that allow for wide-ranging expressions of gender. The democratic exchange and, more recently, the diligent efforts to archive these feminist ephemera have created a vibrant, rhizomatic record of feminist history grounded in the work of grassroots activists and makers, whose extra-institutional voices are typically underprivileged within dominant discourse (Chidgey, 2013; Eichhorn, 2014). Feminist media have also functioned as key spaces for confronting tensions within feminist movements. Catherine Steele (2016) argues that blogs offer black feminists outlets to “talk back” to not only the systems of power that marginalize people of color, but to feminist and anti-racist activist communities that have historically excluded black women’s voices and concerns. Susana Loza (2014) makes a similar argument in her analysis of the 2013 hashtag campaign, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, as a watershed moment for reflecting on who is and is not included in U.S. feminism.

Lastly, scholars have documented how the discursive webs of networked feminism lay the groundwork for new feminist social formations and communities. Harris (2003), for example, argues that the exchange of zines, often for free, barter, or trade, forges communal bonds that encourage the collective formation of critical feminist subjectivities. Others have highlighted similar social processes unfolding online. Keller

(2016), in her ethnographic study of girl feminist bloggers, explores how blogs function as a “discursive space” (p. 14) where young women develop feminist identities and alternative feminist histories through personal reflections and interactions with one another, forming “networked counterpublics” (p. 80). According to Kaitlyn Mendes (2015), the networked counterpublics of the feminist blogosphere were crucial for sparking SlutWalk, a global street protest movement that began in 2011; these same networks later became critical spaces for feminists to debate the movement’s tactics and messages. Carrie Rentschler and Samantha Thrift (2015) argued that “networked community building” (p. 330) has also unfolded through the viral spread of feminist memes, like the 2012 Mitt Romney-inspired “Binders Full of Women” meme; by constructing and circulating memes, feminists not only engage in collective acts of political critique, they also foster communal ties through shared humor that cut across differences. Importantly, point to their open, low-cost, participatory nature, feminist media studies scholars have also described these networked communities as key spaces for launching intersectional analyses of social issues and critiques of feminist movements and communities (Brown, Ray, Summers, & Fraistat, 2017; Daniels, 2016; Kendall, 2013; Kuo, 2016; Loza, 2014; Rodino-Colocino, 2014; Tynes, Schuschke, & Noble, 2016).

Much scholarship on networked feminism retains at least some of Sadie Plant’s (1997) original optimism about the potential of emerging media as discursive outlets for women and other marginalized communities, celebrating the possibilities new platforms offer activists. Even so, some have voiced concerns and critiques about networked feminism’s shortcomings. At the same time that social media are opening up new

platforms for feminist discourse, they have also become hotbeds for targeted harassment against marginalized groups, a tactic scholars have described as a “silencing practice” (Shaw, 2013, p. 94). Others have argued that networked feminism’s emphasis on discourse, personal expressions, and everyday life may distract from the need for institutional reforms (Banet-Weiser, 2015a). Also up for questioning is feminist activists’ choice to use corporately owned platforms altogether. While new media provide feminists with important tools for theory-building and community-organizing, services like Facebook and Twitter financially benefit from activists’ labor and volunteering of their personal data, a relationship of capitalist exchange that contradicts feminist politics.

While this review is certainly not exhaustive, it highlights six key goals scholars consistently identify as motivating contemporary feminists’ orientation toward media: critiquing dominant discourse, promoting free expression, making oppression visible, negotiating feminist principles, fostering collective solidarity, and navigating the strengths and limitations of particular feminist tactics. These are longstanding priorities for U.S. feminism. As Michelle Rodino-Colocino (2014) argues, while some forms of contemporary feminist media activism are new, their content shares common “mobilizing threads” (p. 1114) that bridge generational “waves.” Today’s feminist media activism descends from a long tradition of feminist struggles for recognition, voice, and community; researchers have likened feminist zines, blogs, hashtags, memes, and apps to the consciousness-raising circles, protests, speak-outs, and underground presses of the second wave, recognizing the urgency with which U.S. feminists have always taken up discourse and communication as necessary forms of activism (Keller, 2012; Kennedy, 2007; Shaw, 2012b; Wood 2008; Young, 1997).

What sets the current generation apart, however, is the high degree of mediation that characterizes contemporary feminist tactics, discourses, identities, communities, and organizational structures. The activism of “second wave” feminism unfolded primarily through in-person meetings and actions coordinated, mobilized, and framed by formal organizations with a distinct membership and, often, a central leadership (Dicker, 2016; Reger, 2012). In stark contrast, contemporary feminist activism in the U.S. unfolds primarily through mediated social processes, through “the flow of media productions, media circulation, media interpretation and media recirculation” (Mattoni & Treré, 2014, p. 260), rather than through participation within a formally structured organization. This is what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) describe as the core difference between the logic of collective action and the logic of *connective* action.

Of course, media production and critique were important political priorities for previous feminist generations. The second wave feminist underground press, composed of hundreds of self-published newspapers, magazines, and newsletters that cropped up in cities and towns across the country throughout the 1960s and 1970s, stands as an important precursor to today’s feminist media networks (Steiner, 1992). A key difference, however, separates these two generations of feminist media activists: whereas a web of second wave organizations, collectives, and leaders structured movement communications, actions, and participation, today, media and communication networks have become organizing structures, in and of themselves. As the case studies reviewed above suggest, for contemporary feminists, collectively producing, consuming, critiquing, and circulating media are political actions that, due to the open, everyday, participatory nature of social media platforms, no longer require the resources of formal,

membership-based organizations. Instead, participation in feminist movements and campaigns is structured through blogs, hashtags, memes, email listservs, zines, among other media genres and outlets. These channels mediate political discourse, direct action campaigns, collective identity formation, community building, coordination of street protests, and more.

Throughout the growing body of scholarship on networked feminism, however, one important element remains missing — activists’ voices and perspectives. With a few important exceptions (Keller, 2016; Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2016; Mendes, 2015; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018), nearly all of the existing research on networked feminism focuses on the *content* of feminist media campaigns and the *platforms* used to launch them, rather than the feminist makers, users, and producers organizing and launching actions behind the scenes. Consequently, while scholars have produced a thorough record of particular feminist media campaigns, the field lacks theoretical frameworks that draw connections among these campaigns and shed light on consistencies across feminists’ media practices. Two major questions remain unanswered: *why* has this central orientation toward media come to operate as a key organizing principle for U.S. feminists, and how has this turn toward mediated engagement affected the shape and reach of feminist politics? Alice Mattoni and Emiliano Treré (2014) suggest that this problem underlies most research at the intersection of social movements and media, whose empirical focus is often limited to a single medium or to the latest technological innovations; scholarship on media activism, they argue, is “in need of more encompassing analytical concepts that are able to grasp the multiple dimensions that characterize the interaction between activists and the media

they use in different moments and for different purposes in the context of protest politics” (p. 255). In the case of networked feminism, there remains a need to theorize contemporary feminists’ media *praxis*, or the relationship between feminists’ politics and their participatory, extra-institutional media practices.

In order to understand the processes through which feminist negotiate between their goals, contexts, and media tools, it is necessary to first build a theoretical framework that positions media as not merely materials, tools, or texts, but as political practices that emerge from the resources, conventions, and needs of the practitioners’ context (Couldry, 2012, 2010; Postill, 2010; Williams, 1977). I turn to this framework in the next section.

Toward a Theory of Networked Feminism as a Political Media Practice Media and Social Movements

Building a theory of networked feminist as a political media practice requires a conceptual framework that makes media legible as sites for political contestation. The field of social movement research offers a logical first stop in the search for theoretical resources. Traditionally, however, theorists of social movements have positioned media and communication as resources activists mobilize in the service of more conventional forms of political and civic engagement happening elsewhere, rather than political actions in and of themselves. In their analyses of pre-digital movements, scholars have described news outlets as arenas in which activists and their targets compete for public attention (Koopmans, 2004), documented the power of personal stories to mobilize activists into action (Polletta, 2009), framed discourse as a tool for building collective identities (Melucci, 1989), and highlighted media’s role in maintaining movement ideologies and solidarities during periods of abeyance (Rupp & Taylor, 1987). While this research draws much needed attention to movement cultures, framing processes, emotions, and identities,

in each case, media and communication only become politically significant when mobilized in support of other movement actions. Research related to online activism continues this trend, despite activists' innovation of new, digital protest forms. Scholars often speak in broad strokes about information-communication technologies' inherent ability to facilitate political engagement offline, resulting in recurring debates between "techno-optimists" (Castells, 2009, 2015; Shirky, 2008) and "techno-pessimists" (Morozov, 2011). On both sides, this instrumentalist approach oversimplifies the ways in which media, digital and otherwise, operate as spaces for political participation (Zayani, 2015).

The limited role media play in much existing social movement theory is due in part to the definitional boundaries theorists draw around what qualifies as political work. A great deal of social movement research within the fields of sociology and political science adopts what is known as "the political process model," a state-centered view of power that defines social movements as only those collective challenges explicitly aimed at policy change or institutional reform (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008). In an exemplary work within this tradition, Tilly and Tarrow (2015) develop a theory of "contentious politics" to differentiate between political and nonpolitical collective action. Their definition of contentious politics includes "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors' interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or their parties" (p. 7). Tilly and Tarrow acknowledge that forms of contention unfold in spaces beyond the state's reach, but label such realms as "nonpolitical settings" (p. 9); for them, involvement of the state "distinguishes collective action and contention from

politics” (p. 10). Within the political process model, only highly visible, state-targeted “public performances including marches, rallies, demonstrations, creation of specialized associations, public meetings, public statements, petitions, letter writing, and lobbying” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 11), are recognized as social movement activity. The role of media is limited to that of “interested third parties” (Tilly & Tarrow, p. 69), who might increase the reach and visibility of a protest or advance competing interpretations of a contentious event, but who remain exterior to the actual contestation between challengers and their opponents.

The assumptions about power, domination, and resistance that underscore the political process model are problematic for feminists and feminist scholars for a number of reasons.

For one, contemporary feminists’ tactics simply do not fit the model’s definition of collective action. While in-person, “public performances,” like the marches, rallies, and demonstrations Tilly and Tarrow describe, remain part of the feminist repertoire, mediated tactics, like hashtag campaigns, blogging, and zine-making, are just as, if not more, prevalent. Here, media are not “interested third parties” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 69) or a means “to choreograph collective action” (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 4), but the very sites where political contestation unfolds; the political process model is not equipped to capture the political work feminist media activism performs.

Second, the political process model’s emphasis on public actions and public institutions obscures the behind-the-scenes work of movement building. Alberto Melucci (1989) argues that the model creates the “action without actors” problem, treating social movements as “unified empirical datum, which, supposedly, can be perceived and

interpreted by observers...the collective reality is seen to exist as a thing” (p. 18). While protest event dynamics are important objects of study, an exclusive focus on highly visible action ignores the less visible processes through which activists organize and maintain movements: “This process of ‘collective action’ transforms social action into an incontrovertible fact, a given that does not merit further investigation” (p. 18). The political process model, in other words, is inadequate for theorizing the political dimensions of movement activity like collective identity formation, movement framing processes, ideological maintenance work, and the performance of movement ideals within everyday life at the collective and individual levels (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Benford & Snow, 2000; Rupp & Taylor, 1987; Taylor, Whittier, & Morris, 1992; Melucci, 1989; Young, 1997). Rather than account for activists’ agency as political actors, the political process model positions protest events as wholly determined by structural arrangements (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008).

Third, this analytical focus on highly visible protest events is especially problematic for feminist movements because it overlooks the historical exclusion of marginalized groups, particularly women and girls, from the public sphere (Fraser, 1992; Harris, 2008; Keller, 2016; Taft, 2010). In her study of girl feminist bloggers, Jessalynn Keller (2016) argues that academic definitions of activism, social movements, and politics have been “based primarily around the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual, Western, adult men” (p. 50). Masculinist biases embedded in social movement theory reify hegemonic binaries that mark “women as personal and private and men as civic and public” (Keller 2016, p. 50). When scholars like Tilly and Tarrow (2015) restrict their definition of political contention to public performances, they fail to

grapple with how gender, among other social categories, differentially inscribes access to and legitimacy within the public sphere and how this differential access has fostered alternative forms of political engagement. Consequently, systematic studies of activism often report that women are less politically active than men (Inglehart & Norris, 2003), but fail to question whether their methodologies and analytics exclude political work that takes place along the margins of the public sphere. This gendered dynamic is especially salient when it comes to studying networked feminism, which often takes place through individual engagements with collective media campaigns, as in the case of blogs and hashtags.

Lastly, the political process model's restriction of politics to governments and its prioritization of direct engagement with institutions of governance as activists' strategy of choice obfuscates the ways in which power, and therefore, resistance operate across multiple institutions within everyday life (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Young, 1997). This is especially problematic for studying collective action that challenges sociopolitical systems of oppression and authority, including feminist movements, anti-racist movements, and LGBTQ movements, which are often relegated under the label of "identity politics" in contrast to the "real" politics of state-centered activism (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008). Frances Shaw (2012) argues that the opposition within social movement literature between cultural, identity-based activism and political, state-centered activism reflects the gendered divisions between the public and private sphere. Whereas scholars working within the political process model associate state-centric activism with contentious collective action performed in public and capable of enacting structural changes, scholars of so-called "cultural" activism tend to view its tactics and

effects as “private, internal, cognitive, and personal” (Shaw, 2012a, p. 378). This formula casts movements centered around gender, sexual, and racial justice as personal and expressive rather than political and instrumental, framing culture as separate from and secondary to structures of power (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Shaw, 2012a; Young, 1997). Such binaries are deeply at odds with U.S. feminism, whose longstanding mantra, the personal is political, explodes conventional boundaries surrounding political domination and resistance.

The study of contemporary feminists, whose activism is highly mediated, aimed at forms of domination that permeate everyday life beyond the state, and necessarily adopts diffuse, quotidian, and inventive tactics, requires a broadening of what “counts” as political work. In this section, I draw on media sociology, Foucauldian theories of power, and existing scholarship on feminist activism to develop an interpretive framework for analyzing media as political practices. This move toward a more robust theory of networked feminism requires two analytical steps: 1) framing media as practices, as actions, tactics, strategies, values, and relationships, rather than merely texts or tools; and 2) outlining the conditions under which media practices become *political* practices. I argue that the political nature of feminists’ media practices is rooted in their engagement with discursive power. In synthesizing these resources into an interpretive framework that positions media as political practices, I move closer toward theorizing do-it-ourselves feminism as an activist media praxis.

Media as Practices

“This book is an action.” These five words, which open Robin Morgan’s iconic 1970 feminist anthology, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, sum up the key assumptions that have

guided feminist media activism across its long history in the U.S. As Jaime Harker and Cecilia Konchar Farr (2015) write in the introduction to their eponymous volume, to claim that a book is an action is to claim “that writing can function as activism, just as protests, sit-ins, and marches do...that books could be revolutionary, that language could remake the world, and that writing mattered in a profound way” (p. 1). Media-making, discourse, and cultural production, in all of their varied forms — from books to newspapers to magazines to blogs to hashtags — have played pivotal roles in U.S. feminist activism, dating back to the self-published suffrage pamphlets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Young, Harker & Farr, 2015). Media have only become more central to feminist activism with the rise of commercial internet access and social media platforms. Today, Robin Morgan still writes books, but like countless other media savvy feminists, she also blogs, Facebooks, tweets, and even podcasts, each post, status update, hashtag, and episode an action.

But when does a book, or a zine, tweet, or blog, become an action? How can media function as sites for political contestation and media-making as a tactic for resistance? Answering these questions requires theoretical resources that highlight media not as texts or tools, but as social processes embedded in everyday life (Zayani, 2015).

Theories of media as practices, as habits, techniques, values, and relationships that emerge from the conventions, resources, and needs of a particular cultural context, help explicate the process through which a text becomes an action. Raymond Williams (1977) moved media studies in the direction of this practice paradigm in his essay, “From Medium to Social Practice,” which argues that a medium is more than the materials of which it is composed. According to Williams, a medium is a “practice, which has always

to be defined as work on a material for a special purpose within certain necessary social conditions” (p. 160). Williams’ framework of “material social practice” highlights both the medium’s materials and the social, cultural, political, and economic values, relationships, and conditions which both inform and are enacted through any one particular practice of media-making.

The field of media anthropology has since adopted the practice paradigm as an ethnographic mandate to study media as sites where broader sociopolitical phenomena unfold, including global cultural flows, national imaginaries, indigenous activism, postcolonial identities, diasporic communities, ritual and performance, and more (Hughes-Freeland, 1998; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, & Larkin, 2002; Postill, 2010; Rothenbuhler & Coman, 2005). But while media anthropologists have done the important work of pushing media studies beyond its traditionally limited focus on media content in the global North and West, John Postill (2010) argues that researchers working in this field frequently deploy the term media practices without adequately defining or problematizing it. Instead of positioning media practices as objects of study, media anthropologists have taken up media practices as “conduits through which to reach other research objects” (Postill, 2010, p. 4).

To this end, Nick Couldry’s (2012) media-as-practice framework directs researchers’ attention to “the specific regularities in our actions related to media and the regularities of context and resources that make certain types of media-related actions possible or impossible, likely or unlikely” (p. 78). Rather than using media practices as sites for analyzing other phenomena, Couldry’s media sociology approach is primarily concerned with empirical questions regarding the “media-oriented practices” (2010, p.

41) that makeup people's everyday lives: "Such a media sociology is interested in actions that are directly oriented to media, actions that involve media without necessarily having media as their aim or object; and actions whose possibility is conditioned by the prior existence, presence or functioning of media" (2012, p. 80). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field and Theodor Schatzki's work on the organizing properties of everyday routines, Couldry de-centers media texts and institutions and re-centers media users, consumers, and producers and their social, political, cultural, and economic contexts. This empirical prioritization of people's practices over media content helps "sidestep insoluble problems over how to prove 'media effects': how can we ever know that a particular media text changed the behaviour of audiences in particular ways?" (Couldry, 2012, p. 82). Rather than beginning with content and asking how media messages affect consumers, the media-as-practice paradigm begins with people and asks what people actually do with media, how people understand what they do with media, and how context, conventions, values, and needs yield particular media practices.

This approach helps clarify how media become sites where feminist activism unfolds. Whereas existing scholarship at the intersections of both media and movements and gender and media tends to focus only on media content, which may or may not undermine feminist politics or mobilize dissident actions, Couldry's (2012, 2010) framework pushes researchers toward a less deterministic, more participatory view of media. The media-as-practice approach provides a framework for analyzing media as actions that productively balances structure with agency, bringing users', producers', and consumers' actions and contexts into view.

Media as Political Practices

But, as Couldry (2012, 2010) notes, an incredibly broad range of actions and routines — from watching a football game on television to publishing a video on YouTube — fall under the umbrella of “media practices.” Moreover, the same media practice enacted by one person in one context can take on different significance when enacted by another person in a different context. Under what conditions do particular media practices become political practices? When is tweeting a hashtag a feminist action and when is it just another status update? Can an email listserv or a Facebook group be a grassroots feminist community?

The literature on alternative media offers some possible answers. While scholars have long disputed the boundaries separating mainstream media from alternative media, otherwise labeled as “citizens’,” “radical,” “community,” “civil society,” “critical,” “tactical,” “autonomous,” “rhizomatic,” “small,” “our,” and “DIY” media, the term is typically associated with activist-produced media, broadly defined (Atton, 2001; Bailey, Cammaert, & Carpentier, 2007; Downing, 2001). Despite these debates and the genre’s heterogeneity, Bailey, Cammaert, and Carpentier (2007) synthesize existing scholarship to highlight four general interventions that alternative media projects make: 1) alternative media center groups and topics that are marginalized within the public sphere; 2) alternative media offer spaces for counter-hegemonic discourses and anti-capitalist modes of production that subvert the producer/consumer binary; 3) alternative media create new democratic arenas for civil society participation; and 4) alternative media, as collaborative outlets for communication, link diverse struggles and foster coalitions. These four interventions, which can be found across the existing scholarship on networked feminism reviewed earlier, point to the political work activist-produced media

perform in and of themselves, regardless of whether they spark more conventional forms of collective action, such as street protests.

Alternative media theories, however, are only helpful insofar as they highlight the production, circulation and content of activist media texts. An exclusive focus on alternative media overlooks the fact that, as John Downing argues, “all such media are part of popular culture and of the overall societal mesh and are not segregated into a radical political reservation” (p. 8). Oppositional cultures are intertwined with commercialized mass cultures; a feminist activist may collaborate with others to publish a zine about reproductive justice using cheap or even stolen materials and distribute it for free at a zine festival, but she may also enact feminist politics through everyday media practices, like using corporately owned social media platforms. In other words, alternative media theories cannot account for contemporary U.S. feminism’s central orientation toward media, alternative and mainstream alike, as sites of domination and resistance. The study of feminist media practices as a composite whole requires a more robust theoretical framework.

A theory of feminists’ media-oriented practices, including alternative media production but also media consumption, usage, critique, and circulation, as political practices begins with the common thread that cuts across the media practices Couldry (2010, 2012) describes — *the everyday*. All of Couldry’s case studies are either mundane routines embedded in the flow of everyday life (e.g., watching TV) or more remarkable activities enabled by everyday technologies (e.g., social media). Understanding the political dimensions of everyday media practices requires theoretical concepts that illuminate how power operates in everyday life. To pose the problem in feminist terms, a

theory of media as political practices must shed light on how the personal is political, how domination and, in turn, resistance unfold through quotidian performances, interactions, processes, and technologies. Like the feminist project more generally, this necessitates a categorical expansion of “the political” that challenges distinctions between the private/personal and the public/political (Butler, 1988; Young, 1997).

Michel Foucault’s concept of discursive power offers helpful resources for developing a broader definition of what qualifies as political work and theorizing the political dynamics of feminists’ media-oriented practices. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault (1991) traces the development of the modern Western penal system in order to historicize a transition in the practice of power. Foucault’s genealogy charts a shift from sovereign power, a top-down model of control in which a single authority wields absolute power over the population through physical coercion, to disciplinary power, a bottom-up model of control in which power is dispersed throughout the social fabric and enacted between people on a micro-social level through the everyday performance and enforcement of behavioral norms. According to Foucault, discourse is the primary vehicle for the diffusion and wide acceptance of a particular set of norms at a given time and place. While Foucauldian theory often eludes precise definition, Stuart Hall (1992) helpfully summarizes Foucault’s conceptualization of discourse as

a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. ... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect. (p. 291)

A discourse, in other words, consists of speech, writing, and actions that appear across a variety of sites, texts, and institutions, govern the way a topic can be talked and thought about, and, consequently, influence behaviors and practices.

Similar to Antonio Gramsci's (1995) notion of hegemony but encompassing relationships more complex and diffuse than the single axis of class domination, discourse carries the authority of scientific knowledge or basic truth. Discourse, then, is inseparable from and co-constitutive of power, as discursive practices construct commonsensical thinking about particular groups of people, and, in turn, shape their material realities. Unlike coercive sovereign power, the disciplinary power of discourse is not only restrictive, prohibiting particular behaviors, it is also productive, creating the subject positions that delineate systems of power; it is "one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals" (Foucault 1980, p. 98). Whereas Marxist theories suggest the existence of fundamental truths or authentic subjectivities behind the veil of power, Foucault (1980) argues that no meaning exists outside of discourse and all discourse produces patterns of social relationships:

Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge...that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (p. 76)

Discourse offers a far more efficient means of control than sovereign power.

Normalized into knowledge, discourse renders subjects as docile bodies "manipulated, shaped, and trained" (p. 332) to think and act in line with a set of accepted facts and standards. Discursive power does not require coercion at the hands of a single leader or

institution; instead, individuals become self-disciplining, internalizing normative discourse and regulating their bodies and the bodies of others accordingly, as if under surveillance from an invisible overseer. This phenomenon is captured metaphorically in Foucault's discussion of the panopticon, the nineteenth century penal system composed of prison cells arranged around a central watchtower, from which guards could watch inmates, but inmates could not see inside the tower's windows to confirm whether or not guards were watching them at any one moment; the result, over time, is a state of self-policing. Power, for Foucault, is not the domination of one group over another, but "something which circulates...employed and exercised through a net-like organisation" (1980, p. 98). Within this net, power is not possessed but relationally enacted and individuals "are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation" (Foucault 1980, p. 98). Diffuse, everyday, and everywhere, the disciplinary power of discourse is multidirectional, historically contingent, and constantly under negotiation.

For feminist social movement theory, Foucault does the important work of expanding the domain of "the political" to include sites of power at the micro-level of society. Rather than working from a top-down model that positions the locus of power in government institutions, Foucault (1991) calls for a bottom-up analysis of the everyday, everywhere "micro-physics of power" (p. 73). As Stuart Hall (2013) writes, "Without denying that the state, the law, the sovereign or the dominant class may have positions of dominance, Foucault shifts our attention away from the grand, overall strategies of power, towards the many, localized circuits, tactics, mechanisms and effects through which power circulates" (p. 35). Stacey Young (1997) describes Foucault's emphasis on

discursive power as a critical intervention on liberalism, whose insistence on individualism and the rational objectivity of democratic governments suggests that citizens need only to turn to state institutions to redress inequities in their personal lives: “Ideologies that construct power as being centralized in state institutions divert attention from other arenas and processes of domination, keeping them out of sight and thus decreasing the likelihood that they will become sites of resistance” (p. 6). This intervention, Young argues, is especially important for U.S. feminist theory and practice, whose “longstanding focus on domination and resistance at the level of daily life” (p. 14) grates against liberalism’s categorization of social conflict beyond the reach of the state as “‘private’ and therefore non-political” (p. 5).

The concept of discursive power and its categorical expansion of “the political” to include sites and interactions beyond the state moves social movement theory toward a stronger framework for interpreting the political dynamics of feminist media practices. Importantly for my purposes here, Foucault’s work sheds light on how media operate as everyday sites of political domination and, in turn, targets for feminist activism. As perhaps our greatest purveyors of social meanings and norms, commercial media function as disciplinary technologies that reproduce and maintain discursive formations and, in turn, power. Hall (2013), drawing on Foucault, argues that media texts’ joining of images and ideologies through particular “regimes of representation” constitutes an exercise in “symbolic power” (p. 249) that naturalizes difference, marks “Otherness,” and normalizes imbalances of power. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) cites media as one source of the “controlling images...designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (p.

69); Collins argues, for example, that white male media producers have repeatedly perpetuated stereotypical images of black women as mammies, jezebels, or welfare queens, pushing these discourses into hegemonic status and rationalizing black women's social, economic, and political oppression throughout history. In the neoliberal era, the discursive power of media representations operates as an everyday technology of governmentality; Laurie Ouellette (2008) highlights how media texts, from reality television shows to self-help manuals, "construct templates for citizenship that complement the privatization of public life, the collapse of the welfare state, and, most important, the discourse of individual choice and personal responsibility" (p. 224). Media, in other words, shape and constrain the material conditions of consumers' lives. It is for this reason that, as Van Zoonen (2004) argues, "media are part of feminism's cultural and...material struggle" (p. 148).

Feminists' cultural and material struggle against dominant discourse's "micro-physics of power" has unfolded through similarly mediated, diffuse, everyday, everywhere forms of political actions. As Michel de Certeau (1984) argues in his response to Foucault, consumers may be "caught in the nets of 'discipline'" (p. xiv), but they have not been reduced to it; rather, through creative tactics, they "make do" (p. 66) with everyday materials and resources to "evade" and "manipulate the mechanisms of discipline" (p. xiv). The repertoire of feminist media activism is filled with such tactics that artfully challenge and reappropriate the "symbolic power" of dominant discourse. U.S. feminists, past and present, have consistently adopted mundane, everyday media practices to perform what Stacey Young (1997) calls discursive activism, or collective action directed at "promoting new grammars, new social paradigms through which

individuals, collectivities, and institutions interpret social circumstances and devise responses to them” (p. 3). Feminist media activists endeavor to make visible and deconstruct those hegemonic discourses that, on a daily basis, marginalize some bodies while privileging others. In their place, feminist media activists collectively construct new discursive frameworks for representing marginalized identities, interpreting oppressive experiences, and responding to systemic injustice. Their everyday media practices, from sharing personal stories of encounters with rape culture on Twitter to borrowing time at the office to print copies of their grassroots collective’s latest zine, seize opportunities “on the wing” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix) to throw a wrench into the disciplinary machine that is discourse.

But contrary to de Certeau’s tactical practitioner, who may creatively adapt to the net of discipline but never change it despite daily struggle (“What it wins it cannot keep” (p. 37)), networked feminist practices are transformative. Collins’ (2000) theory of black feminist standpoint formation helps illustrate how everyday discursive tactics create change at the levels of both the individual and the collective, the personal and the political. For Collins, resistance under the conditions of discursive domination is not tactical in de Certeau’s sense of the word – momentary, opportunistic, makeshift – but instead takes the form of an achievement over time that grows from personal experience to collective struggle. In her black feminist framework, resistance begins “when the contradictions between Black women’s self-definitions and everyday treatment are heightened” (p. 89) and the constructed nature of controlling images becomes increasingly visible. These contradictions and the processes of deconstruction they trigger lead individual women to develop a stronger sense of self rooted in a “dual

consciousness” (p. 97) aware of both the discursive norms inscribing her social position and her own sense of identity. Individual self-definition grows into a collective standpoint through what Collins calls rearticulation, in which black women, in conversation with one another, affirm individual political consciousness, form communities, develop new interpretations of everyday social situations, and devise responses to them. Collective self-definition in the form of a black feminist standpoint produces alternative epistemologies that not only debunk the myths underpinning controlling images but also challenge the very process of knowledge production:

Alternative epistemologies challenge all certified knowledge and open up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth. The existence of a self-defined Black women’s standpoint using Black feminist epistemology calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth. (p. 270-271)

Collins argues that a critical mass of individuals espousing a black feminist epistemology not only fosters collective empowerment by changing the ways in which women interpret everyday life situations, but also challenges the set of norms and assumptions limiting black women’s political agency and access to material resources. Collins’ theory of standpoint formation suggests that a dialectical relationship exists between discursive activism and material life, illuminating the political dimensions of feminists’ media-oriented practices.

The political work of feminists’ media practices does not end with the construction of alternative discourses and epistemologies. The collective acts of producing and circulating feminist counter-discourses also foster activist movements, communities, and spaces. Nancy Fraser (1992) argues that second-wave feminists formed a subaltern counterpublic through their “variegated array of journals, bookstores,

publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places” (p. 123). Within these “parallel discursive arenas” (p. 123), feminists addressed “informal impediments to participatory parity” (p. 119) that kept women from participating fully within the public sphere, including gendered discourses circumscribing appropriate social roles for women, long after they were legally licensed to participate. The second-wave counterpublic offered spaces “where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 123). Through these processes of discursive invention and circulation, counterpublic spaces functioned as both “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” and “bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (p. 124). What Michael Warner (2002) calls “the reflexive circulation of discourse” (p. 62) created and maintained the second-wave counterpublic. Just as dominant discourse is productive, generating, as Foucault argues, particular subjectivities and social positions within the net of discipline, feminist media activists’ counterdiscourses perform “poetic world-making” (Warner, 2002, p. 82), calling dissident subjectivities and collectivities into being.

Taken together, theories of discursive power and resistance help illuminate the political dynamics of feminists’ media-oriented practices. Networked feminism, whether oriented toward critiquing mainstream media, using social media platforms, or producing alternative media, is a distinctly political practice because it disrupts and, when successful, transforms discursive power, advancing new interpretive frameworks for

responding to injustice and fostering the formation of counterpublic spaces that center marginalized voices.

Methodological Approach

The media-as-political-practices approach outlined in the previous section calls for a methodology that prioritizes media makers, users, and consumers in both the data collection and analysis stages. If the goal of the practice-based approach as outlined by Couldry (2010, 2012) is to contextualize and understand what people are doing with media and why, then the researcher must treat her participants as expert sources on the meaning and significance of their actions. Throughout the entire methodological process, the practice-based approach consequently calls for a high degree of reflexivity on the part of the researcher. In order to center and uplift practitioners and hold their perspectives in the same regard as scholarly analyses or high theory, the researcher must remain critical of her role in the field, her subjective interpretations of her participants, and the power imbalance between herself as the researcher and her participants as the researched. She must also take steps to triangulate her findings, approaching a set of media practices through multiple methods to build as thorough an understanding as possible, and to perform participant check-ins, weighing her interpretations against her participants' understandings. The ethical stakes of this methodology increase when a project revolves around *activists*, who, due to the dissident quality of their activities or the marginalized nature of their identities, occupy a precarious position in the fabric of society.

In this section, I outline a general overview of the methodological approach I take to study networked feminism as a political media practice. Each of the following three chapters includes a section on methods, data, and theoretical resources specific to the

case studies taken up in that chapter. Here, however, I describe the feminist, practitioner-centered methodology the guides my approach for each case.

Data

Throughout this study, I employ a mixed-methods qualitative approach that takes up feminist activist practitioners' voices, perspectives, and actions as primary source material to consider four questions:

- RQ1. How are feminists using media to craft an activist praxis that reflects their intersectional values *and* responds to the challenges of today's political context?
- RQ2. What strategies do they use to navigate the double entanglements of networked activism?
- RQ3. How does this generation of feminist activists imagine the role networked media play in political liberation?
- RQ4. And finally, what are the implications of feminists' media practices and politics for the face and reach of contemporary feminism in particular, and social movements more generally?

Six case studies structure this project. They include, in the order that they appear in the following chapters, 1) the Women's March on Washington (WMOW); 2) Philadelphia's annual March to End Rape Culture (MTERC); 3) the #MeToo campaign; 4) Girl Army, a feminist Facebook group; 5) the U.S. feminist zine community; and 6) Permanent Wave Philly (PWP), a grassroots feminist music and arts collective.

My study of networked feminist activism began in 2014, when I attended MTERC for the first time. Following Jenna Burrell's (2009) work on the field site as a network, I approached the march as a localized hub, which might act as an entry point for accessing multiple nodes across the broader networked field site that is contemporary U.S. feminism. Every year, MTERC offers tabling space to dozens of Philadelphia-based organizations and collectives interested in mobilizing local activists. At MTERC 2014, I

connected with representatives from several organizations and signed up for their email listservs.

Ultimately, through this strategy, I followed networked connections outward from MTERC 2014 to the organizing team behind the march, Girl Army, and Permanent Wave Philly: I joined the MTERC team after speaking with Chelsea, a key MTERC organizer, at the 2014 march about my research; another MTERC organizer later invited me to join the Girl Army group, a communicative hub for Philly feminist happenings, via Facebook; and I became involved with PWP after signing up for the collective's listserv at their march table. These three network connections opened doors to others. PWP members, who collaborate on an annual zine, introduced me to the handmade paper booklets and the broader circuit of feminist zine festivals, distributors, and websites. It was through Girl Army members that I first learned about the earliest rumblings of the Women's March and, later, the #MeToo movement.

As I discuss in more detail below, my study of each protest or community was not always ethnographic, but my approach mirrors Marcus' (1995) articulation of "multi-sited ethnography," which moves ethnography "from its conventional single-site location...to multiple sites of observation and participation" (p. 95) in order to develop a more robust understanding of participants' lifeworlds. In selecting my case studies, I adapted Marcus' "follow the people" (p. 106) mode of multi-sited research, following my participants from one site or practice to the next. Together, my case studies, interconnected through both my research questions and participant overlap, reflect Lingel's (2017b) comparative "networked field studies" approach, which "allows for looking across multiple communities and field sites to build a coherent set of analytical

claims” (p. 1). By taking a *networked* approach toward studying *networked* feminism, I allowed my participants to guide my analytical attention, thereby centering activist-practitioners in the scaffolding of my project.

For each site, I drew on at least two of three different qualitative methods: participant observations, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis. See Table 1 for an overview of the methods I used across my case studies. In every case, I deployed a particular set of methods with the goal of understanding, from multiple angles, the relationship between feminists’ politics and their media practices.

Table 1	
<i>Case Studies and Methods</i>	
<u>Case Study</u>	<u>Methods</u>
Women’s March on Washington	Participant Observations, Textual Analysis
March to End Rape Culture	Participant Observations, Textual Analysis
#MeToo	Textual Analysis
Girl Army	Participant Observations, In-Depth Interviews, Textual Analysis
Feminist Zine Community	Participant Observations, In-Depth Interviews, Textual Analysis
Permanent Wave Philly	Participant Observations, In-Depth Interviews, Textual Analysis

Participant observations. Data collection for the three cases localized in Philadelphia — MTERC, Girl Army, and PWP — involved extensive ethnographic observations. I spent three years within the networked field of grassroots feminist media activism in Philly, from September 2014 through September 2017. During that time, I was actively involved in the planning and execution of MTERC’s annual protest event and of PWP’s music shows, arts events, and annual zine. For nine months during that three-year period — from January to October 2015 — I conducted an ethnographic

analysis of Girl Army, a secret feminist Facebook group whose members are primarily from the greater Philadelphia area. Over the course of those nine months, I interacted with Girl Army throughout the day via the Facebook mobile app and I also set aside one hour per week dedicated to browsing, posting, and lurking in group discussions. I estimate that I spent approximately 120 hours, 300 hours, and 100 hours working and interacting with the MTERC organizing team, the PWP collective, and Girl Army members, respectively. A more detailed overview of my ethnographic approach to each case study can be found in Chapters 2 and 4.

The three remaining translocal case studies — WMOW, #MeToo, and feminist zines — involved more episodic participant observations. I watched the Women's March grow in the fall of 2016 from a Facebook event to a globally networked protest movement through my own social media accounts and later joined the local march in Philadelphia. When #MeToo went viral the following year, I watched as important conversations about sexual violence began popping up all around the world and joined in activist discussions on Twitter about the promise and perils of a media campaign that asked survivors to tell their stories on a public stage. A similar mix of casual and formal observations informs my analysis of feminist zines. As a participant observer in PWP, I contributed to and edited one annual zine and helped produce and sell copies of others. I also participated in local zine festivals, distributed copies of PWP zines to local bookstores, where I connected with other zinesters, and contributed to another collaborative zine published by a different feminist grassroots collective. In all three cases, these episodic observations give my analysis more contextual details.

Whether extensive and ethnographic or casual and episodic, participant observations of networked feminism in the Philadelphia area gave me the opportunity to study activists' practices firsthand. Each of the following three chapters begins with one or more vignettes from this fieldwork to ground my analysis in the actions and experiences of my participants.

In-depth interviews. For three of my case studies — Girl Army, PWP, and the feminist zine community — I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. Table 2 provides a complete list of my interviewees. To develop a deeper understanding of Girl Army members' practices, I supplemented my ethnographic observations with interviews with seven members, each of whom represented a different level or type of experience in the group, from highly active moderators to lurkers. I took a similar approach to studying PWP, using interviews with the collective's three most active members to explore themes that emerged throughout my fieldwork in greater depth. In my analysis of the feminist zine community, interviews constitute the bulk of my data. I interviewed twelve zinesters who had exhibited work at the Philly Feminist Zine Festival to consider the role the paper-based goods play in the digitally networked feminist media repertoire. In total, I interviewed 22 feminist activist practitioners. All interviews had a semi-structured agenda that incorporated scripted but flexible, open-ended questions and encouraged participants to take the conversation in the direction of their choosing. While participant observations allowed me to study feminists' actions, in-depth interviews gave participants a chance to reflect on their practices, offering new insights into the behind-the-scenes negotiations feminist perform between their politics and their media tactics. Moreover, the three sets of practitioners I interviewed — Facebook

users, grassroots collective members, and zine makers and readers – represent the three general categories that the networked feminist practices under study here fall under: digital, in-person, and print media activism. More information about the structure of these interviews can be found in Chapter 4.

Textual analysis. For all six case studies, I used textual analysis in conjunction with observations and/or interviews to study the media texts participants produced, news media coverage related to the activism in question, and activists’ written reflections regarding feminist movements and their tactics. To understand activists’ public outreach work as well as public opinion about their tactics, I archived and studied the public-facing websites and social media accounts as well as news coverage of WMOW, MTERC, and PWP. Data collection for the other three case studies — #MeToo, Girl Army, and Zines — involved developing more targeted archives of a particular feminist media practice: tweeting hashtags, posting in Facebook groups, and circulating print zines. For both WMOW and #MeToo, I also collected activists’ reflections on the movements’ tactics that were published in editorial pages or on public platforms like Twitter. Importantly, for my case study of #MeToo, I developed a new methodological approach that I call *meta-tweet analysis*, through which I collected and analyzed activists’ tweeted commentaries about the hashtag campaign as an activist tactic. Rather than analyzing the content of the hashtag campaign as a whole, this purposive sampling approach, discussed at length in Chapter 3, centers the perspectives of practitioners on their own media practices.

Table 2			
<i>Interviewees</i>			
<u>Case Study</u>	<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Interview Format</u>
Girl Army	Dee*	Former member of Girl Army	Facebook chat
Girl Army	Jasmine	Founder and moderator of Girl Army	Skype
Girl Army	Kim	Girl Army lurker	In-person
Girl Army	Nikki	Girl Army lurker	In-person
Girl Army	Sylvia	Active Girl Army member	Skype
Girl Army	Rebecca	Active Girl Army member	In-person
Girl Army	Zola	Active Girl Army member	In-person
Permanent Wave	Dee*	Highly active Permanent Wave member	In-person
Permanent Wave	Callie*	Permanent Wave founding member	In-person
Permanent Wave	Jenny*	Long-time Permanent Wave member	In-person
Feminist Zines	Adelaide Barton**	Author of: <i>I Just Can't Have This Conversation Anymore</i> ; <i>Lady Gardens</i> ; <i>Menstrual Cup: A Love Story</i>	Email
Feminist Zines	Annie Mok	Author of: <i>No No No: A Guide to Girling Wrong</i> ; <i>Shadow Manifesto</i> ; <i>Worst Behavior</i>	In-person
Feminist Zines	Christine Stoddard	Author of <i>Quail Bell Magazine</i>	Email
Feminist Zines	Dre Grigoropol	Author of: <i>Dee's Dream</i> , <i>She Magazine</i> , <i>Lupa Cachula's Life</i>	Email
Feminist Zines	Candice Johnson	Contributor to <i>Permanent Wave Philly</i>	In-person
Feminist Zines	Dee*	Contributor to <i>Permanent Wave Philly</i>	In-person
Feminist Zines	Jenny*	Contributor to <i>Permanent Wave Philly</i>	In-person
Feminist Zines	Kate P. Bennett	Author of: <i>Sticking Around</i> ; <i>Cakes on the Loose</i> ; <i>Eating Love</i>	In-person
Feminist Zines	Kerri Radley	Author of <i>Deafula</i>	Email
Feminist Zines	Moose Lane**	Author of: <i>Don't Put Trash in my Toilet</i> ; <i>Get the Fuck Outside</i> ; <i>Stuck</i>	Email
Feminist Zines	Nicole Rodrigues	Author of: <i>Bump-Ins</i> ; <i>Cave Royalty</i> ; <i>Incognito Jams</i> ; <i>Level Up</i>	In-person
Feminist Zines	Sky Kalfus	Author of <i>Analytical Girl Manifesto</i>	In-person
*Denotes pseudonym			
**Denotes interviewee's chosen pen name			

In existing scholarship on networked activism, researchers often use textual analysis to conduct studies focused on campaigns' content. This work has yielded a wealth of rich descriptions of feminist media, but has also resulted in an under-theorization of the politics and philosophies that inform feminists' media practices. In this study, I also use textual analysis to study feminist media content, but this material functions primarily as contextual information for my case studies. To refocus attention on the feminist activist-practitioners behind the content, I paired my study of feminist media content with observational and interview data and conducted textual analyses of activists' published reflections. The combination of all three qualitative methods across this project highlights activists' actions, voices, and perspectives from a variety of different angles.

Analysis

To center practitioners while also remaining in dialogue with existing scholarship and theories of power and resistance, I took a *constructivist grounded theory* approach to analyzing the data described above. This mode of analysis allowed me to privilege practitioners' words and actions while also drawing on theoretical resources to guide my interpretation of their perspectives and experiences.

Developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss in the 1960s through their work in health and nursing studies, grounded theory involves "the systematic elaboration of concepts and theories that are rooted in the empirical materials at the center of the investigation" (Mattoni, 2014, p. 21). The approach was originally developed during a period in which the credibility of qualitative research was under attack and interpretive social scientists were seeking methodological frameworks that carried the same empirical weight as positivistic claims to quantitative objectivity and

generalizability (Mattoni, 2014). As such, the original formulation of grounded theory has a staid, mechanistic quality involving a strictly inductive approach, in which the researcher develops coding categories through constant comparison across case studies, which in turn become the building blocks for generating theory (Charmaz, 2014; Lingel, 2017b). The method's intensive emphasis on rooting theory in data in the search for empirical validity left researchers struggling to balance knowledge grounded in fieldwork with existing scholarship on the case under study (Mattoni, 2014).

Over time, grounded theory has moved toward the more flexible “constructivist” approach Mattoni (2014) outlines in her work on the potential of the method for social movement research. The constructivist grounded theory approach maintains Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original emphasis on rich, empirical data driving theory-building projects, while also recognizing that the research is embedded in a particular field of study that includes a variety of relevant theoretical resources. The earliest conceptualizations of grounded theory openly discouraged the use of existing scholarly knowledge to formulate or guide a research project. The constructivist model, however, “starts from the assumption that the researcher is situated in social reality and, as such, brings with her previous knowledge — both empirical, related to the fieldwork, and theoretical, related to concepts and models — when engaging with grounded theory” (Mattoni, 2014, p. 25). Although the researcher maintains the same degree of self-reflexivity and critical scrutiny of previous scholarship built into grounded theory's emphasis on empiricism, she may also use “sensitizing concepts” (Mattoni, 2014, p. 25) to shape her fieldwork and her interpretative analysis. The constructivist approach to grounded theory continues the

method's tradition of building theory from emergent themes and codes, while also putting this themes and codes in conversation with existing theories.

Throughout this study, I use constructivist grounded theory to pursue analyses that are simultaneously rooted in feminist activist-practitioners' actions and voices and informed by existing feminist and social movement theories. In each chapter, I bring the theories of power and resistance embedded in the media-as-political-practice approach outlined in the previous section to bear on my interpretation of feminists' media politics and tactics. It is this combination of theoretical resources born out of social justice projects and practitioner-focused data that brings do-it-ourselves feminism to light as an organizational paradigm guiding contemporary feminist movements and communities.

Reflexivity

When Couldry's (2010, 2012) media sociology is applied to *activist media practitioners*, an especially high degree of reflexivity is necessary. Stefania Milan (2014) outlines four special ethical considerations that social movement scholars must take, all of which apply to my study of networked feminism. First, because social movements are knowledge projects in and of themselves, social movement researchers must treat this knowledge with the same respect granted to academic scholarship and work to incorporate knowledge "from below" into their own work. Second, activism in any context is often risky and disclosing the dynamics of activism through scholarly work might expose activists to surveillance, repression, and personal threats. Researchers must incorporate an awareness of these potential consequences into their project designs. Third, activists are, of course, highly invested in their movements and may likely expect movement scholars to at least be politically aligned, if not politically *involved*, in their

dissident work, leaving the researcher to strike a balance between their own activist and academic work. Fourth and finally, practitioner-centered scholarship in any context requires research subjects to perform labor for the researcher. In the case of social movements, the researcher takes from practitioners' limited time and energy, which might be otherwise invested in activist projects. The researcher, then, must interrogate this power imbalance and develop strategies for compensating for it. When read alongside Couldry's work, Milan's concerns indicate that a media sociology approach that truly centers practitioners must include an "ethically informed positioning of the researcher in relation to the values and practices of the movement" (p. 447) under study.

To address these ethical concerns, throughout this study, I strive to incorporate the values that have shaped and driven feminist epistemological projects across the social sciences. More specifically, regardless of the actual method I use to pursue a particular case study, I take up the same normative assumptions that have long guided contemporary feminist ethnographic projects.

Since the 1980s, feminist researchers have launched important challenges to the norms and assumptions underpinning knowledge-building projects across multiple disciplines within social science. Whereas, in decades prior, feminist social scientists invested ample energy into correcting the androcentric biases of their fields by adding women to research samples and preexisting theoretical frameworks, this more radical generation of researchers advanced a fundamental line of questioning that shook the very foundations of their fields: what is the nature of social reality? Who can know? What can be known (Hesse-Biber, 2007)? Feminist researchers, instead of attempting to improve the objectivity, accuracy, and universality of social science and theory, disputed the

validity of these taken-for-granted ideals that position the researcher as occupying a “view from nowhere” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 16), value-free, detached, and neutral. Dorothy Smith (1990), a feminist sociologist and central figure within this movement, explains why the ethic of objectivity is problematic for researchers interested in women’s experiences: “how sociology is thought – its methods, conceptual schemes, and theories – has been based on and built up within the male social universe, even when women have participated in its doing” (p. 13). Smith and others shed light on a different kind of androcentric bias, one that may include women in its samples but is nevertheless unable to center their knowledge and experiences, contributing to their further marginalization.

In an effort to disrupt knowledge-building projects that exclude while seeming to include, that universalize dominant groups’ perspectives despite their embeddedness within a specific social location, feminist research has for three decades endeavored to deconstruct the researcher/researched binary and center marginalized subjects as legitimate authorities on social life. Ethnography, with its emphasis on grounded, thick descriptions and participatory observation, has been a key method for this project. There is no single, coherent definition of feminist ethnography, as the boundaries of both terms are contentious, nor is there a particular subject matter specific to feminist ethnography (Schlock, 2013). Even so, regardless of the phenomena under study and the methodological practices used, certain normative assumptions tend to guide feminist ethnographic research, in all of its forms and practices. Like most feminist researchers, feminist ethnographers typically do not identify as unbiased scientists capable of producing universal theory, but instead view their methods as situated and subjective, their representations as partial and constructed, and their research as explicitly political

projects that contribute to social change (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Schlock, 2013). Feminist ethnographers often attempt to destabilize the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched by validating participants' situated experiences as knowledge, grounding their claims in their participants' experiences, engaging in research that is of use and relevance to their participants, and seeking participants' feedback throughout the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Schlock, 2013). Reflexivity is central to this process; at every stage, feminist ethnographers must "recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practices" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 17).

Feminist scholars have launched important critiques of the plausibility of feminist ethnographers' egalitarian goals. Judith Stacey's oft-cited 1988 article, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" questions the method's ability to mitigate the power imbalances between the researcher and the researched, arguing that "the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research participants afforded by feminist ethnography can make the potential for deeper forms of exploitation" (p. 22). In a 1990 article published (unintentionally) under the same title, Lila Abu-Lughod critiqued feminist ethnographers for often assuming the existence of a universal and romanticized women's experience or standpoint, erasing important differences among women, including the researcher and her participants. Other scholars have charged that privileged feminist ethnographers' representations of subaltern groups often exoticize "the Other" or erroneously assume access to more marginalized individuals' subject positions (Borland, 2007; Schlock, 2013).

Even so, with these critiques in mind, the feminist ethnographic project offers an instructive guiding framework for researchers studying the media practices of social movements. Politically motivated, partial, and reflexive, feminist ethnographers, working closely with their participants, attempt to produce social science that honors difference and advances justice.

Throughout the course of conducting this study, I have attempted, to the best of my ability to do the same. This has involved a range of pragmatic steps, such as using pseudonyms to protect participants' identities, compensating interviewees for their time, making careful choices about which tactics and personal stories to bring to light through my scholarship, and sharing what I learn with the activists who could use it. My research approach has also included more complex processes, such as asking participants for feedback on my findings and developing methods for highlighting activists' voices without also asking them to perform extra labor on my behalf. Most importantly, I have tried, at every opportunity, to contribute to participants' social justice projects.

Sometimes, this has entailed "borrowing" reams of printer paper from the department office for zine-making or using local university connections to promote a protest. Other times, it has meant utilizing my privilege as an academic to procure campus event spaces for film screenings or panel discussions. Still elsewhere, I have taken up the everyday grunt work known to most all activists deep in the struggle, from screen-printing t-shirts, stapling flyers on telephone poles, and taking meeting minutes to drafting press releases, fielding emails, and fundraising. And in its most exciting moments, doing research that centers the needs, wellbeing, and work of activist-practitioners has meant being an *accomplice*, not an ally (Indigenous Action Media, 2014), and talking back to the sexist

cop who made fun of an anti-rape protest chant or using a megaphone to rally a crowd against a group of misogynist counterprotesters. While my participants and I share certain marginalized identity markers — many of the voices that fill these chapters are, like me, women from working-class backgrounds — I recognize that my status as a white, educated woman not only shapes my subjective understanding of power and oppression, but also enables me to push where less privileged activists might face pushback. I have written this study as an accomplice, in hopes that the space it creates for reflecting on the activist media praxis behind networked feminism might function as a social justice project, in and of itself, and help activists craft tactics for pushing forward, even in the face of incredible odds, until every year is our year.

Project Preview

Taking up the media-as-political-practice approach outlined here, the following three chapters identify the activist praxis guiding networked feminism and demonstrate how this paradigm has shaped U.S. feminist movements, actions, and spaces. Chapter 2 traces the history and contours of a new feminist organizational logic, identifying, through examples of protest actions of varying scales, the relationship between contemporary feminists' political visions and their networked mobilization tactics. Then, against the backdrop of this broad sketch, Chapters 3 and 4 draw offer more detailed looks at how feminists put this organizational logic into practice to launch networked visibility campaigns and build networked community safe spaces. Each chapter focuses on a particular dimension of networked feminist activism: networked feminist organizing, networked feminist visibility, and networked feminist communities. These three categories are not mutually exclusive; an organizing team or a protest event can, for example, feel like a community. But they represent longstanding core objectives of U.S.

feminism, the pursuit of which has shifted alongside activists' turn toward highly mediated modes of collective action and away from formally structured organizations. Together, these three empirical chapters tell the story of the rise of *do-it-ourselves feminism*, the possibilities and challenges this activist media praxis opens up, and the strategies feminists are using to navigate both.

The next chapter begins to unpack the question at the heart of this project: how are U.S. feminists using media to craft an activist praxis that reflects their values *and* responds to the challenges of today's political context? Drawing on two case studies of contemporary feminist protest — Philadelphia's March to End Rape Culture and the Women's March movement — Chapter 2 identifies do-it-ourselves feminism as the emergent organizational logic underpinning networked feminist actions, from local, grassroots initiatives to global waves of protest. The chapter begins with a historical overview of feminism's status within the U.S. and the role media — both mainstream commercial media and activist-produced media — have played in its many rises and falls. I argue that networked feminism grows out of three interrelated histories: 1) the long tradition of feminist media activism in the U.S., 2) the need to redevelop collective politics in the wake of neoliberalism, and 3) the intersectional critique of second-wave feminist organizing tactics. Then, through a comparative study of MTERC and WMOW grounded in data from ethnographic and textual analyses, I describe the key features, strengths, and shortcomings of the do-it-ourselves feminist logic that characterizes both protests. Citing examples from each, I describe DIOF as an everyday political praxis that draws on the media tools we use on a daily basis to make visible the ways in which power operates throughout individuals' personal lives, updating the 1960s feminist

mantra, *the personal is political*, for the twenty-first century. Given its everyday qualities, DIOF is also accessible and participatory, enabling more intersectional and inclusive feminist protests and communities. These same features, however, leave DIOF precarious, as networked feminism's personalizability and accessibility leave it vulnerable to activist burnout, internal discord, commercial cooptation, and anti-feminist backlash. Even so, DIOF is a reflexive praxis built around intersectionality theory's emphasis on self-critique and its practitioners are constantly working to grow and strengthen their organizing tactics as new obstacles become apparent. Although networked activist tactics can be found in other social movements, I argue that DIOF represents a distinctly *feminist* form of networked activism, that not only emerges from a unique feminist history, but also reflects a specific set of feminist values and responds to the particular opportunities and challenges facing feminists in the current sociopolitical context.

Following this general overview of do-it-ourselves feminism, Chapters 3 and 4 trace how activists take up this feminist praxis in pursuit of different movement goals. In particular, I examine how feminists are using media to bring visibility to personal experiences of oppression and to cultivate safe, inclusive spaces while navigating the challenges of the current context and the structural constraints of media platforms, all without the capacities or resources of formal organizations. Visibility and community have been key goals of U.S. feminist movements for decades but the double entanglements of networked activism — the mix of affordances and limitations of highly mediated protest tactics — raise new questions for today's activists. Both chapters address two: what strategies do feminists use to navigate the double-edged nature of

networked activism? And how does the current generation of feminist activists imagine the role networked media play in political liberation?

Chapter 3 focuses on a feminist protest tactic that, though it has roots in the street protests and speak-outs of previous “waves” of U.S. feminism, has become a central component of the contemporary feminist repertoire — *networked visibility campaigns*, or digitally networked protest actions aimed at drawing attention to a particular issue. These campaigns can take many forms, but hashtag feminism, a mass mobilization tactic for gender justice that unfolds through Twitter hashtags, is an especially widely practiced form of networked visibility. Taking up a recent and highly visible campaign — the global #MeToo movement against sexual assault and harassment — this chapter considers practitioners’ perspectives on hashtag feminism and highlights the processes through which activists develop their tactics within the social and technological constraints of both the current context and the Twitter platform. While much discourse about online activism revolves around whether or not digital media are effective tools for creating social change, I work from the assumption that both sides of the “techno-optimist” versus “techno-pessimist” debate may be telling one part of a larger story about the possibilities and limitations of networked protest. I approach digital media as political practices rather than tools, so as to bring the contradictions of networked activism and the strategies practitioners use to navigate them into view. Through an analysis of a large sample of hashtagged meta-tweets, or tweets about the #MeToo campaign, I argue that hashtag feminism is a contentious performance through which activists make the personal political by making it visible, bridging the individual with the collective and illustrating the systemic nature of social injustice. But making the personal visible on a globally

networked media stage opens activists up to a variety of negative consequences, including re-traumatization, backlash, and the erasure of those whose stories may not fit the ideal victim narrative. To compensate for these limitations while also taking advantage of hashtag feminism's affordances, #MeToo participants developed *performance maintenance strategies*, through which they evaluated the campaign's shortcomings and advanced solutions informed by their goals and values. Their reflexivity points toward hashtag feminism as a complex, interactional, recursive process aimed at achieving a transformative politics of visibility.

While Chapter 3 focuses on public-facing protest actions, in Chapter 4, I turn my attention toward feminists' practices for building *networked safe space communities*, or carefully bounded, inward-facing communities, fostered through the technological and social affordances of digital media and closed off from the misogynistic harassment that plagues other online spaces. Networked safe spaces do not fit traditional definitions of "activism" or "protest," which frame political engagement as highly visible, state-targeted public performances. In this chapter, however, I apply the media-as-practice approach to three case studies — a secret feminist Facebook group, the feminist zine community, and a feminist grassroots collective — to identify the connections between feminists' goals and their mediated community-building tactics and illuminate the distinctly political work networked safe spaces perform. More specifically, I argue that feminists in each site use media to construct community boundaries that prioritize marginalized voices and foster open expression among members, who otherwise lack safe outlets to share their experiences of oppression. Rather than mobilizing viral protest actions that spread across the globe, these activists aim to produce counterpublic spheres

that draw like-minded activists inwards, together, where they can create communities that prefigure the kind of society they seek to bring about. In the process, they challenge conventional notions of what “counts” as political work and model alternative, more empowering modes of social engagement that are instructive for any community space, online or off.

Lastly, in the final chapter, I review the core findings of this project and turn toward the implications of feminists’ media practices and politics for the study of social movements and new media and for the practice of networked activism.

CHAPTER 2 – “We’ll just keep doing it ourselves.” Networked Feminist Organizing: Crafting an Activist Praxis

In the weeks leading up to the 2017 Women's March on Philadelphia, one of a staggering 673 sister marches planned around the world to demand support for women's rights on President Donald Trump's first day in office (Women's March on Washington, 2017b), organizers predicted that approximately 20,000 people would join the Center City protest (6abc, 2017). When I arrived at Logan Square on the morning of January 21 and waded into a sea of picket signs and pink pussyhats bottlenecking slowly toward the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, it quickly became apparent that our numbers were much bigger, too big even to truly march down the half-mile strip between City Hall and the Art Museum. Local news outlets later reported that some 50,000 people from the Philadelphia area and beyond inched, shoulder-to-shoulder, down the Parkway over the course of the afternoon (6abc, 2017).

By all accounts, Election Day had been dark one for U.S. feminism. Hillary Clinton, the first woman candidate for president nominated by a major party, a lifelong public servant, and a fervent supporter of women's rights, had lost to Trump, a businessman who had never held office and who ran a campaign that so frequently degraded or threatened women, people of color, queer communities, immigrants, people with disabilities, Muslims, and others. But the mood that morning on the Parkway was one of jubilant defiance. A dozen women and girls led the procession to the rhythm of drums, keeping spirits high even as the temperature dropped and the massive protest occasionally ground to a halt. Nearby, a portable Bluetooth speaker belted out Beyoncé at one moment, Aretha Franklin at another. In a different section of the crowd, call-and-response chants let passersby and news media know that “This is what democracy looks

like!” Still elsewhere, a group of protesters from a local synagogue directed a makeshift choir to the familiar tune of “This Little Light of Mine,” improvising lyrics for the occasion: “all the way to the White House, I’m gonna let it shine. All the way to Trump Tower, I’m gonna let it shine...” And while birds-eye photos shared on social media platforms would depict the protest as a single, pink-spotted mass moving in unison, on the ground, individual protesters represented a multiplicity of personal identities, experiences, and concerns. Their colorful posters addressed reproductive justice, sexual violence, immigrants’ rights, LGBTQIA rights, Islamophobia, white supremacy, ableism, climate change, public education, affordable healthcare, and voter suppression, among other issues. Commentators and activists had and would continue to critique the inclusivity of the global protest movement, particularly the original Women’s March on Washington’s emphasis on white, cisgender women throughout its early stages of development (Stockman, 2017). In Philadelphia, however, *intersectionality* emerged as a key organizing principle among protesters (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). Their signs and chants pointed toward capacious definitions of womanhood, women’s rights, and women’s issues that captured personal experiences of gender and gender-based injustices across the overlapping axes of race, sexuality, class, faith, and ability. One protester’s sign articulated in rainbow-colored marker what Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), founding theorist of intersectionality, calls the “multidimensionality” (p. 139) of gender: “I am black, Latina, LGBT, Muslim, Jew, all of these and WOMAN, too!” The Women’s March on Philadelphia, and the hundreds of local protests like it expressed a collective message of dissent from a broad spectrum of subject positions that grew into the single largest demonstration in U.S. history (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017).

Eight months after the Women's March, on September 30, 2017, I joined a decidedly smaller crowd of several hundred people, who had converged on Thomas Paine Plaza in Center City to participate in Philadelphia's seventh annual March to End Rape Culture (MTERC), formerly known as SlutWalk Philadelphia. MTERC protesters took over the streets surrounding City Hall, waving signs and chanting loudly, their unified voices breaking into laughter at one corner and erupting with righteous indignation at another. Picket signs and banners, ranging dramatically from hilarious to heartbreaking, called out a myriad of issues: sexual violence, sexual consent, intimate partner violence, victim-blaming, street harassment, homophobia, transphobia, racism, police brutality, slut-shaming, fat-shaming, reproductive health rights, restrictive gender roles, the erasure of male survivors, the concept of "friend-zoning," sexist media, and more.

While protestors marched for two and a half miles under these seemingly disparate rally cries, volunteers gave bystanders postcards that defined the umbrella term under which their grievances fell: "Rape culture is a term used to describe a culture in which sexual violence is accepted as a part of everyday life." Marching under this broad framework, protesters held signs that told stories of surviving a range of violent experiences, from sexual harassment to sexual assault. For some, the violence was emotional or psychological, as in the case of protestors demanding an end to shaming people on the basis of their sexuality, gender identity, or body type. In most cases, the violence was doubly inflicted, once by the perpetrator – the rapist or the harasser – and then again by the discourses that enable the violence to persist – the mainstream media tropes or the ineffectual legislation. With a sense of painful irony, we witnessed this

system manifest itself as a group of men seated at a sidewalk cafe catcalled protestors who had chosen to wear little clothing to declare their right to move safely through public space without facing harassment or assault regardless of their appearance or state of dress. An organizer on a bullhorn led our response: “Wherever we go, however we dress, ‘no’ means no and ‘yes’ means yes!” Following the march, protestors reassembled in the plaza and speakers connected sexual violence to the rights of transgender people, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, and the homeless, *and* to the Black Lives Matter Movement, labor movements, movements for the decriminalization of sex work, and movements against mass incarceration. This intersecting system of violence represented collectively through protestors’ signs, chants, speeches, and bodies constituted what MTERC organizers call “rape culture.”

These two protest events vary drastically in scale. The record-breaking turnout for Women’s Marches held across the globe stands in sharp contrast to the small but mighty crowd that gathers annually for Philly’s March to End Rape Culture. They share, however, what social movement scholars have termed a common *organizational logic* (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), a similar methodological approach for organizing and mobilizing collective action that sets them apart from previous generations of feminists in the U.S.

Both the Women’s March and the SlutWalk movement, of which MTERC is a critical offshoot, have inevitably drawn comparisons to the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Dow & Wood, 2014; Hess, 2017a). Like this earlier “wave” of U.S. feminist activism, both protest events emphasize that *the personal*

is political, that structures of power circumscribe individual actions and experiences, that seemingly private concerns and situations are symptomatic of systemic injustices (Butler, 1988; Hanisch, 1969). And, like their foremothers, the protesters at both marches must have been galvanized in part by the notion that the inverse is also true, that individual actions can reshape configurations of power, that choosing to protest could rewrite the scripts that marginalize some bodies while privileging others (Butler, 1988).

But *unlike* the protests of previous generations, neither the Women's March nor the March to End Rape Culture emerged from the political vision of a formally structured organization or a high-profile feminist leader. Their global and local expressions of dissent were not fueled by the membership or finances of a nonprofit like the National Organization for Women (NOW), nor were they spearheaded by luminaries the likes of Gloria Steinem or Angela Davis, though all three 1960s icons made appearances at the Women's March on Washington. Instead, both protests stemmed from the digital media practices and the resilient creativity of dispersed networks of activists who, working with little or no institutional resources, sought to transform intersecting systems of oppression equally as diffuse and persistent as their support bases. It was a Facebook event organized by one person that ultimately led an estimated *five million people* to take to the streets worldwide the day after Trump's inauguration and take a stand against the hatred and bigotry that defined his campaign (Stein & Somashekhar, 2017). Meanwhile, a crew of about ten stalwart volunteers operating on their spare time, crowdsourced funds, and digital media savvy alone launch MTERC every year to protest sexual violence and the sociocultural norms that enable it. Both movements are self-starting, extra-institutional,

participatory, and above all, mediated and networked, tactically appropriating the technological and social affordances of digital media platforms for their own purposes.

I call this new organizational logic *do-it-ourselves feminism* (DIOF), an activist praxis that draws on digital media tools to mobilize protests and build communities from the ground up that, in process and product, reflect feminists' values. In naming this praxis, I am borrowing from the language of MTERC organizers who participate in and draw resources from the "DIY community" in Philly, the city's underground arts and music scene, which thrives on offbeat venues, independent bookers and outlets, and an economy of sliding-scale admissions fees and handmade goods (Lingel, 2017; Silberling, 2015). Despite their contrasting sizes, the same emphasis on creativity, collectivity, resourcefulness, and freedom from institutional restraints characterizes the organizational logic behind both the Women's March and MTERC. Throughout this study, I use the term "do-it-ourselves" feminism to describe contemporary feminist praxis because, unlike "DIY" feminism (Bail, 1996) or "do-it-together" feminism (Mann, 2014, p. 23), "doing it ourselves" captures the collective, though not always communal or collaborative, nature of feminist media activism; DIO feminism includes both the collaborative work of organizing a feminist protest and the individually produced but collectively networked expressions of feminist discourse on social media. And, whereas *do-it-yourself* modes of civic and cultural engagement have been critiqued for their complicity in the neoliberal restructuring of social welfare and the marketplace value of individualism (Dawkins, 2011; Lee, 2014; Luvaas, 2012), *do-it-ourselves* feminism is a distinctly collective praxis, committed to the revitalization of collective feminist politics.

But these two protest events are not the only examples of do-it-ourselves feminism; rather, the turn toward DIOF constitutes a major paradigm shift for contemporary U.S. feminism in general. Reflecting the broader digital reconfiguration of social and political life (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2011; boyd, 2008; Friedland, Hove, & Rojas, 2006; Tufekci, 2017), social media platforms, rather than formal and informal associations, organizations, and institutions, have become the building blocks of feminist movements in the twenty-first century. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. feminist movements unfolded within a web of closely tied, highly structured organizations like NOW, the Women's Equity Action League, and the National Women's Political Caucus, alongside more radical but still formally structured groups like the New York Radical Women and the Redstockings (Reger, 2012). Over the past decade, however, as scholars have documented since the earliest days of Web 2.0, *networked feminism*, from the feminist blogosphere to hashtag feminism, has outpaced movement organizations and institutional politics. With access to wide audiences just a few keyboard strokes away, feminist social media users have mobilized direct action campaigns and sparked transnational movements, despite lacking infrastructural support and despite, as in the case of the Women's March, initially acting alone.

In 2017, for example, it was *not* feminist nonprofits or lobbyists, but feminists' networked activism and media campaigns, like the Women's March and #MeToo, that led dozens of news outlets and commentators to dub the first year of Trump's presidency "The Year of Women," despite the misogyny, racism, heterosexism, and xenophobia at the heart of this administration's policies and rhetoric (e.g., Dvorak, 2017; Epstein, 2017; Grady, 2017; Jain, 2017; Shamus, 2017). The global protest events that marked "The

Year of Women” were only the latest in a new tradition of viral feminist media activism, including SlutWalk and hashtag campaigns like #YesAllWomen, #WhyIStayed, #NotBuyingIt, and #SayHerName, among others. As these examples suggest, networked feminism campaigns vary widely in form — from Twitter hashtags to street protests — and content — from liberal critiques to more radical demands for social and political transformations. They share, however, a common *do-it-ourselves* ethos, a central orientation toward rebellious, bottom-up cultural production fostered through the participatory nature of digital media networks. Their tenacity and ingenuity have reenergized feminist politics precisely at a moment when women’s rights and the rights of marginalized communities are under siege in the U.S.

This chapter offers an in-depth exploration of do-it-ourselves feminism as an emerging organizational paradigm for contemporary U.S. feminism. First, citing existing research on both feminist media activism and feminist movements’ relationship with media, I map the history of feminism’s status within the U.S. since the end of the second wave and the role media have played in its ebbs and flows. Through this history, I consider why and how networked feminism has emerged at this moment in time and, in the process, establish the context for the study as a whole. One contribution of this chapter is to provide an overview of the development of networked feminism over time through a synthesis of feminist media studies scholarship, a history that is otherwise missing from existing research. Then, taking a case study approach grounded in three years of ethnographic fieldwork with the MTERC organizing team and media associated with the Women’s March, I identify the key features, strengths, and shortcomings of the organizational logic underlying networked feminism — do-it-ourselves feminism. In

doing so, I begin to unpack the question at the heart of this project: how are U.S. feminists using media to craft an activist praxis that reflects their values *and* responds to the challenges of today's political context?

While scholars have documented a similar shift from away from formally structured organizations and toward networked activism within other social movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), I argue that do-it-ourselves feminism represents a distinctly *feminist* form of networked activism that emerges from a unique feminist history, set of feminist values, and political and social context.

DIOF is the latest iteration in a rich history of U.S. feminist media-making stretching back to the 1960s underground press; its digitally networked and mediated nature reflects U.S. feminists' historical emphasis on *discourse* — everyday language and personal expressions — as a site of power.

Though rooted in this long lineage of feminist media activism, do-it-ourselves feminists' extra-institutional activism also offers both a contemporary feminist critique and response to the exclusionary organizational logic of the second-wave generation. Whereas 1960s-era feminism often centered the voices of white, middle-class women who had the capital necessary to build and participate in formal organizations (Reger, 2012), the current generation's intersectional values conflict with the structural inequities and gatekeeping functions baked into bureaucracies. Instead, they craft and share their own dissident expressions through free or cheap media platforms, which not only grant immediate access to broad audiences, but enable a greater diversity of activists to mobilize and participate in campaigns.

Lastly, DIOF faces a range of obstacles, from movement sustainability to activist burn-out, that plague most all networked activist movements, but digitally networked *feminist* movements also face a particular set of challenges and shortcomings. Despite decades of backlash and the reality of the current administration, this generation of media-savvy feminists has created a moment in which feminist ideas, rhetoric, and figures are not only highly visible but *celebrated* within U.S. popular culture. With this popularization, however, has come the rise of neoliberal “marketplace feminism” (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991; Zeisler, 2016), in which feminist personal politics are coopted and commodified to support the capitalist ideals of consumption and individualism. Worse still, what commentators have heralded as today’s “feminist zeitgeist” (Banet-Weiser, 2015b; Valenti, 2014a) has triggered in equal measure a violent anti-feminist backlash, whose proponents make use of the same digital platforms and tools that have fueled this new wave of feminist activism and discourse (Banet-Weiser, 2015b, 2018b; Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016). To borrow McRobbie’s (2004) phrasing, today, digital media are “doubly entangled” in both the “undoing” (p. 255) and “redoing” (Baer, 2016, p. 19) of feminism, leaving do-it-ourselves feminists to juggle both the affordances and shortcomings of networked activism.

Given the complexities of this critical juncture, where feminism is both reinvigorated yet precarious, Gill (2016) argues that it is necessary “to unpick and disentangle the profoundly uneven visibilities of different feminisms in media culture” (p. 615), to highlight the possibilities for resistance feminist activists are seizing despite the challenges they face. Existing scholarship has yielded a thorough record of feminist media campaigns and outcomes, but there remains a need to theorize contemporary

feminists' media *praxis*, or the relationship between their political ideals and their networked media tactics (Couldry, 2012, 2010; Postill, 2010; Williams, 1977). Drawing on theories of power and resistance (Collins, 2000; de Certeau, 1984; Foucault, 1991), this chapter highlights DIOF as a political media praxis informed by contemporary feminists' ideals, goals, needs, resources, and context. The chapters that follow this one offer case studies of how feminists put this praxis into action to mobilize networked visibility campaigns and build networked communities, all while navigating the double entanglements of media platforms and tools.

Literature Review

Feminisms Across the U.S. Media Landscape

As Gill's (2016) phrasing suggests, the current media culture is marked by a plurality of feminisms. A convergence of often contradictory discourses has swirled around the concept of feminism across U.S. media over the past several decades, creating a complicated social and political backdrop for feminist media activists. In this section, I "disentangle" (Gill, 2016, p. 615) this complex web by mapping out a series of four feminist media histories, each of which overlap with and feed into one another, through a review of existing feminist media studies scholarship. Together, they recount how feminism's status within the U.S. has shifted since the rise and fall of second-wave feminism and the role media, including both mainstream commercial media and activist-produced media, have played in this process. In turn, they also tell the story of networked feminism's rise and historicize contemporary feminists' media practices and organizing logic. While a growing body of scholarship offers case studies of individual networked feminist campaigns, less clear is *why* this highly mediated organizing logic has emerged at this particular point in time. Pushing beyond overly simplistic techno-deterministic

narratives, I argue that U.S. feminists' turn toward networked activism and away from highly structured organizations cannot be explained through the availability of digital media tools alone. Rather, their practices stem from a precarious sociopolitical context for feminist discourse, a desire to reimagine a more intersectional feminist politics, and a long tradition of feminist media-making. This history lays the groundwork necessary to theorize the *do-it-ourselves* praxis that undergirds networked feminism today and establishes key context for the following chapters.

Media and the Undoing of Feminism

Starting in the mid- to late 1980s, feminism took on a precarious position in the U.S., and commercial media representations of women in general and feminists in particular were partly to blame. The activism of feminists throughout the 1960s and 1970s had fundamentally altered the social, political, and economic fabric of society, troubling patriarchal norms and creating new possibilities for women in the workplace, in the home, and in the public sphere. Following this period of revolutionary change, however, a "postfeminist sensibility" (Gill, 2007, p. 5) flooded U.S. media, declaring feminist movements as unnecessary, undesirable and out of touch with young women's lives (McRobbie, 2004). Some scholars have pointed to the 1980s rise of the Religious Right's conservative "family values" platform under Ronald Reagan and described this era as a concerted backlash aimed at undermining feminist legislative and cultural achievements (Faludi, 1992; Whelehan, 2000). But while the backlash thesis tells a compelling narrative of America's political pendulum swinging from left to right, theorists of postfeminist media culture argue that the reality was not so straightforward. The postfeminist sensibility did not offer a flat-out rejection of feminism. Rather,

postfeminism, McRobbie (2004) argues, selectively took *some* feminist ideas and values “into account” (p. 255) as common-sensical thinking, while simultaneously dismissing feminist politics. As Gill (2007) puts it, within postfeminist culture, “Feminist ideas are at the same time articulated and repudiated, expressed and disavowed” (p. 163).

The postfeminist sensibility, loaded with ambivalence and contradictions and normalized into hegemonic status, was far more pernicious and complex than an outright backlash. Much like the feminist underground press publications of the 1960s and 1970s described in the Introduction, according to Tasker and Negra (2007), *postfeminist* media texts produced throughout the 1990s and early 2000s emphasized “educational and professional opportunities for women and girls; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; and physical and particularly sexual empowerment” (p. 2). At the same time, however, these texts suggested that feminism had already achieved these goals, that those who continued to perform feminist activism were extremists, and that participation in feminist politics deprived women of some essential feminine fulfillment in the domestic sphere. As McRobbie argues (2004), postfeminism engages in a “double entanglement” with both neoconservative values and the liberalization of choice in domestic relationships and professional aspirations.

This double entanglement, according to Gill (2007), “turns the idea of the personal-as-political on its head” (p. 153) and reduces the political to the personal. Rather than drawing connections between personal experiences and political inequities, as second-wave feminists had worked to do, the postfeminist “grammar of individualism” (Gill, 2007, p. 153) reframed political inequities in exclusively privatized terms, recast empowerment as a personal responsibility, and refracted all aspects of life through the

lens of individual choice and self-determination. Evidenced most clearly in the “makeover paradigm” (Gill, 2007, p. 156) that dominated television throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the ideal postfeminist subject achieved empowerment through self-surveillance, self-discipline, and self-improvement via participation in consumer culture, *not* collective action. To put it differently, the postfeminist sensibility refused to acknowledge the role systems of power like sexism or racism play in shaping individuals’ personal lives, instead positioning “women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or imbalances whatsoever” (Gill, 2007, p. 153). With structural inequities erased from view and empowerment framed as a matter of choice, the collective politics of a social movement were no longer necessary. The result was a generation of women who, by some accounts, refused to identify as feminists, even as they acknowledged their debts to past feminist movements and the persistence of gendered inequities (Scharff, 2012). Postfeminism’s double entanglements left feminism to exist, in Jo Reger’s (2012) words, “everywhere but nowhere,” a distilled version of feminist ideas and identities “diffused into the culture and structure of society” (p. 3) but without the collective politics of a social movement.

The 1980s shift within U.S. media culture toward the postfeminist sensibility of empowerment through self-determination was rooted in a parallel turn toward *neoliberalism* (Baer, 2016; Gill, 2007; Gill & Scharff, 2011). Neoliberalism is a political and economic philosophy that rejects the social welfare model of governance, favors free-market capitalism, and pursues policies that deregulate corporations, privatize public goods, and encourage competition in open markets (Harvey, 2007; Marwick, 2013). Neoliberal economic policies rose to prominence throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when

politicians like Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Bill Clinton advocated for a completely deregulated global market society, inspired by the laissez-faire ideology of the Chicago School of economists (Harvey, 2007; Marwick, 2013). But neoliberalism extended far beyond specific economic policies to, in David Harvey's (2005) words, "become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (p. 3). Neoliberalism's individualistic market logic infiltrated everyday life, becoming "a form of governmentality," a "technique that determines the strategies available for people to use in interpersonal relationships and self-expression" (Marwick, 2014, p. 12). Citing Foucault, Alice Marwick argues that neoliberal governance unfolds *not* through top-down regulation, but through the creation and popularization of "technologies of the self" (p. 13), from therapy and self-help books to fitness tracking devices and personal social media profiles, that encourage voluntary self-regulation in accordance with marketplace ideals. Neoliberal discourse constructs the myth of the rational and self-interested economic actor with complete control over and, in turn, responsibility for her own life (Phipps, 2014). In this formula, structural inequalities are reconstructed as personal shortcomings that can be resolved through self-discipline. As Alison Phipps (2014) explains, within the neoliberal framework, "Success is measured by individuals' capacity for self-care via the market, and those who do not achieve their potential are viewed as failures rather than as victims of oppressive social structures" (n.p.). Neoliberalism, in other words, privileges private, corporate solutions to social and structural problems, obfuscating systems of power and, consequently, making social movements seem obsolete.

While neoliberal discourse and policies pose major obstacles for any downwardly redistributive social movement, there exists an especially powerful resonance between postfeminism and neoliberalism (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Both emphasize individualism, choice, and agency at the expense of vocabularies for talking about social welfare, structural inequities, and collective politics (Gill, 2007; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Harvey, 2007; Marwick, 2013; McRobbie, 2004, 2008; Phipps, 2014; Tasker and Negra, 2007). And, in each case, *media* play a major role in the individualization of collective politics and action; both require media representations that reify their discourses of self-responsibility and willing subjects who practice self-governance through the countless technologies of the self available in the marketplace (Gill, 2007; Marwick, 2013; McRobbie, 2004, 2008; Ouellette, 2008).

Feminist scholars have accounted for the relationship between neoliberalism and postfeminism in two ways.

Some argue that the postfeminist sensibility is part and parcel of neoliberalism (Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2009). To a much greater extent than men, neoliberal media texts call on women to regulate and transform the self. For these scholars, “neoliberalism is always already gendered” and “women are constructed as its ideal subjects” (Gill, 2008, p. 164).

But others have also questioned whether the second-wave values of personal empowerment and economic mobility for women left U.S. feminism ripe for neoliberal cooptation. Writing for *The Guardian* in 2013, Nancy Fraser observed that, “In a cruel twist of fate, the movement for women’s liberation has become entangled in a dangerous liaison with neoliberal efforts to build a free-market society.” U.S. feminism has, in

Fraser's words, become "capitalism's handmaiden," its Civil Rights Era emphasis on "the personal as political" coopted and corrupted to support a "liberal-individualist scenario." To make matters worse, Fraser argues, feminists have done this to themselves, pushing a platform focused on identity politics that dovetailed all too nicely with neoliberalism's focus on individual freedoms, self-empowerment, and personal responsibility at the cost of collective rights, coalitional solidarity, direct action, and structural analyses of power. Others have turned a similarly critical eye onto feminist theory, questioning whether academic feminism compounded neoliberalism's depoliticization of feminist rhetoric and ideas to produce the postfeminist sensibility. McRobbie (2004) argues that neoliberalism's selective cooptation of feminist ideas was enabled in part by feminist theory's "dismantling of itself" (p. 20) throughout the 1990s in response to debates surrounding the field's claims to represent women's experiences. This dismantling was an important political project; postcolonial and critical race scholars led the field toward more reflexive feminist knowledge projects that troubled essentializing notions of womanhood and instead sought to develop contextual understandings of power, subjectivity, and the body. But this shift toward locating oppression and, in turn, resistance in more dispersed sites, such as everyday discourse and individual performances, rather than universal phenomena fit neatly within the neoliberal narrative of personal choice and individualism. Feminist theory's new emphasis on subjectivity combined with second-wave identity politics left feminist movements especially vulnerable to neoliberal cooptation.

From the 1980s through the early 2000s, the parallel rise of postfeminism and neoliberalism pushed a flattened, one-dimensional, individualistic understanding of

agency into hegemonic status, erasing from view the systems of power that structure everyday life and making collective action seem unnecessary. Theorists of postfeminism describe this era as an impasse for feminist activists; late capitalism had so artfully adapted to the diffusion of feminist values and rhetoric that the possibility for widespread social, political, and cultural transformations informed by feminist politics appeared increasingly improbable. In step with the rise of neoliberal philosophy since the 1980s, the Left in the U.S. has witnessed a systematic retraction of the policy gains of previous generations, along with the decline of radical collectives, presses, publications, and bookstores, and with them, their progressive ideals (Eichhorn, 2014). Combined with growing internal discord over the marginalization of women of color, queer women, and working-class women within feminist movements, these conditions made feminist work especially precarious (Reger, 2012).

This, McRobbie (2004) argues, was the “undoing of feminism” (p. 255).

Media and the Popularization of Feminism

But, by the mid-2010s, the tide of popular culture shifted. In the words of Andi Zeisler (2016), founder of feminist outlet *Bitch Media*, “feminism got *cool*” (p. x). Across the U.S. media landscape, the repudiation of the postfeminist sensibility gave way to *celebration*, and a new era of “popular feminism” began (Banet-Weiser, 2015b, 2018a, 2018b).

The shift from postfeminism to popular feminism reached a fever pitch in August 2014. More than eight million viewers watched Beyoncé close out the MTV Video Music Awards while standing defiantly in front of a giant screen emblazoned with the word “FEMINIST.” Her girl power anthem “Flawless,” which samples a recording of Nigerian

author Chimimanda Ngozi Adichie paraphrasing a dictionary definition of “feminism,” blared in the background. But while she created a breathtaking moment in feminist media history, Beyoncé was not the only celebrity aligning herself with the feminist label. A number of other stars “came out” as feminists, including Miley Cyrus, Lady Gaga, Lorde, Lena Dunham, Ellen Page, Emma Watson, and even Taylor Swift, who had previously distanced herself from the “f-word,” and media outlets began curating lists of “top” celebrity feminists.

This “celebrity feminism” emerged against the backdrop of an undeniably feminist “moment” in U.S. media. 2013 and 2014 saw the rise of “hashtag feminism” through some of the first feminist hashtag campaigns, including #YesAllWomen, #NotYourAsianSidekick, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, #WhyIStayed, #BringBackOurGirls, #YouOkSis, and #RapeCultureIsWhen, among others. During those same years, feminist nonprofit The Representation Project launched the #NotBuyingIt campaign and mobile app, inviting Super Bowl viewers to take to Twitter, call out the big game’s traditionally sexist commercials, and harness the power of women consumers through threats of brand boycotts (Clark, 2014). Their efforts went viral, ushering in a new era of what commentators have alternatively referred to as “femvertising,” “empowertising,” or “go-girl marketing” (Ciambriello, 2014; Zeisler, 2016; Zmuda & Diaz, 2014). In 2015, women’s lifestyle company SheKnows Media launched their annual Femvertising Awards and, from Always feminine hygiene products to Bud Light beer, socially conscious advertisements featuring positive representations of women and girls breaking down gender roles and barriers became the new norm (SheKnows Media, 2018). Meanwhile, successful female entrepreneurs, like Facebook

Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg and Nasty Gal founder Sophia Amoruso, penned best-selling feminist books, drawing on their own life experiences to advise women on how to *Lean In* and become a *#Girlboss*. And while gender gaps still plagued the television and film industries, these years also brought an increase in the presence of trans women in popular culture through television series like *Transparent*, *Orange is the New Black*, and *I am Cait* and the activism of celebrity actors and advocates like Laverne Cox and Janet Mock. Feminist ideas and rhetoric popped up in even the most unexpected places. Women's magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, and *InStyle*, shifted away from the genre's traditional representations of gender and sexuality and started running feminist content (Groetzinger, 2016). Even *Playboy*, the men's "lifestyle" magazine known for its pornographic centerfolds and long derided by feminists, (temporarily) stopped printing nude photos and began publishing stories with headlines like, "You Can't Have Feminist Liberation Without Choice."

These are just a fraction of the media sites, figures, products, and trends that have explicitly embraced feminism in recent years. By 2017, Merriam-Webster declared "feminism" its "Word of the Year," citing the Women's March and the #MeToo movement alongside film and television offerings like the *Wonder Woman* reboot and *The Handmaid's Tale* as evidence for the term's comeback. Suddenly, in a clear reversal of Reger's (2012) prognosis, feminism, with a big, capital "F," was *everywhere*, loud, proud, and clear-as-day.

It is difficult to isolate any one variable that triggered feminism's ascent in U.S. media culture. But while the exact cause of feminism's popularization remains unknown, as feminist blogger Jessica Valenti (2014a) argues, one thing is for certain: "The zeitgeist

is irrefutably feminist.” We are living in a moment that Banet-Weiser and Laura Portwood-Stacer (2017) describe as “decidedly not postfeminist” (p. 886). Rather than casting feminism as unnecessary or outmoded, advertisers, celebrities, and corporate leaders have explicitly adopted the feminist label and its associated rhetoric of empowerment. In a dramatic shift from the “backlash media” (Faludi, 1991, p. 94) of the postfeminist era, the current media landscape has given feminism a “new luminosity in popular culture” (Gill, 2016, p. 614). As Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017) put it, “For us as feminist media scholars, feminism has always been a useful lens through which to *understand* popular culture. However, we are now living in a moment when feminism has undeniably *become* popular culture” (p. 884).

Media and the Traffic in Feminism

The popularization of feminism through its commercial and digital media diffusion has made feminism accessible and even admired, a remarkable feat when compared with the postfeminist sensibility that infused media markets in the 1990s and early 2000s. Feminism’s unprecedented degree of visibility has offered gender justice activists a variety of new political opportunities and affordances, as feminist ideas and rhetoric diffuse through mainstream media outlets and reach wider audiences than ever before.

Feminism’s hypervisibility, however, has also created new challenges for feminist activists. Like the postfeminist sensibility, popular feminism has become doubly entangled in both the resurgence and the undermining of feminist collective politics.

For one, popular feminism’s emphases on identity, representation, and empowerment are easily coopted and commodified to support neoliberal values. Banet-

Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017) argue that “the terrain of popular feminism is currently occupied in large part by the individualist-feminism of neoliberal consumer culture” (p. 884). The most popular forms of feminist media are inflected with a neoliberal discourse of self-improvement and individual choice; from the inspirational self-care messages that circulate on social media to feminist-branded clothing to the girl power marketing of femvertisements, popular feminism often celebrates feminism in name only while simultaneously upholding marketplace values. Zeisler (2016) argues that these manifestations of popular feminism, however alluring they may be for activists who could once only imagine a culture that celebrates feminism, are merely “facsimiles” of feminist “ideas, objects, and narratives that are, on closer inspection, almost exclusively about personal identity and consumption” (p. 74). This “marketplace feminism” (Zeisler, 2016, p. xiii) is necessarily decoupled from analyses of structural inequities, which would undermine the capitalist systems of exchange that enable it to exist. The most popular forms of feminism only go so far as to recognize that feminism is necessary and that inequities exists, but stop short of actually disrupting the systems of oppression that justify feminist politics in the first place, instead pointing to consumption and the marketplace as solutions to social injustices (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017). Drawing on Gayle Rubin’s (1997) analysis of the “traffic in women” within capitalism, Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017) refer to this phenomenon as the “traffic in feminism” (p. 886); just as capitalism depends upon and reproduces gendered oppression, today, capitalism depends upon and reproduces a particular version of feminism that supports individualist marketplace values. Popular feminism *enables* the gendered, racial, sexual, and economic oppressions that undergird capitalism by linking

empowerment with consumption and work on the self, masking persistent inequities, and creating the illusion that we live in a feminist society (Banet-Weiser, 2015b; Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017; Gill, 2016; Zeisler, 2016). The traffic in feminism produces and reproduces a more palatable, depoliticized version of feminist ideas and rhetoric, shoring up neoliberal ideologies and benefitting only those most privileged “feminists” — the celebrities, CEOs, and marketers — best positioned to profit from marketplace visibility (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017).

Second and relatedly, popular feminism’s linking of empowerment to consumption and choice implies that feminism is an individual enterprise, one open to interpretation and uncommitted to a particular political agenda. Perhaps nowhere does this dynamic play out more clearly than in the media frenzy over celebrity feminism. Entertainment media’s obsession with exposing which actors and pop artists identify as feminists and which do not has produced a full roster of celebrity activists. What being a “feminist” actually *means*, however, has gotten lost in the f-word’s recent surge in popularity, leaving feminism to be treated as a label rather than an action, a movement, or a set of values (Valenti, 2014b). This has opened the door for celebrities and politicians whose beliefs and platforms contradict basic feminist ideals, including Sarah Palin and Ivanka Trump, to brand themselves as feminists (Filipovic, 2017; Valenti, 2014b). Celebrity feminism and other forms of popular feminism make the movement more accessible to a broader base, offering what Roxane Gay (2014) has called a “gateway” to feminist politics for the otherwise uninitiated; the importance of these mainstream engagements with the rhetoric of social justice movements should not be discounted. However, when feminism is boiled down to a label, a sound bite, or a headline, it is left,

in Gill's (2016) words, "contentless" (p. 618), an identity that can be taken on or off like a trendy t-shirt, unencumbered by the weight of a specific set of politics or positions. As such, whether it takes the form of Beyoncé putting the word FEMINIST in lights on the VMA's stage or Super Bowl advertisers promoting girl power, popular feminism is not equipped to confront ongoing systemic inequities. Moreover, the large amount of media attention given to *identifying* as a feminist rather than *engaging* in feminism makes activism appear as easy as proclaiming yourself an activist. As discussed in Chapter 3, popular feminism operates within an "economy of visibility" (Banet-Weiser, 2015a, 2018a, 2018b), in which the representation of feminism in the marketplace, not feminist collective action, is positioned as the solution to structural imbalances of power.

Third and finally, popular feminism has been met in equal measure with "popular misogyny," a "misogynistic political and economic culture, where rape culture is normative, violent threats against women are validated, and rights of the body for women are either under threat or being formally retracted" (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016, p. 172). The hypervisibility of feminist cultures, Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) argue, has triggered an anti-feminist backlash, ushering in "a new era of the gender wars" (p. 171). Discussed at length in Chapter 4, this backlash is especially rampant on social media platforms, where women face high levels of sexual harassment, death and rape threats, and doxxing attacks (Duggan, 2017). The same digital platforms feminists have used to launch viral campaigns against sexual violence have also been complicit in the perpetuation of violent harassment against feminist activists, as misogynist and racist users often face few consequences for their actions. Offline, the backlash of popular misogyny has also taken the form of attacks on the policy gains of previous feminist

generations under the Trump administration, including access to safe abortions and reproductive healthcare, anti-domestic violence programs, and workplace discrimination laws (Planned Parenthood Action Fund, 2017). Despite the veneer of popular feminism, whose media takeover creates the perception that feminist values have won the day, women's rights and the rights of marginalized communities are have never been more at risk.

While we are living in a moment that is “decidedly not postfeminist” (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017, p. 886), the challenges popular feminism presents to activists are similar to those of postfeminism: neoliberal commodification and cooptation, depoliticized individualism, antifeminist backlash. There remains, however, a key difference between the postfeminist era and the current context of popular feminism. The undeniable commercial media market for explicitly feminist content combined with the sociotechnical affordances of digital media platforms have enabled feminist activists to mobilize highly visible campaigns, reach new audiences, amplify hitherto ignored voices, and build their own virtual communities, all with little or no resources. To be sure, to borrow Banet-Weiser's (2012) terminology from her work on branding, it is important that both scholars and activists remain critically aware of the “politics of ambivalence” (p. 211) that lurk beneath the surface of popular feminist media content. The hashtag campaign or girl-power advertisement might empower a user to express herself or introduce a young viewer to feminist ideas, but it also supports a capitalist system of exchange and marketplace individualism, exploitative ideologies that run counter to feminist collective politics. Within the “double entanglement” of ambivalence, however, lies a “generative potential” (p. 221), the possibility for creative resistance and subversive

meaning-making even as capitalist white male supremacy works to subsume it, a reason, I argue in the next section, to *hope*.

Media and the Redoing of Feminism

At the same time that the parallel forces of neoliberalism and postfeminism conspired to “undo” U.S. feminism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a new generation of feminist activists began making their own media to “redo” (Baer, 2016, p. 29) feminism for this precarious political climate. Whether in print or online, I refer to this emerging feminist media practice as *networked feminism* because its practitioners adapt the social and technical affordances of a particular medium to connect activists and assemble protest actions without the resources of a formally structured movement organization.

Their efforts were motivated by two factors.

The first involves the political climate. Following Couldry’s (2010, 2012) definition of *media as practice*, the origins of networked feminism emerged in part from the conventions, challenges, and needs of practitioners’ context. Just as the underrepresentation of second-wave politics and actions led Civil Rights-era feminists to develop a feminist underground press, this generation of feminists turned toward media to fill the void of discursive spaces for feminism in the U.S. in the wake of neoliberalism and to correct postfeminist media representations of feminism as unnecessary or outmoded.

The second, and more important, factor involves contemporary feminists’ political *values*.

Dissatisfied with the second wave's centering of white women, marginalization of women of color, and essentializing conceptualization of womanhood and women's condition, this generation of feminists drew on critiques authored by feminists of color to move toward more *intersectional* gender justice platforms. Writing in 1989, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* to capture the "multidimensionality" (p. 139) of gender and to critique the "single-axis framework" (p. 139) for interpreting identity and building movement communities. Intersectionality posits that gender, race, class, sexuality, and other identity categories are overlapping, mutually constitutive, and inseparable. Any one person's lived identity cannot be fully understood through the lens of one of these categories alone. Consequently, systems of oppression rooted in these identity categories also interlock and reinforce one another, creating what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) calls a "matrix of domination" (p. 18). An intersectional approach to analyzing privilege and oppression rejects one-dimensional views of power and instead aims to account for differences and inequities between and within groups. Intersectionality, however, is not just a theoretical tool for describing and analyzing oppression. Developed within the context of social justice struggles, intersectionality is an activist praxis for building inclusive movements (May, 2015). Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) theory of intersectionality directs feminists to evaluate and redress organizing practices (e.g., when and where meetings are held, who takes on leadership positions) and political visions (e.g., what problems and solutions are considered "feminist" ones, whose voices and concerns are prioritized) that collude with systems of oppression by excluding those who are of color, queer, and/or poor.

In the nearly thirty years since Crenshaw (1989) defined the term, intersectionality has become the “gold standard” (Nash, 2008, p. 2) within both academic disciplines and activist communities for analyzing oppression and practicing inclusive politics. Networked feminism, which unfolds through media campaigns rather than formally structured and thereby potentially exclusive organizations, offers a more inclusive, participatory mode of feminist organizing and protest (Brown, Ray, Summers, & Fraistat, 2017; Daniels, 2016; Kendall, 2013; Kuo, 2016; Loza, 2014; Rodino-Colocino, 2014; Tynes, Schuschke, & Noble, 2016).

What scholars have alternatively referred to as the “resurgence,” “reclaiming,” “renewing,” and even “rebranding” of feminism (Baer, 2015; Dean & Aune, 2015; Evans, 2015; Lewis & Marine, 2015; Payne, 2012; Thornham & Weissmann 2013) as an intersectional, modern, and sorely needed movement began quietly at first, tucked between the pages of young feminists’ handcrafted zines, before exploding into a vibrant web of feminist blogs, message boards, online communities, and more.

During the 1980s ascent of neoliberalism and decline of leftist politics, disaffected youth began building alternatives spaces that offered what Stephen Duncombe (2008) describes as “a way of understanding and acting in the world that operates with different rules and upon different values than those of consumer-capitalism” (p. 10). It is within this context that punk zines, descended from the science fiction “fanzines” of the 1930s and the underground press of the 1960s and 1970s, emerged (Duncombe, 2008). While the genre eludes precise definition, Duncombe identifies several key features of zines: “zines are noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” (p. 11). Throughout the 1980s

and early 1990s, their production, circulation, and exchange cultivated the network ties of a counterculture where alternative politics ruled.

The punk scene at the center of this alternative underground culture, however, was male-dominated; women were not viewed as legitimate contributors to the traditional masculine space and were often sidelined, their voices marginalized and their activist labor made invisible (Piepmeier, 2009). Confronted with a variety of factors – a political climate where collective action was no longer seen as viable but severe inequalities persisted, a feminist movement that seemed too distant and exclusive, an alternative arena that, like the New Left and the abolition movement before it, claimed to challenge power dynamics and yet did not fully recognize the contributions and concerns of women – young women drew on the long tradition of alternative media-making among U.S. feminist movements and began creating their own zines (Piepmeier, 2009). Starting in the Pacific Northwest and spreading through different cities across the country, the Riot Grrrl movement exploded against the backdrop of an emerging “third-wave” feminism that emphasized the politics of everyday life and identified culture as a site of both oppression and resistance (Duncombe, 2008; Piepmeier, 2009). Like zinesters within the broader punk scene, grrrl zinesters’ handmade publications followed a do-it-yourself ethics; their zines were printed cheaply, poached from commercial print outlets, exchanged at low cost or free of charge, created activist networks, and often focused on music, artists, celebrities, or media. Unlike other zine genres, however, grrrl zines also served as important sites for feminist theory-building and knowledge production for a cohort of activists that was largely dissatisfied with their antecedents’ treatment of femininity, sexuality, and difference across the overlapping intersections of identity (Duncombe,

2008; Eichhorn, 2014; Piepmeier, 2009). Drawing on their everyday, personal experiences, third-wave media-makers explored identity and oppression, talked back to mainstream media, meditated on both the burdens and the pleasures of gender performance, and reimagined feminism for a new generation.

Commercial access to the internet emerged precisely at the moment that legacy feminist media institutions were struggling to survive and young feminists were eagerly developing alternative media platforms from which to theorize their experiences, share knowledge, deconstruct popular discourse, and build communities while also including as many voices as possible. Digital media's destabilization of the producer/consumer binary and participatory nature paralleled the do-it-yourself ethos and intersectional politics of the third-wave generation (Lievrouw, 2011). Some zinesters created online *distros* (distributors) for their print zines, while others produced "ezines," a genre that closely mirrored *grrrl* zines and laid the groundwork for feminist bloggers (Piepmeier, 2009). By the early 2000s, the feminist blogosphere was a thriving network composed of countless nodes and growing every day, as the work of pioneering sites like TheFBomb.org, Feministing.com, Feministe.us, CrunkFeministCollective.com, Scarleteen.com, Shakesville.com, among others, inspired readers to take part.

This budding feminist blogosphere helped mobilize one of, if not *the*, earliest instances of networked feminist activism. The 1997 Million Woman March in Philadelphia, the original namesake of the Women's March on Washington, is among the largest protest marches in U.S. history. Like the Women's March, the Million Woman March was *not* organized by high-profile leaders or big-name organizations, but by two local women, Phile Chionesu and Asia Coney, who found their particular concerns as

black women unrepresented in either anti-racist or feminist movements (Everett, 2004). Without the support or resources of a movement organization, Chionesu and Coney created their own network of websites to promote the event and its mission statement. Women of color in homes and offices across the country printed the websites' pages to share with computerless friends and family members (Everett, 2004). On October 25, 1997, their digitally networked grassroots efforts brought, by some estimates, *1.5 million people* to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway to demand social, political, and economic empowerment for black women, their families, and their communities (Everett, 2004).

In the two decades between the Million Woman March and the Women's March on Washington, networked feminism flourished, with activists developing new protest forms as new platforms became available. Feminist bloggers initiated the dialogues that led to the 2011 international SlutWalk movement and to the recent rise in activism against sexual violence on college campuses and (Mendes, 2015). Social media users developed hashtag feminism, a practice I discuss in Chapter 3, pairing viral campaigns with traditional protest actions like street protests and boycotts (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Clark, 2014). At present, despite the reality of President Donald Trump, digitally coordinated feminist protest against the new administration thrives in multiple modalities — in the streets (Merlan, 2016), across hashtagged discussions (Levit, 2016), over congressional phone lines (Killough, 2017), and through online fundraising campaigns (Ryan, 2016). Beyond direct action, networked feminism has created countless spaces for feminist dialogue and critique, which have spilled over into mainstream commercial media. The success of the feminist blogosphere, for example, demonstrated a demand for feminist content, leading mainstream outlets to hire feminist voices and cover feminist

topics (Groetzinger, 2016; Keller, 2016). Today, several bloggers responsible for the early growth of the feminist blogosphere, including Jessica Valenti (Feministing), Jill Filipovic (Feministe), and Brittney Cooper (Crunk Feminist Collective) have landed gigs at commercial media outlets the likes of *The Guardian*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Salon*, suggesting that these early feminist bloggers' early and energetic adoption of the internet played a sizable role in the popularization of feminism discussed in the previous sections. And while online platforms continue to inspire new, highly visible forms of resistance, feminists have also used digital networks to facilitate older tactics for internal community-building, including the production and circulation of paper-based zines and the cultivation of safe spaces, both of which I discuss in Chapter 4.

Like feminism more generally, networked feminism is complex, multiple, diverse, and often, messy, contradictory, and filled with inner tensions. Any attempt to trace its growth over time is bound to be incomplete and to oversimplify its history and nature. But while it may be too expansive to define or historicize with exact precision, one thing remains certain — networked feminist activism and discourse are, against seemingly all odds, thriving.

Methods, Data, and Theoretical Resources

If the vitality of feminist politics and activism are, as the scholarship reviewed above suggests, bound up with the growth of networked feminism, then identifying and meditating on shared struggles, successes, and tactics across networked feminist projects is key to building stronger feminist movements over time. This is where academic researchers studying feminist social movements and their media practices can directly support feminist activists, who, embedded in the daily struggle of mobilizing and sustaining protest actions and movement communities, do not often have the time or

ability to take a step back and reflect on common threads that cut across the broad spectrum of U.S. feminist activism.

To move toward a theory of networked feminism as a media praxis, I consider several practitioner-focused questions in this chapter: how are U.S. feminists using media to develop an activist praxis uniquely suited to the contemporary moment? What are feminists *doing* with media? How do they imagine the role media play in feminist politics? And what are some of the affordances and limitations of their media practices? While I begin to address these questions here, they also motivate the project as a whole. The following two chapters continue to pursue this line of inquiry within the specific contexts of feminist visibility campaigns and feminist communities. The primary goal of this chapter is to provide a robust description and definition, rooted in practitioners' perspectives, of the activist praxis behind networked feminism. The other chapters offer analyses of this praxis in action, with special attention to the ways in which activists navigate the double entanglements of do-it-ourselves feminism's networked organizing logic.

Following Couldry's (2010, 2012) call to treat media as practices requiring sociological exploration, I explore these questions through the constructivist grounded theory approach outlined in the Introduction. This approach allows the researcher to generate theory from data and, importantly for media sociology, center the voices of the practitioners under study. At the same time, it recognizes the researcher's situated position within a particular sociopolitical context, an existing body of research, and a set of theoretical frameworks or "sensitizing concepts" (Mattoni, 2014, p. 23), all of which inform, but do not determine, the elements illuminated through the analysis.

In what follows, I bring two case studies of networked feminist activism — the Women’s March and Philadelphia’s March to End Rape Culture (MTERC) — and a set of theoretical resources for theorizing power and resistance to bear on each other.

My exploration of contemporary feminists’ media practices began with MTERC in 2014. I attended my first march on September 27 of that year. There, I met the MTERC organizers, informed them of my research, and asked if I could join their team as both an activist and an academic studying activism. They agreed to allow me on the team, or what members refer to as the MTERC “planning committee.” As a committee member, I participated in the planning and execution of three annual marches — 2015, 2016, and 2017 — and, in addition to MTERC 2014, also attended each of these marches. At first, I took on mostly simple, day-of tasks, such as setting up tents and tables for the pre- and post-march rally or serving as a “marshal,” directing protestors around corners to follow our permitted march route, as designated by the mayor’s office. But as time went on, I was invited to take on larger tasks, including fundraising and reaching out to feminist organizations on local university campuses. By the time planning began for MTERC 2017, I was a member of the “core organizing committee” and worked with several other members to delegate tasks, oversee the execution of the event as a whole, and resolve disputes within the planning committee. This trajectory is typical for planning committee members. At any one point, about 20 people are involved in some capacity in planning the march. The committee’s membership is partly revolving, with newcomers attending MTERC meetings as their schedule and interest permits. A group of about ten members has consistently attended MTERC planning meetings throughout the past several years. Over time, these experienced members have taken on informal,

unelected leadership positions within various subcommittees dedicated to particular tasks, such as scheduling speakers, raising funds, or promoting the march on social media.

This long-term fieldwork provided me with the data necessary to center practitioners' voices in my analysis of their media practices. I was able to observe practitioners' media practices and organizational decision-making and hear firsthand their understandings of the role media play in feminist activism, while also developing my own "insider knowledge" as an MTERC organizer. As a participant observer, while I can never step into my participants' subject positions, I can develop the situated knowledge of an activist in the space under study. To develop this knowledge, I attended monthly MTERC planning meetings, typically held at local community centers and, between meetings, I participated in committee discussions via email, a private committee Facebook group, and later, a chatroom hosted on Slack, a free-to-use, browser-based application for group project management. I also worked on independent MTERC-related tasks between meetings. While, given the periodic nature of the group's meetings, my fieldwork was sporadic, I estimate that I spent at least 120 hours "in the field." At meetings, I wrote down "jottings," which I later typed up and formalized. I "exited the field" immediately following MTERC 2017. To supplement my participant observations, I also archived and analyzed media associated with MTERC, including activist-produced media and news coverage of the protest. Using the inductive, constructivist approach to grounded theory described above and outlined in the Introduction, I coded these materials for emergent themes.

In the early stages of my ethnographic observations, the networked nature of MTERC quickly became apparent. The MTERC team lacked the institutional structure

and finances of a formal organization and instead consistently relied on volunteer labor, donated funds, cheap resources and supplies, and free-to-use media platforms to sustain their coalition and launch the annual protest. Once I observed this pattern within MTERC, I began noticing it elsewhere. While this may be expected of a relatively small, local, grassroots initiative, the same makeshift creativity seemed to characterize much larger feminist protest actions. For example, feminist hashtag campaigns, the earliest of which were taking off around the same time I began my fieldwork, typically start with a single actor, unaffiliated with any particular movement or organization, posting a message with a hashtag on Twitter, which later explodes into a global expression of dissent. When plans for the Women's March got off the ground following Trump's election in November 2016, I recognized the same elements at play: a loose network of activists working without institutional backing used social media platforms to spread the word and mobilize local protests around the world.

In this chapter, I pair MTERC with the Women's March, two street protest actions that are similar in form but different size and reach, to study how this networked organizing logic unfolds at different scales. My goal is to isolate, in the context of networked feminism, what Couldry (2012) "the specific regularities in our actions related to media and the regularities of context and resources that make certain types of media-related actions possible or impossible, likely or unlikely" (p. 78). In other words, by comparing these two case studies, I aim to identify commonalities in the practice of networked feminism across the spectrum of local and translocal campaigns and in the contexts of its practitioners, so as to begin drawing connections between contemporary feminists' media tactics and their political goals.

While not ethnographic, my methodological approach for studying the Women's March also centered practitioners' voices. I was unable to gain access to either the planning committee behind the local Women's March in Philadelphia or what came to be known as the "National Committee" behind the original Women's March on Washington and its global expansion. Instead, I developed my own archive of Women's March-related media, paying particular attention to news coverage that included interviews with participants and organizers; editorials, blog posts, and tweets in which participants and organizers reflected on or critiqued the marches; and statements published by the National Committee on their website (www.womensmarch.com) and various social media accounts. I also attended the Women's March on Philadelphia and recorded observations through photos, videos, and field notes. As with MTERC, I coded these materials for emergent themes.

I went on to compare the themes found in both studies. At this stage, a number of theoretical resources informed my analysis. Given that my object of analysis is a specifically *activist* media praxis, I drew on the analytics for interpreting media as political practices outlined in the Introduction. These theoretical resources help illuminate the two elements at the heart of political activism: *power* — how practitioners imagine both the systems of power against which they organize and the forms of empowerment they seek — and *resistance* — how, with this understanding of power in mind, practitioners developed tactics for combating oppression and achieving empowerment. Following this approach, I deploy Foucault's (1991) concept of *discourse* to parse U.S. feminists' longstanding understanding of politics, power, and oppression as deeply personal matters embedded not just in the walls of state institutions, but within everyday

life. I then pair de Certeau's (1984) notion of *tactics* with Collins' (2000) concept of *rearticulation* to illuminate how resistant feminist media practices might create change at both the individual and structural levels within this everyday, everywhere system of power. Together, this theoretical framework brings into view a feminist activist praxis, which in turn helps highlight shared concerns, methods, struggles, and successes between my two case studies and, as I argue, across feminist movements more generally.

Findings and Discussion

Do-it-Ourselves Feminism, an Activist Media Praxis

When studied side-by-side, the global Women's March movement and Philadelphia's local March to End Rape Culture appear very different in scale, media attention, and impact. Upon closer inspection, however, an array of similarities connect the organizational logic behind both protest events. The Women's March and MTERC both share a common media *praxis*, a recursive combination of political values and media tactics, that reflects contemporary feminists' goals. I call this praxis *do-it-ourselves feminism* (DIOF). In this section, drawing on observations from and media related to both protests, I describe the core features of DIOF, laying the groundwork for later chapters, which will explore how activists navigate the affordances and limitations of this praxis within particular contexts.

Do-it-ourselves feminism is *everyday*, working from a conceptualization of power as personal and, instead of forming highly structured organizations, appropriating the media platforms we use on a daily basis to launch protest actions. The everyday quality of DIOF makes it a fairly accessible, *participatory* mode of activism, open to anyone with the time, interest, and literacy in the digital tools that power it and personalizable according to participants' experiences and concerns. This stands in stark contrast with the

campaigns of previous generations, whose messages were framed and filtered by movement organization leaders and gatekeepers. This shift toward networked activism emerges from contemporary feminists' values and concerns. DIOF's emphasis on personal expressions networked through collective actions enables feminists to make the personal political and its participatory nature paves the way toward more intersectional organizing practices. But while these features help feminist activists achieve their particular goals, DIOF's turn away from formal structures and centralized messaging also leaves feminist movements *precarious*, lacking the organizational capacity to respond to internal and external challenges. DIOF, however, is also a *reflexive* praxis that entails constant ongoing reflection and self-critique. Feminist activists are not only aware of their own precarity; they are actively creating strategies for coping with the shortcomings of networked activism while also taking advantage of the affordances that come with engaging in resistance on their own terms. Do-it-ourselves feminism is a difficult praxis, one that requires a great deal of time, energy, and creativity. But the activists behind both the Women's March and the March to End Rape Culture know that, like any DIY project, crafting movements in line with their values takes a lot of hard work, even more perseverance, and a fair share of audacity.

DIOF is Everyday

A defining feature of do-it-ourselves feminism is its *everydayness*. This emphasis on the everyday is twofold: DIOF practitioners politicize everyday life and appropriate everyday media tools and resources to mobilize political actions.

The activists behind both the Women's March and the March to End Rape Culture work from a conceptualization of power as diffuse, inescapable, everyday,

everywhere — suffused through all aspects of personal life. Their political visions extend what Young (1997) describes as U.S. feminists’ “longstanding focus on domination and resistance at the level of daily life” (p. 14), not just centralized in state institutions, as captured in the second-wave slogan, *the personal is political*. This approach to understanding power parallels Foucault’s (1991) concept of *disciplinary power*; whereas sovereign power involves a top-down model of control in which a single authority wields absolute power over the population through physical coercion, disciplinary power is enacted through a bottom-up model of control in which power is dispersed throughout the social fabric and enacted between people on a micro-social level through the everyday performance and enforcement of behavioral norms. According to Foucault, *discourse*, dominant interpretive frameworks for thinking, taking about, and responding to particular topics, is the primary vehicle for the diffusion and wide acceptance of a particular set of norms at a given time and place. In her work on black feminist thought, Collins (2000) describes disciplinary power manifesting as a discursive “matrix of domination” (p. 18), a composite of intersecting oppressions along multiple axes of race, gender, sexuality, and class and the particular sociopolitical practices, from government policies to mass media imagery, used to maintain those oppressions at a given point in history. Contemporary feminists continue the movement’s decades-long work of uncovering these quotidian experiences of oppression so that they might become sites for resistance. While intersectional theory may have expanded their analysis to prioritize anti-racism and economic justice alongside gender equality, this broad view of power remains a key “mobilizing thread” (Rodino-Colocino, 2014, p. 1114) cutting across generational “waves” of U.S. feminism.

This expansive conceptualization of power as an everyday phenomenon can be found in the Women's March's public platform. The Unity Principles, a guiding vision for the movement authored by the ad hoc "National Committee" that initially launched the Women's March on Washington (2017a), offers an "ambitious, fundamental and comprehensive agenda" (p. 1) that links state-based rights and power with everyday life. The document includes demands for legislative and policy changes, including an end to police brutality and mass incarceration, equal pay for equal work, paid family leave, workplace protections for undocumented laborers, voting rights, environmental protections, and the passage of an Equal Rights Amendment. Its authors also argue, however, that these changes must take place alongside transformations in daily life. The Committee calls for respect for women's right to live free from everyday forms of physical violence, such as domestic abuse and sexual assault. They link this freedom to the end of discursive forms of violence, such as oppressive "gender norms, expectations, and stereotypes" (p. 3) and the awarding of power "disproportionately to masculinity to the exclusion of others" (p. 3), both of which take away from women's "power to control our bodies" (p. 3). The document goes on to also name specific everyday sites where this "matrix of domination" plays out, like the devaluation of women of color who work in the care and service industries, discrimination against non-heteronormative families and families of color in the housing market, and prejudice in healthcare facilities against individuals in the LGBTQIA community. When the Committee refers throughout the Unity Principles to "women's rights," they are pointing toward this multidimensional platform for social, legislative, and economic empowerment.

The March to End Rape Culture mobilizes around an equally expansive conceptualization of power, one that captures both everyday and institutional systems of oppression, summed up in the event's title — *rape culture*. The annual event, however, began under a different name as SlutWalk Philadelphia, the city's local chapter of an international movement sparked in January 2011, when a Canadian police officer told an assembly of York University students that "women should avoid dressing like sluts" in order to prevent rape (Mendes, 2015). Around the world, SlutWalk organizers used social media to call for protests, inviting participants to dress "like sluts" in order to both challenge the discourse surrounding sexual violence victims' clothing choices and to reclaim the word "slut" to support women's sexual agency (Mendes, 2015). In 2013, SlutWalk Philadelphia changed their annual protest's name to the March to End Rape Culture in solidarity with women of color activists who, noting that reclaiming oppressive language requires a certain degree of sociocultural privilege, found SlutWalk's mission to be negligent of black women's historical experiences with norms regulating gender and sexuality (Murtha, 2013). The "slut" in SlutWalk, the organizers argued, centered the sexual agency of white cisgender women, who had privileged access to the term's binary and correlative opposite — the pure virgin. The virgin/slut double bind did not resonate with less privileged women, whose marginalization under white male supremacy depends in large part on their wholesale classification as sexually amoral and available. "Rape culture," the organizers explained in an open letter published on their Facebook page, captures a more intersectional vision of oppression beyond white women's experiences: "the concept of 'rape culture' has been one that has been identified in many forums and communities to describe the cultural forces which conspire to make

it so that sexual violence occurs so often, and with so few of the perpetrators being held accountable for their actions” (qtd. in Murtha, 2013). The bystander card organizers distribute to onlookers every year throughout the protest includes a litany of these cultural forces: “There are many different aspects of society that contribute to rape culture including victim blaming, rape jokes, transphobia, slut shaming, keeping survivors in silence, racism, the use of bodies as sexual objects, the sexualization of violence, lack of education around consent, intimate partner violence, homophobia, sexist media message, the list is never ending.” As an entry point for analyzing oppression, the term *rape culture* suggests that “rape” and “culture” are inseparable and visualizes an interlocking system of physical and discursive violence that manifests in both everyday and institutional life.

In both sites, feminists’ understanding of power could be described as *networked*. Rather than being centralized within the state or a set of institutions, power reaches indefinitely in all directions across any array of interconnected nodes, the same webbed image of power at the heart of Foucault’s (1991) “carceral network” (p. 298) and Collins’ (2000) “matrix of domination” (p. 18). It follows that do-it-ourselves feminists mobilize networked modes of activism in a struggle to meet this everywhere, everyday networked form of power step for step. While contemporary feminists share their antecedents’ understanding of power as diffuse and personal, their networked tactics of resistance set them apart.

Neither the Women’s March nor the March to End Rape Culture followed the trajectories of previous feminist movements or protest actions. In past generations, as Tufekci (2017) argues, a large, organized march or protest would typically “be seen as

the chief outcome of previous capacity building by a movement” (p. xiv). In “the networked era,” however, the march or protest “should be looked at as the initial moment of the movement’s bursting on the scene...the first stage in a potentially long journey” (p. xiv). Activists no longer require the capacities or resources of a formally structured movement organization, which can take months to build, to launch direct actions. Instead, as in the case of both the Women’s March and MTERC, a handful of people using social media platforms can ignite global dissent within a matter of hours.

In January 2011, Toronto resident Heather Jarvis was browsing Facebook when she stumbled upon a link to an article published in *The Excalibur*, York University’s student newspaper, recounting the campus assembly on sexual violence in which a police officer blamed rape on women’s clothing choices (Mendes, 2015). Infuriated at the officer’s perpetuation of dangerous rape myths, Jarvis shared the article on her personal Facebook page, which in turn initiated a conversation among friends about what steps they could take in response (Mendes, 2015). Jarvis and her friend, Sonya Barnett, decided that a protest was necessary and, after one of Barnett’s colleagues joked that they should call their march a “slut walk,” the global movement was born (Mendes, 2015). Jarvis and Barnett created a website, Facebook page, and Twitter account, calling on supporters to join them for a “SlutWalk” from Queen’s Park in Toronto to the city’s police headquarters (Mendes, 2015). Several thousand protesters, some dressed provocatively to challenge the discourse surrounding sexual violence victims’ clothing choices, joined SlutWalk Toronto three months later on April 3, 2011 (Mendes, 2015). In the lead-up to and following the march, SlutWalk went viral; popular feminist blogs covered the event and word continued to spread through international news media. By the end of the year,

SlutWalks popped up in more than 200 cities and 40 nations, from North America to Asia (Carr, 2013). While the global movement eventually slowed, annual marches would gather in many cities for years to come, including Philadelphia.

The first SlutWalk Philadelphia took place in August 2011 and would continue to convene yearly until 2013, when organizers changed the event's name to the March to End Rape Culture and continued the annual protest tradition under a revamped mission. Over time, in the aftermath of SlutWalk's initial bursting onto the scene, MTERC has gathered some of the organizational "capacities" (p. xi) Tufekci (2017) describes. While the planning committee's membership changes from march to march, and even from meeting to meeting, a small group of steady volunteers has developed the specialized set of skills and knowledge required to get a public event of this scale off the ground in Philly. They have learned through trial and error, for example, how to manage a budget and track expenses, how to file a permit for a rally in a public square that includes performers and merchants, how to secure a certified ASL interpreter to translate speeches, and how to write a press release and land news coverage.

But five years since its debut, the march remains, at its core, a networked, do-it-ourselves effort, fueled by organizers' commitment, makeshift creativity, and digital media savvy. Throughout my fieldwork, the committee would start off each planning year with little or no budget to cover what typically amounted to approximately \$3,000 worth of expenses, including rental fees for tables, chairs, audio equipment, and accessibility ramps, honorariums for speakers and artists, upfront costs for producing t-shirts and other merchandise, and printed promotional materials. Organizers set up crowdfunding websites and tapped into their personal and professional connections to

link up with organizations and businesses willing to donate money, supplies, or venues for fundraising events. The same improvisational approach characterized their recruitment practices. A small group of about 10 people consistently showed up to march meetings, but a much larger team was necessary to make the event a reality. Every year, open calls for volunteers were spread online through Facebook and in person, at any relevant local event whose host granted us a bit of table space, until the committee had enough people-power to work through its often overwhelming to-do list. Like the broader SlutWalk movement, MTERC organizers also relied on social media to spread the word about the protest. While organizers would tape or tack printed flyers to light poles and cafe community boards across the city, it was undeniably their Facebook profile and event page, along with their official website, that drew the largest numbers to the march. Digital media also functioned as the planning committee's core structure. Without an official membership, a formal leadership structure, or a central meeting place, the planning committee effectively consisted of whoever joined the MTERC listserv, private Facebook group, or Slack, where in-person meetings were scheduled and where discussions and decision-making between meetings took place. Just as MTERC mobilizes around a conceptualization of power as diffuse and everyday, it also mobilizes *through* a diffuse network of volunteers and supporters, connected through everyday media tools and platforms.

Alongside the 1997 Million Woman March, SlutWalk in many ways pioneered networked feminist activism, emerging at a moment when other movements, including the Arab Spring, Indignados, and Occupy, were using social media platforms to reach global audiences. Five years later, the Women's March would follow suit.

After watching Trump win the presidency, Theresa Shook, a retired grandmother living in Hawaii, created a Facebook event on election night, November 8, 2016, inviting her friends to a protest in Washington, D.C. scheduled for the day after the inauguration (Stein & Somashekhar, 2017). The next morning, Shook woke to more than 10,000 RSVPs (Stein & Somashekhar, 2017). The event quickly spread to Pantsuit Nation, a Facebook group where Hillary Clinton's supporters connect, share stories, and plan actions (Women's March on Washington, 2016). Similar events started appearing across Facebook and thousands of users began making plans to attend protests in Washington (Women's March on Washington, 2016). New York-based fashion designer Bob Bland, who recently had risen to prominence through her anti-Trump t-shirt line, proposed a "Million Pussy March on Washington" in a Facebook post dated November 10 (Bland, 2016). Once Bland discovered that she was not alone in her desire to march, she worked with others to consolidate the events into a unified effort, represented by a single Facebook page (Women's March on Washington, 2016). Initially, the protest was organized under the name, Million Woman March, a reference to the 1997 Philadelphia protest. At the time, however, Bland's organizing team for the 2017 march was composed entirely of white women, leading women of color and their allies to raise concerns on social media about appropriation and inclusivity (Women's March on Washington, 2016). In response to these criticisms, Bland and her team recruited three women of color activists to serve as co-chairs of the march on Washington — Tamika Mallory, Carmen Perez, and Linda Sarsour — who, together in 2015, led a march from New York City to D.C., walking for 250 miles to demand an end to mass incarceration (Women's March on Washington, 2016). By December, their team grew into a National Committee of nearly

90 organizers, intentionally recruited for their leadership within diverse communities (Women's March on Washington, 2016; 2017a). The Committee changed the protest's name to the Women's March on Washington, in homage to the 1963 March on Washington, where Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, with the blessing of King's daughter (Felsenthal, 2017). As Bland wrote in a post to the official Facebook event page, "Now voices including Asian and Pacific Islanders, trans women, Native Americans, disabled women, men, children, and many others, can be centered in the evolving expression of this grassroots movement" (Women's March on Washington, 2016).

Word of the march spread globally through Facebook, Twitter, and the official Women's March on Washington website. By the eve of Trump's inauguration, at least one march was planned on all seven continents, most with a Facebook event page directing participants to their nearest town square and a localized Twitter hashtag providing updates on logistics and speaker lineups. A march even took place on Antarctica, where an international group of about 30 people hosted a small demonstration on an expedition ship off the coast of the Antarctic Peninsula (Bowerman, 2017). Although dispersed geographically, protesters around the world were connected through a digitally networked communications infrastructure established by the National Committee, consisting of Twitter lists, aggregated social media streams, photo and video archives, and a collection of hashtags active in before, during, and after Inauguration Day, including #WhyIMarch, #WomensMarch, and #WomensMarchGlobal (Women's March on Washington, 2018a). Following the Inauguration Day, the National Committee would continue to grow and even formalize into an official "Board," led by co-presidents

Tamika Mallory and Bob Bland, and a “National Team,” composed of nonprofit directors, entrepreneurs, field and communications strategists, and web developers, who would go on to launch other resistance projects (Women’s March on Washington, 2018b). But it was ultimately a dispersed network of passionate activists improvising with social media tools, not a formally structured movement or organization, that sparked a global day of protest in January 2017.

Do-it-ourselves feminists’ use of everyday media tools to resist everyday, everywhere systems of oppression fit de Certeau’s (1984) definition of *tactics*, the countless quotidian practices through which “individuals already caught in the nets of ‘discipline’” (p. xiv) circumvent systems of power. For de Certeau, “strategies” are the domain of the powerful, “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated....it is an effort to delimit one’s own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other” (p. 35-36); in other words, through strategies, those in positions of power define the Other’s everyday resources and surrounding environment in order to maintain the boundaries protecting their own privilege. A tactic, on the other hand, “is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus...The space of a tactic is the space of the other” (p. 37). Through everyday tactics, the weak “make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers” (p. 37). Whereas strategic operations of power occupy a space from which discourse can be generated and relationships delineated, tactical practitioners do not have the privilege to see the whole field of relationships from their own base of operations. Instead, “a tactic depends on time – it is always on the

watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’” (p. xix). While, as Foucault argues, the “‘grid’ of discipline” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xiv) cannot be escaped, for de Certeau, tactics allow the oppressed to creatively “make do” (p. 66) with the materials at hand.

Do-it-ourselves feminism, in other words, is a rebellious, bottom-up, extra-institutional practice that, like other DIY projects, subverts the producer/consumer, expert/amateur binaries and rejects the slow grind of bureaucracies and institutional politics (Ratto & Boler, 2014). Instead, its practitioners, who often have little prior experience in political organizing, make use of everyday networked media platforms and find creative ways to take action now. A similar networked sensibility can be found at play in other types of movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). For contemporary feminists, however, finding everyday opportunities for resistance stems from a deeply rooted historical emphasis on the everyday as a site of power.

DIOF is Participatory

The everyday quality of do-it-ourselves feminism makes the praxis available to anyone with the time, interest, access to, and basic literacy in the media and platforms that fuel it. Through its use of everyday tools like Facebook and Twitter and its emphasis on extra-institutional voices and engagement, DIOF shares what is often referred to as the “DIY ethos” (Ratto & Boler, 2014, p. 10) that underlies other creative amateur practices. DIOF prioritizes open accessibility and participation, regardless of one’s previous experiences or financial resources. Teresa Shook, the retiree whose Facebook event eventually grew into the Women’s March on Washington, had no prior experience in activist organizing, had not been politically active before Trump’s campaign, and had

none of the financial backing or people-power of a traditional movement organization (Stein, 2017). *But* she had a Facebook account with broad network connections extended through the Pantsuit Nation group, which at the time had nearly three million members (Collins, 2016), and some friends had taught her how to make and share a Facebook event (Stein, 2017). Similarly, while Heather Jarvis and Sonya Barnett had participated in political activism before, they only needed a few social media accounts to launch the international SlutWalk movement (Mendes, 2015); the March to End Rape Culture continues this do-it-ourselves tradition every year in Philadelphia. The result of this feminist generation's DIY ethos is an activist praxis that is fundamentally *participatory*, open to nearly anyone looking to channel political outrage into a social movement.

Scholars have documented a similar degree of accessibility and participation in other movements' shift from traditionally organized collective action toward what Bennett and Segerberg (2013) call *connective action*. Connective action unfolds when *personal action frames*, or "easily personalized ideas" (p. 37) are linked together through digital networks, as exemplified in the case of hashtag activism (Clark, 2016). Without a formal organization keeping a firm grip on a movement's message framing, connective action allows protesters to express themselves more freely and personalize their participation according to their specific experiences and concerns, all while still take part in a collective, solidary action. Ratto and Boler (2014) observe the participatory nature of connective action at work in other types of DIY political projects, and researchers have cited Bennett and Segerberg's work to theorize protester's involvement in the Arab Spring (Howard & Hussain, 2013), Indignados (Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014)

and Occupy movements (Theocharis, Lowe, van Deth, & Albacete, 2013), among many others.

Less clear, however, is how the participatory nature of connective action might map onto a movement's politics. While new media platforms facilitate connective action and make this organizing logic available to activists, their existence alone does not guarantee that activists will choose to engage in networked activism over traditionally organized campaigns by default. Rather, following the media-as-practice approach, connective action likely emerges from a combination of activists' goals, values, needs, resources, and contexts. My case studies illustrate that, for contemporary feminist activists, the shift toward a more participatory, connective organizational logic stems from a particular sociotechnical assemblage of activists' politics and media savvy at the core of do-it-ourselves feminism.

The participatory nature of networked activism maps directly onto two goals specific to U.S. feminist activism.

First, and perhaps most importantly, the accessibility of DIOF enables more intersectional feminist organizing practices, which in turn creates more inclusive feminist protest actions. Within the traditional collective organizing more characteristic of second-wave feminism, movement leaders performed a gatekeeping function, choosing whose voices and concerns shaped feminist public platforms. While the movement claimed to fight for the rights of all women, this filtering process often privileged white women, whose stories and experiences were more likely to resonate with the mainstream press. For example, in her analysis of feminist activism against domestic violence throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Rothenberg (2002) demonstrates that personal narratives were

crucial to the construction of the “battered woman” as a victim deserving of social and legal support. The narratives highlighted during these decades, however, painted a narrow portrait of who qualifies as a deserving victim. Feminist anti-domestic-violence media published during this time focused exclusively on violence against white, middle-to-upper class heterosexual women, erasing the realities of victims of color and of lower socioeconomic status, as well as queer victims. DIOF’s networked organizing logic eliminates gatekeepers, creating space for activists standing at various intersections of difference to participate in and shape feminist platforms.

This played out most clearly in the lead-up to the Women’s March when the National Committee set to drafting the movement’s Unity Principles. While the National Committee was tasked with coordinating the logistics of the march on Washington and developing an infrastructure of support for sister marches around the world, the Women’s March was largely decentralized, its expression of dissent shaped and refined through constant feedback from activists via social media. Critiques circulated through Facebook, Twitter, and the feminist blogosphere about the composition of the organizing team and the event’s name had altered who the marches represented, and would later influence what message the marches communicated. The National Committee published an initial draft of the Unity Principles on January 12, 2017: “Recognizing that women have intersecting identities and are therefore impacted by a multitude of social justice and human rights issues, we have outlined a representative vision for a government that is based on the principles of liberty and justice for all” (Women’s March on Washington 2017a, p. 1). Soon after its publication, activist bloggers and Twitter users highlighted major gaps in the document, including support for the rights of sex workers (Rowntree,

2017) and people with disabilities (Ladau, 2017), while others critiqued the organizers for not taking a clear stance in support of access to safe and affordable abortion services (Graham, 2017). By Inauguration weekend, the Unity Principles were updated to include an expression of solidarity with sex workers' rights movement, multiple references to disability as a social justice issue, and a clear demand for reproductive freedom for all. National Committee members combined their commitment to intersectionality and openness to critique with the participatory nature of social media platforms to foster an expression of dissent unfiltered by any one leader or organization. As march organizers wrote on Twitter, "The leadership of the Women's March on Washington are not experts on every issue — but we are committed to being bridge-builders and amplifiers of shared values" (womensmarch, 2017).

Second, the participatory nature of DIOF enables protest actions that are both individual and collective. Bennett's and Segerberg's (2013) concept of "personal action frames" (p. 37) helps visualize this dynamic. Personal action frames are personalizable; activists can connect their specific interests or concerns to the message framework. At the same time, they are also collective; by virtue of building on the same action frame, activists are participating in a mass movement. The hashtag is perhaps the clearest example of this concept in action. Millions of activists took part, for example, in the #MeToo campaign, many sharing their own personal stories of surviving sexual violence. While each story was unique to its author, these narratives were connected into one direct action campaign through the networking functions of the hashtag.

Of course, this same individual/collective dynamic can be found in other types of movements. Tactics like hashtag activism, which connect personal expressions of dissent

into one powerful, collective outcry, are not unique to U.S. feminists. Networked activism's bridging of the individual and the collective, however, parallels their emphasis on politicizing the personal and uncovering how power operates in everyday life, making the practice uniquely suited to contemporary feminist activists' goals and values. U.S. feminists have historically drawn on consciousness-raising practices, or what Collins (2000) calls *rearticulation*, a process through which individual women identify similarities across their repeated personal experiences of injustice, affirm one another's private outrage, foster collective strength, and, working together, develop new responses to these experiences. Here, what were previously cast as private and therefore nonpolitical concerns are "rearticulated" as systemic injustices requiring collective action. Today, networked feminist activism carries on this practice for a new generation, drawing connections across personal experiences to illustrate how systems of oppression shape everyday life.

The individual/collective, personal/political dynamic unfolds every year at the March to End Rape Culture. MTERC organizers advance a core action framework for their march through their web presence and through printed materials distributed at the event; the purpose of the protest is, as its name indicates clearly, to end rape culture. As discussed in the previous section, however, the definition of "rape culture" the organizers advance is broad, encompassing a spectrum of violent experiences and an expansive matrix of interlocking oppressions. This creates space for protesters to incorporate their own personal expressions of dissent into the march. Every year, the protesters who gather in Thomas Paine Plaza express themselves via a huge variety of performances channeled through their posters, clothing, and bodies. Some of these performances recount their

experiences of sexual assault, which often takes place behind closed doors. At every march that I attended, several participants carried signs stating that they were wearing the same clothes they wore when they were raped, undermining news media's and litigators' tendency to blame sexual violence on victims' choices and behaviors. Others reenacted the victim-blaming discourses they were confronted with following their assaults. One particularly striking poster that an organizer carried at both the 2015 and 2016 march depicts a ghostly white feminine silhouette standing against a dark backdrop of common victim-blaming discourse: "She can't say 'no' if she is drunk! Only sluts get raped. Were you drunk? Why would she go by herself? She was asking for it. What were you wearing? She was sending mixed signals!" Another protestor at the 2016 march carried a poster that included the question people posed to her when she spoke out about her sexual assault: "Why didn't you just push him off?" Yet another poster listed common excuses for assailants' actions: he was just a "nice guy," who was "hot and bothered." Still others used their bodies to make explicit the dominant discourses that normalize and excuse sexual violence, writing phrases like, "I am not asking for it," in paint or marker across their chests, legs, and arms while waiting in the plaza for the march to begin. The similarities across these protesters' experiences, connected through their expression at the annual protest, shed light on rape culture as a matrix of domination otherwise normalized into invisibility.

At MTERC 2014, the first march I attended, one protester's performance encapsulated the political importance of do-it-ourselves feminism's participatory nature.

The protester, who was topless, approached me within minutes of my arrival to the plaza. She handed me a red permanent marker and, without formal introduction,

recited a line I would hear her repeat to other protestors in the crowd waiting for the march to start: “Hi. Will you write a trigger word on me?” She exuded confidence. “What do you mean by a ‘trigger word?’” I asked. “Words that hurt you, that people have used to tear you down because you’re a woman, or you’re queer, or you’re dressed a certain way, or you’re assertive.” The task made me nervous. The marker’s ink would be difficult to wash off and no one else had written on her yet. The thought of inscribing her body with hate speech was unnerving. These uneasy feelings, I realized, were exactly the point of the exercise. I uncapped the marker and moved to stand behind her. Taking her prompt seriously, I thought for a moment about words people have selected to purposefully trigger my insecurities as a woman. I pressed the felt tip to her shoulder blade and wrote in capital letters, *BITCH*. The act was cathartic, as if by writing the word on her back, it became her burden to bear. I gave the marker back and thanked her. “No, thank you,” she said, before moving on to ask someone else to participate in her embodied art experiment. We didn’t cross paths again and I never caught her name, but a photo of her surfaced on the protest’s Facebook event page the next day. By the end of the march, her upper body was covered in trigger words and phrases: *bitch, bossy, hoe, shawty, slut, skank, whore, floozy, femi-nazi, yo mama, how you doin’, hey baby, smile honey*. The epithets and jeers scribbled across her skin made visible the violence they inflict, like so many open wounds left untreated.

Dozens of protestors had expressed, through a series of individual words or phrases written across this woman’s body, their personal, everyday experiences with the violent discourse — the insults, catcalls, and slurs — meant to reify their powerlessness. The epithets jotted across her skin made visible the ways in which women’s bodies are

culturally inscribed with discourses of ideal femininity and disciplined, as Foucault (1991) argued, into “docile bodies,” whose sights are directed inward and whose energies are too drained from constant self-criticism to critique the networks of power that subjugate them. Women, queer people, and people of color encounter such verbal harassment so frequently, that these microaggressions have become a taken-for-granted component of everyday life. But through their collective expression via this protester’s body, the systems of oppression behind these words and the damage they inflict become perceptible, rearticulating a personal encounter as a political one and laying the groundwork for transformation at both the individual and collective levels of society. This translation of the personal into the political is at the core of the do-it-ourselves feminist praxis and made possible by the participatory nature of networked feminist activism.

The “DIY ethos” (Ratto & Boler, 2014, p. 10) of networked activism — its open, participatory nature — shares a unique resonance with feminists’ political values and goals. The same logic of connective action that undergirds DIOF characterizes a number of other contemporary movements and campaigns. My case studies suggest, however, that feminists’ turn away from traditionally organized collective action and toward networked activist campaigns emerges from a particular set of concerns, including a desire for more intersectional movements and an ongoing search for protest forms that allow the open expression of personal experiences with injustice. This generation’s use of digitally mediated tactics represents a particular feminist *praxis*, an ever expanding repertoire of practices informed by a specific set of goals, values, and needs that can scale up from grassroots projects like MTERC to global movements like the Women’s March.

DIOF is Precarious

The praxis of do-it-ourselves feminism has, in many ways, revolutionized gender justice activism for the twenty-first century. Pairing media tools and platforms with their personal politics and intersectional values, contemporary feminists have spearheaded movements and campaigns that include a diversity of experiences while still fostering the solidarity necessary to transform systems of power. But the same features that grant DIOF its social and technical affordances — its everydayness and participatory nature — have also made it precarious.

Unlike previous generations of activists, do-it-ourselves feminists launch actions without first building the capacities of a formal organization. This allows a more diverse range of actors, who, due to a range of structural barriers, may not have access to organizational resources or public platforms, to make their voices heard. At the same time, however, DIOF's lack of a clear infrastructure raises concerns about long-term sustainability. While rebellious and artful, without the financial support or reliable people-power of a big-name organization or nonprofit, feminists' tactical improvisation can become a drain on their time, energy, and, eventually, their mental health.

This activist “burnout” was apparent among MTERC organizers, particularly during toward the end of my fieldwork, as they struggled to maintain the energy and commitment required to fund and launch the event year after year. Often, I would watch as, at the beginning of MTERC's planning year, dozens of interested activists would show up to the first meeting to begin laying the groundwork for that year's march. Then, as months passed, attendance dwindled and important tasks fell to Chelsea, an activist involved in multiple feminist projects throughout the city and the march's unofficial lead

organizer.² When, after volunteers failed to follow through on key day-of responsibilities for MTERC 2015, Chelsea kicked off the planning year for MTERC 2016 with a speech about accountability:

You know, it's great that so many of you are here and that so many people want to volunteer every year, but it is incredibly frustrating when people who volunteered to take on particular tasks at the march just don't show up. You might think your job is small, like directing protestors along the march route, but if no one shows up to do that job, then I have to scramble to find someone else to do it or else everything goes to shit. If you're gonna sign up, you need to show up, that's all I'm saying.

But showing up is often easier said than done. Making time not only for scheduled monthly meetings but for on-the-fly problem-solving and crisis response took its toll on many MTERC organizers, who also worked full-time or multiple part-time jobs and who, in many cases, were also struggling to cope with their own trauma related to sexual violence. Even Chelsea, who had been a key figure on the planning committee since the protest's name change in 2013, announced her plans to take a step back after MTERC 2016, following a particularly difficult year balancing personal life issues with her growing list of march responsibilities. Others, frustrated with the committee's informal leaders making decisions without group consensus, stopped attending meetings following internal disagreements. Without a formalized structure for leadership and decision-making, the planning committee lacked the means to address infighting and disputes. If, as Tufekci (2017) argues, the trajectory of social movements begins with, rather than culminating in, a large protest action, the question becomes how to create a support system for keeping activists engaged in the struggle while also maintaining their energy and building capacity for tactical innovation in response to new obstacles.

² Throughout this study, I used pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. Exceptions were made for some zine authors, who wanted to maintain attribution for their work.

Without one in place, DIO feminists risk limiting their political engagement to attention-grabbing actions, like global street protests or viral hashtag campaigns, that do not grow into sustainable movements. The Women's March offers a potentially helpful counterexample, as the National Committee pooled resources to formalize the protest into an ongoing struggle for women's rights that took the form of national voter registration tours and campaigns for progressive women candidates for office (Power to the Polls, 2018). But with its formalization and growing profile came critiques that the National Committee had fallen out of touch with its support base's intersectional values (e.g., Pagano, 2018). Do-it-ourselves feminists must struggle with the competing goals of fostering open, accessible, intersectional movements and establishing the infrastructure necessary to carry movements forward.

The participatory nature of DIOF enables protesters to personalize their participation and express their own perspectives, experiences, and concerns without having their voices filtered by a centralized gatekeeper. But the openness and flexibility of the praxis can make articulating a clear platform with definitive political values and commitments difficult. This challenge came to the fore in the debates concerning white women's overwhelming presence at Women's Marches across the U.S. While the National Committee had, in collaboration with activists voicing their concerns over social media, authored a set of Unity Principles with intersectionality at its core, women of color described feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome around white, liberal, feminists who had not turned out in equal numbers to support anti-racist efforts like the Black Lives Matter Movement or condemn state violence against black and brown bodies (Dupuy, 2018). Others expressed a feeling of distrust for white women, the majority of whom

(53%) voted for Trump, and a disappointment in their failure to mobilize friends and family members against his racist campaign (Dupuy, 2018). Reports from local protests of white women thanking police officers for safeguarding the march (Chen, 2017), chanting loudly over black feminists' speeches (Xiao, 2017), or spending more time taking selfies with friends in pussyhats than engaging in speakers' calls to action (Obie, 2017) only exacerbated these frustrations. Following the 2017 marches, participants and commentators struggled to balance the desire to offer the uninitiated a gateway to more radical activism through the Women's March with their frustration with "white feminism's" complicity in systems of violence. Scholar and activist Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2017), writing for *The Guardian*, urged activists of color and more experienced organizers to join forces with their white allies, even those with less radical views, in order to build a strong movement ready to struggle for the long haul: "There are literally millions of people in this country who are now questioning everything. We need to open up our organizations, planning meetings, marches and much more to them. We need to read together, learn together, be in the streets together and stand up to this assault together." But when, in January 2018, activists organized anniversary marches to mark the end of Trump's first year in office, women of color expressed frustration that the movement had yet to better center marginalized communities' voices and concerns. For example, S.T. Halloway (2018), a black feminist attorney, activist, and mommy blogger, explained why, in an editorial for *Huffington Post*, she would not attend her local anniversary protest despite having marched in 2017: "Until OUR issues become all of our issues, I cannot continue to lend my voice, my strength and my power to a movement or a brand of feminism that seeks to end the oppression of some of its members, while some

of its members continue to aid in the oppression of others.” In opening its arms to anyone, from the liberal center to the far left, who wanted to participate, the National Committee behind the Women’s Marches brought massive turnouts for protests held around the world. But, at the same time, they also laid the groundwork for a movement whose politics, particularly when it comes to racial justice, were less clear in practice than in writing, leaving feminists of color feeling unheard and unsupported. Moreover, when paired with DIO feminists’ focus on everyday life, the lack of a definitive platform can make the path toward creating long-lasting institutional change, such as policy reform, unclear.

Lastly, DIO feminism’s politicization of everyday life and emphasis on open participation leaves movements vulnerable to cooptation and backlash. As Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017) argue in their analysis of “the traffic in feminism” (p. 886), the personalized, individual aspects of networked feminism are easily transmuted into “marketplace feminism” (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991; Zeisler, 2016). When, for example, the Women’s March captured the world’s attention, marketers used rhetoric associated with the global movement and the broader anti-Trump resistance to sell their products. Popular clothing brands even mass-produced t-shirts with march slogans (Hess, 2017b). While the practice might have further amplified the movement’s messaging, it also risked, as feminist journalist Amanda Hess (2017b) put it in an article for *The New York Times*, “leading audiences away from the hard work of political action and civic organization and toward the easy comfort of a consumer choice.” The same media tools that led the Women’s March to become both a worldwide political action and a pop culture phenomenon also opened activists up to harassment. Two days before

Inauguration, the hashtag #RenameMillionWomenMarch began trending on Twitter, flooding the platform with sexist messages targeting feminists' appearance and intelligence (Harvard, 2017). Without a tightly structured organization with the capacity for issuing collective or innovating tactics, DIOF movements can struggle to issue collective responses to cooptation, backlash, and other obstacles.

Do-it-ourselves feminists, then, face a particular set of challenges. Their activist media repertoire is doubly entangled in both the “redoing” (Baer, 2016, p. 19) and “undoing” (McRobbie, 2004, p. 255) of feminist collective politics for the networked era. Today's generation of feminists must face an important question if feminist movements are to continue to grow and thrive: how can activists take advantage of networked activism's social and technical affordances, while also navigating its shortcomings?

DIOF is Reflexive

The answer to this question begins with a final defining feature of do-it-ourselves feminism — the contemporary feminist praxis is *reflexive*, an element that stems at least in part from activists' intersectional values. As a movement-building praxis, intersectionality directs activists to reflect critically on their organizing practices at every stage. This constant, ongoing, reflexivity has become central a feature of contemporary feminist activism, as illustrated by the ongoing internal debates regarding the inclusivity and politics of the Women's March. Critics have cautioned that today's feminist movements risk losing time and newcomers through the infighting that self-critique can generate. Some have even gone so far as to accuse feminists of color who critique white feminists' racial politics of engaging in a “toxic feminism” that creates unnecessary divisions (e.g., Goldberg, 2014). My case studies demonstrate, however, that while self-

critique often produces difficult conversations within feminist movements, this practice of reflexivity has helped activists navigate the double entanglements of networked activism. While their movements may lack the structure and capacities of more traditionally organized forms of collective action, do-it-ourselves feminists engage in a reflexive praxis, constantly evaluating whether their tactics align with their goals and changing course as necessary.

Anyone keeping tabs on the development of the Women's March through social media and news coverage could witness this reflexivity at play, particularly in the internal discussions and responses to concerns regarding the event's name and Unity Principles. But as a participant observer working with the March to End Rape Culture, I was able to witness firsthand how feminist activists grappled with the challenges and precarity that come with engaging in networked activism.

Throughout my fieldwork, two aspects of this process became apparent.

The first is that DIO feminists are aware of their own precarity. Critiques of activists' tactics in general and feminists' media practices in particular are often written with the assumption that the practitioners in question are not aware of the challenges they face or of their own shortcomings. This was not the case among MTERC organizers, who intentionally made time to highlight and address the planning committee's organizational struggles. For example, throughout the planning process for MTERC 2016, a number of in-group disputes made it evident that the planning committee members' politics were not completely in line with one another. One particularly heated debate focused on whether white people in the group should, whenever possible, take a step back from central responsibilities so as to better center the perspectives and interests of people of color.

After several organizers on both sides of the debate left MTERC, committee members came together to draft what they refer to as their “Points of Unity,” a mission statement explicitly laying out the group’s shared values, beliefs, and goals. Two organizers wrote an initial draft of the statement with guidance from other Philadelphia-based feminist collectives who had recently authored their own Points of Unity. The draft was then posted on the committee’s Slack, where members could comment on it and suggest revisions, which were incorporated into the document through a consensus-based process. The final version, which was shared publicly through the MTERC website, outlines a vision for intersectional organizing, including an explicit statement in support of prioritizing participants of color, among other practices:

This organizing committee is guided by principles of intersectionality, anti-oppression and combating rape culture. All members must be open to learning about these ideas and reflecting on their own biases. We understand that unpacking and unlearning our own biases and privileges allows us to create space for the various experiences of survivors of all different backgrounds & narratives and the ways they experience rape culture and other violence.

The Points of Unity document became a touchstone for navigating debates in any decision-making process. When, for example, a committee member shared a viral letter calling out cisgender people who expected trans people to disclose their identity on dates on the official MTERC Facebook page, other members expressed concerns that the post’s language was too radical and would alienate more moderate supporters. The post had sparked a heated exchange in the comments section, which included transphobic language, raising concerns that, in addition to potentially offending followers, it may have also hurt trans supporters of MTERC. For the planning committee, the question became whether or not the post should be deleted. After reviewing our Points of Unity, the committee collectively decided that the post was in keeping with MTERC’s mission

to support trans people and that its tone and language mapped onto the march's own radical politics. Members then went about responding to or deleting comments that did not reflect MTERC's values. For the MTERC planning committee, the Points Unity document offered a solution to DIOF's precarious and often unsustainable structure. A collectively agreed upon mission statement offered a way for members to systematically make decision and keep one another in check without also sacrificing their emphasis on open participation.

The second follows from the first. Not only are do-it-ourselves feminists aware of their precarity, they are often *emboldened* by it.

During the planning year for MTERC 2016, organizers briefly considered applying to the IRS to obtain 501(c)(3) status and incorporate the group as a nonprofit organization. In addition to potentially increased credibility, becoming a nonprofit offered a number of potential benefits, including the ability to apply for grants restricted to 501(c)(3) organizations and give donors tax deductions when they make charitable gifts. But after some exploratory research, the idea was squashed. Incorporating as a 501(c)(3) would make the group accountable to the government and legally restrict their ability to engage in partisan politics at any level or speak out against candidates with oppressive agendas.³ Organizers were also concerned that incorporating would shift the group's focus toward professionalization; they feared they would become more caught up in the bureaucratic ins and outs of keeping a nonprofit organization afloat and lose sight of their mission to dismantle rape culture and support local survivors. Plus, organizers worried that as a nonprofit organization, they would have to tone down the march's

³ See INCITE! (2007) for activists' perspectives on the shortcomings of nonprofit organizations when it comes to pursuing revolutionary political agendas.

radical politics and generally “edgy” nature in an effort to maintain a professional public appearance. “But,” I asked Chelsea once at a meeting, “wouldn’t incorporating make fundraising much easier?” She just smiled at me and said, “We will raise our own funds. We always get people to donate supplies even without the tax deduction. We’ll just keep doing it ourselves, and then the march can keep being what we want it to be.”

For these activists, DIOF’s precarity was at times a hazard, but it was also a strength and even a source of pride. Starting the march every year from scratch was strenuous. The committee’s struggle to retain more than ten members at one time has been a testament to that fact. But the flexible, improvisational nature of do-it-ourselves feminism enabled MTERC organizers to craft a protest event that, in process and product, reflected their values and the concerns of their supporters. The reflexivity activists build into this praxis allows them to recognize and grapple with both the political possibilities and limitations of networked feminist organizing.

Conclusion

The Women’s March on Washington and the March to End Rape Culture offer clear evidence of a paradigm shift in U.S. feminist organizing that has been building, gradually, throughout recent history. Feminist movements no longer orbit around highly structured organizations, with clearly defined leaders and tightly controlled messages. Instead, feminist media-makers and platform users stand at the center of the complex, multifaceted terrain that is U.S. feminism. Their creative, extra-institutional activism constitutes a new organizing logic that I call *do-it-ourselves feminism*.

In many ways, the pink pussyhat, which became the signature look of the Women’s March, offers the perfect metaphor for DIOF. Riffing on Trump’s leaked 2005 conversation with Access Hollywood host Billy Bush, in which he claimed his celebrity

status allowed him to “do anything to women,” including “grab them by the pussy” (Fahrenthold, 2016), friends and artists Krista Suh and Jayna Zweiman shared the pattern for a cat-eared hat online (Walker, 2017). Countless feminist knitters soon joined the Pussyhat Project (Walker, 2017). While each individual hat carried the personal touches of its creator, making, wearing, and exchanging pussyhats became collective acts of protest and community-building. Feminists hosted virtual and in-person knitting circles, shared photos of their hats alongside their particular political concerns via social media platforms under the hashtag #PussyHatGlobal, and distributed hats to fellow protesters (Pussyhat Project, 2017). Hundreds of thousands of handmade pussyhats appeared at marches around the world, each a visually striking signifier for the movement and, as *The New Yorker* put it, “a personalized act of labor dedicated to communal protest” (Walker, 2017).

Like the pussyhat, contemporary feminism in the U.S. is a network of self-starting, participatory, open access movements, improvising protest actions “on the wing” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix) through the tactical appropriation of everyday media tools and resources. Channeling their dissent through the social media platforms we browse on a daily basis, this generation of activists has built movements and campaigns open to just about anyone with internet access and some spare time. Importantly, without the gatekeepers of a formally structured organization, this networked feminist activism allows participants to express themselves freely, play a role in directly shaping movements’ public platforms, and even launch campaigns around their personal experiences of oppression. Just as the pussyhat offered an outlet for self-expression while simultaneously linking participants in shared act of protest, feminists’ rebellious, bottom-

up approach to political action enables an activism that is both personal and collective, that both honors the particularities of individual experiences and fosters solidarity across intersections of difference. While U.S. feminism's history of exclusions haunted the Women's March, its organizational style enabled a set of Unity Principles built around women as a complex, multifaceted class, rather than a monolith defined solely by gender. As one journalist quipped, "A new image of feminism — intersectional, DIY, unapologetically pink — was solidified" (Brooks, 2017). Above all, like the pussyhat, today's feminist movements have gained a striking degree of visibility across U.S. media culture, offering a bright glimmer of hope after decades of anti-feminist backlash and in a political moment where civil rights are under attack.

But the pussyhat protest tactic was not without its shortcomings. Trans women and women of color critiqued the hat for centering through its symbolism the bodies of white cisgender women (Compton, 2017). The hat was also easily mass-produced and sold for profit, turning feminist dissent into a commodity and upholding capitalist values that run counter to feminist collective politics. As a low-risk personal fashion statement, some critics charged that the pussyhat gave participants a false sense of accomplishment, as if, by donning the hat, they had done *something* to affect the status quo, which could in turn lull them into complacency. Perhaps more than any other action taken at Women's Marches around the world, the pink, cat-eared caps sparked a flurry of internal discord within feminist communities.

The *do-it-ourselves* activist media praxis behind contemporary feminist movements faces a similar array of problems. Without clear movement structures, DIO feminists lack a means through which to hold one another accountable for following

through on their intersectional principles. Their turn away from a centralized leadership and toward open, personalizable participation can even make establishing a platform with a well-established set of political values and commitments difficult. The individualized nature of DIOF leaves it vulnerable to commercial cooptation, and when its message is distorted or commodified or activists face backlash, it is often missing the organizational capacity necessary to issue a collective response. The networked media praxis also faces a sustainability problem. Millions of marchers may have made and worn pussyhats, but what happens after the viral protest action's media attention comes to an end? Networked feminist actions can disperse just as quickly as they come together. A key question for today's feminist organizers is how to keep activists engaged in long-term struggles for social justice, even when feminism is not making headlines.

But the pussyhat controversy illustrates a final key feature of do-it-ourselves feminism. In the weeks leading up to and following the Women's March, feminists' critiques of the tactic flooded social media platforms and editorial pages. These discussions and debates stand as a testament to the reflexivity of today's feminist activists, who consistently evaluate whether their actions align with their politics and revamp their tactics accordingly. The case studies taken up in this chapter and the emerging scholarship on contemporary feminist movements suggest that networked activism is doubly entangled in both the "undoing" and "redoing" of feminist politics for the twenty-first century. Through their reflexive media praxis, DIO feminists actively confront the double-edged nature of networked activism and negotiate between their political goals and media resources.

This project offers an in-depth, practitioner-focused exploration of how feminists are building a repertoire of activist media tactics that reflects their values and how the choice to “do it ourselves” is changing the face of U.S. feminism. In this chapter, grounded in case studies of the global Women’s March movement and Philadelphia’s local March to End Rape Culture, I set forward a robust description of do-it-ourselves feminism as an activist media praxis reshaping contemporary feminist movements. The following two chapters trace how activists, drawing on the DIOF praxis, use media to pursue two longstanding goals of U.S. feminism — bringing visibility to personal experiences of oppression and cultivating safe, inclusive communities — while navigating the challenges of the current context and the structural constraints of media platforms, all without the capacities or resources of formal organizations. In naming and describing the organizing logic that connects these political projects — do-it-ourselves feminism — my goal is to create space to identify and reflect on activists’ best practices and shared struggles, so that we might continue crafting a praxis of resistance up to the challenges of the current political context.

CHAPTER 3 – “I hear you, I see you, I believe you, I stand with you.” Networked Feminist Visibility: A Case Study of #MeToo

In 1997, Tarana Burke was working as a counselor at a youth summer camp, when a young camper asked to speak to her in private. The camper disclosed to Burke that she had been sexually abused. Heartbroken and caught off guard, Burke sent the camper to another counselor. The exchange haunted Burke, who is also a sexual violence survivor: “I didn’t have a response or a way to help her in that moment, and I couldn’t even say ‘me too,’” Burke told *The New York Times* (Garcia, 2017). In 2006, Burke founded Just Be Inc., a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization focused on the wellbeing and growth of young women of color. Remembering that camper, Burke used the organization to launch the “me too Movement,” aimed at creating “empowerment through empathy” (Just Be Inc., 2013) for girls and young women who have endured sexual abuse, assault, or exploitation.

More than a decade later, those two simple words — “me too” — spread like wild fire across social media. On the evening of October 15, 2017, actor Alyssa Milano tweeted, “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted, write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet”.⁴ Inspired and infuriated by the wave of allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, which had emerged in the weeks prior, Milano sought to expose the

⁴ Contrary to most journalistic coverage of the hashtag, Milano was not the originator of the hashtag component of the “me too” movement. Amy Siskind, president of the women’s advocacy organization The New Agenda, started the hashtag campaign, #WomenWhoRoar in the morning of October 15, in response Twitter suspending the account of actor Rose McGowan, a prominent voice in bringing Harvey Weinstein down. That afternoon, several people, the earliest including author and activist Nancy Gruver and attorney Carreen Shannon, began tweeting #MeToo alongside #WomenWhoRoar to signal that they had faced sexual harassment or assault (Busch, 2017). Milano’s tweet did not come until later that evening; however, her celebrity status and millions of followers played a pivotal roll in amplifying #MeToo and catalyzing its global diffusion.

pervasiveness of sexual violence beyond the film industry (Sayej, 2017). Milano woke the next morning to 55,000 replies, to more than 17,000 retweets of her original message, and to #MeToo as the top trending hashtag on Twitter (Sayej, 2017).

#MeToo was not the first instance of *hashtag feminism*. This form of networked feminist activism, mobilized through Twitter's metadata tags for marking, organizing, and linking posts on a particular topic, has become a core component of the do-it-ourselves feminist repertoire and dozens of feminist hashtags concerning gender justice issues have taken off in recent years.⁵ Even so, feminists are not the first or only activists to appropriate the hashtag form to pursue their goals. Some of the earliest activist hashtags include the 2009 #IranElection campaign, in which activists on the ground in Iran connected with allies around the world in the aftermath of that year's fraudulent presidential election (Mottahedeh, 2015); the 2010 #G20report campaign, in which activists reported on the protests at the G20 Toronto summit (Poell, 2014); and the 2011 #OccupyWallStreet campaign, in which activists around the world reported on happenings at their local occupations throughout the Occupy movement (Ferrari, 2016). Hashtag feminism is just one tactic in the broader activist repertoire of what I call *networked visibility campaigns*, or protest actions that draw on the social and technical affordances of digital platforms to draw attention to a particular issue, experience, or cause. #MeToo's viral diffusion, however, exponentially outpaced many of its predecessors. Prior to #MeToo, 2014 campaigns #WhyIStayed and #YesAllWomen, two of the earliest feminist hashtags, were the most visible Twitter campaigns against sexual

⁵ See *Feminist Media Studies* 14(6), 15(1), and 15(2) for essays documenting some of the earliest and most visible feminist hashtag campaigns. See also Bonilla & Rosa (2015) for a thorough overview of Twitter hashtags' forms and functions.

violence; in one day, they were tweeted more than 46,000 times and 61,000 times, respectively (Grinberg, 2014; Main, 2017). By comparison, within 24 hours, #MeToo was used in 109,451 tweets (Main, 2017) and referenced in more than 12 million posts and comments on Facebook (Park, 2017).

At the time of her original Tweet, Milano was unaware of Burke's grassroots "me too" movement. Women of color journalists and activists, wary of white women appropriating black women's labor and dominating the conversation surrounding sexual violence, quickly took to Twitter to call out the erasure of Burke's work (Hill, 2017). Two days after the hashtag went viral, Milano publicly credited Burke with having founded the movement a decade earlier and the two joined forces, taking media interviews together to promote the movement's message (Hill, 2017).

In the weeks after the campaign first went viral, #MeToo outlived the fleeting temporality of most hashtags and grew into a powerful, transnational movement against sexual violence. The hashtag was quickly translated into its French (#BalanceTonPorc/"call out your pig"), Spanish (#YoTambien/"me too"), Italian (#QuellaVoltaChe/"that time"), Hebrew (#גם_אנחנו/"us too"), and Arabic (#AnaKaman/"me too") counterparts, among others (Lekach, 2017; Levy, 2017); the Chinese equivalent, #MiTu, translates into the seemingly innocuous nonsensical phrase, "rice bunny," to circumvent government censorship (Lake, 2018). Variants of the original hashtag, including #MosqueMeToo, #ChurchToo, #MeTooPhD, #MeTooK12, #MeTooCongress, #MeTooMilitary, and #AidToo, soon took off, calling attention to sexual misconduct across multiple sites and industries within and beyond the U.S.

context. By the end of 2017, the still-active hashtag had been used on Twitter in 85 countries and posted on Facebook nearly 90 million times (Sayej, 2017).

The hashtag has had a number of ripple effects, which are still unfolding as of this writing.

The same month the hashtag went viral, journalist Moira Donegan anonymously created and circulated the “Shitty Media Men” list, a shared Google spreadsheet that allowed anyone to document warnings about men in media industries who had allegedly committed sexual misconduct. While Donegan deleted the spreadsheet after it went viral, copies spread across the internet, naming more than 70 men as perpetrators of sexual assault and harassment (Grady, 2018). Olympic gymnast McKayla Maroney used the hashtag to publicly disclose that USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar had molested her while she was in his care; following Maroney’s lead, 156 other victims came forward and Nassar was sentenced to life in prison (Correa, 2018; Park & Perrigo, 2017). In November, Congresswoman Jackie Speier, herself a survivor of sexual assault as a young congressional staffer, introduced a bill to streamline the process for reporting sexual harassment on Capitol Hill (Serfaty, 2017).

The following month, *Time Magazine* named the movement’s “Silence Breakers,” from celebrities like Milano to grassroots organizers like Burke, as its 2017 Person of the Year (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017). In the aftermath of the hashtag’s diffusion and the public condemnation of Weinstein, who now faces 81 different accusers, allegations of sexual misconduct were made against dozens of high-profile men in entertainment, politics, journalism, sports, the arts, and more (Almukhtar, Gold, & Buchanan, 2018). On January 1, 2018, inspired by #MeToo, 300 actors, agents, writers,

directors, producers, executives, and lawyers published an open letter in *The New York Times* announcing the launch of Time's Up. The initiative, which has its own hashtag campaign, includes a \$13 million legal defense fund for underprivileged survivors, a call for new legislation against sexual harassment, and a formal effort to reach gender parity at film and TV studios and talent agencies by 2020 (Buckley, 2018). One week later, at the 2018 Golden Globe Awards, Time's Up mobilized its first symbolic action as celebrity supporters dressed in all black, donned pins bearing the initiative's name, addressed sexual violence in interviews, and brought grassroots activists as their guests to draw attention to gender justice issues beyond Hollywood (Weaver, 2018). Similar forms of red carpet activism would punctuate the rest of the 2018 awards season (North, 2018).

As it became more and more visible, a commercial market sprang up around #MeToo and the campaign's slogan was used to brand not only celebrities, but also clothing, accessories, makeup, and even a spate of mobile applications and start-up companies (Dvoskin & McGregor, 2018; Hampton, 2018; Salo, 2017). Once #MeToo became almost inescapable across social media platforms, news outlets, and consumer culture, dozens of think pieces concerning gender, sex, and power emerged and some, like the hashtag, went viral, further extending the campaign's relevance beyond any one news cycle.⁶ Perhaps most importantly, #MeToo has sparked everyday conversations about consent at dinner tables, in classrooms, and on college campuses (Bennett, 2017; Crowley, 2018) and has emboldened record numbers of individual survivors to seek support through crisis centers and hotlines (Koerth-Baker, 2018; Lambert, 2018; McCammon, 2017).

⁶ See Traister, 2018 for an overview of the editorials #MeToo inspired.

In three months' time, what started out as a grassroots initiative and, later, a tweet exploded into a global, multimedia movement against sexual violence.

Following its meteoric rise, #MeToo faced two diametrically opposed critiques. Conservative critics charged that the campaign had gone "*too far*," destroying the lives of those publicly accused and straining personal and professional relationships between men and women (e.g., Chattopadhyay, 2018; Kipnis, 2018; Richardson, 2018).⁷ #MeToo, these commentators argued, had the potential to change everyday life through its globally networked visibility, and not necessarily for the better. But others, particularly feminist activists and academics, wondered whether #MeToo had gone *far enough*, or if the hashtag was merely a media spectacle, a superficial performance incapable of dismantling a system of oppression that extends well beyond its celebrity spokeswomen (e.g., Banet-Weiser, 2018b; Faludi, 2017; Kipnis, 2018). For these commentators, the

⁷ Some news outlets described the critique that #MeToo had gone "too far" as the outcome of a feminist generational divide. According to this perspective, while younger #MeToo feminists advocated for an expansive conceptualization of sexual violence that charts a spectrum of injuries from street harassment to rape, older "second-wave" feminists, commentators took issue with the younger generation's subsumption of such a variety of experiences under the label of "assault" and their portrayal of women as victims (e.g., Bennett, 2018; Crary & Lush, 2018; Edwards, 2018; Harding, 2018; Livingstone, 2018; Richardson, 2018). But, as longtime feminist writer Katha Pollitt points out in an interview with *Slate* (Chotiner, 2018), the most prominent voices in the "#MeToo has gone too far" camp were not feminists at all, let alone activists who helped mobilize the movement's second wave. Moreover, as Pollitt and feminist blogger and author Lindy West (2018) have argued, this generation's more expansive conceptualization of rape culture has roots in feminist thought from the Civil Rights Era. In keeping with my practitioner-focused methodology, I apply these feminists' perspectives on the #MeToo debate here and classify the "too far" critique as a conservative one. It is also worth noting that, as feminist social movement researchers have documented, journalists and other commentators have frequently deployed the trope of the generational divide, often characterized as a mother-daughter quarrel, to discredit U.S. feminist movements throughout history (Henry, 2004; Whittier, 2010).

hashtag campaign had made *some* progress by drawing awareness to sexual violence, but visibility alone was not enough; #MeToo's popularity was too easily coopted by corporate media and Hollywood interests to bring about the social revolution its participants called for. Both critiques echo questions at the center of debates concerning hashtag activism: Can hashtag activism cause "real" social change beyond its viral visibility? What happens *after* the hashtag takes over news media? Or, as a PBS docuseries inspired by the campaign asked, *#MeToo, Now What?*

Much existing research and discourse surrounding networked visibility tactics like hashtag campaigns circle around these questions, with polarizing results. So-called "techno-optimists" have argued that the internet can indeed create real social change. Social media platforms, they argue, democratize access to the tools and information required to build movements and stage protests, thereby lowering the cost of participation and, in the process, revolutionizing the public sphere, such that political organizing no longer requires the resources of political institutions (e.g., Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2011, 2015; Shirky, 2008). From this more utopian standpoint, digital forms of protest, such as hashtag feminism, enable a diversity of actors to gain visibility and mobilize collective action around underrepresented issues. "Techno-pessimists," however, have made the case that networked activism is merely "slacktivism," a risk-free performance of virtue-signaling that *feels* satisfying but has little impact, that distracts from "real" activist organizing, that opens activists up to surveillance, that directly benefits social media corporations, and that is incapable of building the strong community ties of sustainable movements (e.g., Carr, 2012; Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011). For these tech-dystopian critics, sharing a personal story through a feminist hashtag only creates the *illusion* of

doing activism, while simultaneously upholding capitalist systems of exchange and directing attention away from structures of power. Viewed through the lens of these bifurcated debates, #MeToo seems to offer a case study for testing whether or not social media platforms can create social change.

In this chapter, however, I work from a different line of inquiry.

While Western news media have demonstrated a sizable appetite for think pieces and sound bites that scorn or hype the power of the internet (Tufekci, 2017), either/or questions about whether or not networked activism works restrict our understanding of digital protest tactics. The binary structure of the “activism versus slacktivism” debate oversimplifies the multiple dimensions of a case like #MeToo. The campaign has simultaneously taken the forms of a grassroots organization, a hashtagged support network, a community conversation, a personal revelation, a coalition of actors and media-makers, and a push for stronger legislation, *as well as* an individualistic celebrity self-branding mechanism, a capitalist marketing campaign, a superficial fashion statement, and more. The social, cultural, and political lives of #MeToo are numerous, and the campaign’s impact cannot be wholly dismissed nor uncritically celebrated. Asking either/or questions of activist hashtags overlooks the possibility that the answer might be *both/and*, that hashtag feminism, in its many dimensions, might be *both* politically transformative *and* politically problematic. In fact, that such polarizing tensions exist in empirical research and popular discourse concerning hashtag activism suggests that each side of this debate may be telling one part of a far more complex story. To borrow McRobbie’s (2004) phrase, competing opinions on hashtag activism suggest that the tactic is *doubly entangled* in both liberatory politics and systems of oppression.

As Tufekci (2017) argues, research questions that reject false dichotomies and embrace this complexity are needed to develop a fuller understanding of hashtag activism.

Moreover, the *technodeterminist* assumptions behind these debates — the notion that technology alone drives social change — leave little room for feminists’ voices and agency and the complex negotiations they have historically made between their political goals and contexts when developing tactics. Though digital platforms may be new, for U.S. feminists, the struggle to balance both the compelling, highly visible drama of protesting personal experiences of injustice with the difficult, backstage work of collective organizing is not. Susan Faludi (2017) argues that feminist activism in the U.S. has, dating back to the nineteenth century temperance movement, taken two forms: one is expressions of anger at the abuses of individual men, who provide unambiguous targets for activists’ righteous outrage, and the other is the “less spectacular but essential” work of dismantling structures of inequality and building more equitable systems in their places. These two forms of protest can productively intersect, but “fighting the patriarchy” is easier and often far more electrifying than “fighting the patriarchy,” making the former more widely practiced and more easily digestible within mainstream media. Historical accounts of U.S. feminist activism like Faludi’s (2017), in other words, suggest that digital media have intensified and complicated, rather than caused, feminists’ struggles to sustain strong and effective movements over time.

To sum up, the instrumentalist approach of the “activism vs. slacktivism” debate frames social media as *tools* that may or may not cause real social change and, as such, lacks the capacity to hold at once both the possibilities and limitations of hashtag feminism and the history of organizing struggles that preceded it. With a handful of

important exceptions (Barassi, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2012; Keller, 2016; Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018; Tufekci, 2017; Yang, 2009; Zayani, 2015), existing scholarship on hashtag activism and other digital protest tactics also tends to focus exclusively on campaigns' effects and qualities, rather than the perspectives and experiences of the activists behind them. The result is that activist-practitioners' understandings of the strengths of digital protest tactics and efforts to counterbalance their shortcomings remain undertheorized.

Here, I take up the media-as-practice framework described in Chapter 1 to develop a more expansive, bottom-up, practitioner-focused look at feminist hashtag campaigns. When digital media platforms are framed not as tools but as spaces for political participation, where activists develop repertoires of contention, the contradictions of networked activism and the strategies practitioners use to navigate them come into view. Instead of asking about hashtag feminism's effects, a line of inquiry that demands definitive answers to what are in reality complex questions, I ask about feminists' hashtag *practices*, starting with the political values that inform them. How do feminist activists imagine the role visibility, through networked discourses and performances like hashtag campaigns, plays in political liberation? What, from their points of view, are the political affordances and limitations of networked visibility campaigns? And how do they navigate these double entanglements of networked visibility? My goal is to contribute practitioners' perspectives on hashtag feminism and illuminate the processes through which activists develop their tactics while working within particular sociotechnical constraints. This grounded, processual approach toward understanding hashtag feminism is especially key as do-it-ourselves feminists work to

build a feminist praxis that reflects their values and responds to the challenges of the current political context and media landscape.

To explore these questions, I applied the media-as-practice framework to #MeToo, the most popular feminist hashtag campaign against sexual violence to date. I conducted a textual analysis of a large sample of *meta-tweets* — or tweets in which activists use a hashtag to reflect on it or call attention to it — from the campaign. Through an inductive coding approach, I identified participants' reasons, both personal and political, for joining #MeToo as well as where they saw hashtag feminism falling short of their goals or contradicting their values. Importantly, I also documented what strategies activists developed to course correct and redress hashtag activism's shortcomings, while making the most of its perceived affordances.

Drawing on this primary source material alongside existing scholarship concerning visibility, performance, and discourse, I argue that hashtag feminism is a type of contentious performance that enables activists to politicize the personal — a longstanding goal of U.S. feminist movements — by making it *visible*. #MeToo aggregated personal stories into a networked visibility campaign, bridging the individual with the collective and illustrating the systemic nature of sexual violence. As the activists in my sample report, however, making the personal visible on a globally networked media stage posed a variety of challenges for both individual participants and the movement as a whole, from re-traumatization to the erasure of those most marginalized survivors. To negotiate between the affordances and limitations of hashtag activism, #MeToo participants developed *performance maintenance practices* over the course of the campaign's first several months. Through these ongoing remedial strategies,

participants evaluated the campaign's shortcomings and advanced solutions informed by their goals and values, taking steps toward a specifically feminist approach to hashtag activism. Their reflections and efforts to improve the campaign point toward hashtag feminism as a complex, interactional, recursive process aimed at achieving an intersectional, transformative politics of visibility.

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, I review ongoing scholarly and popular debates concerning the political significance and shortcomings of *networked visibility* as a feminist protest tactic through the lens of the #MeToo fallout. These debates are largely divided between two poles: those who see hashtag feminism as engaging in a *politics of visibility*, capable of creating social change by spreading alternative interpretations of social injustices, and those who see hashtag feminism as ensnared in an *economy of visibility*, where political action begins and ends with representation in consumer media culture. One contribution of this chapter is to build a comprehensive review of existing research concerning hashtag feminism, which has been steadily growing and converging around similar findings and tensions since 2014, so as to highlight new questions and challenges for feminist media studies scholars moving forward. Second, I outline my theoretical and methodological approach for analyzing hashtag feminism as a contentious performance, whose actors must grapple with both the possibilities and shortcomings of networked visibility campaigns. In this section, I detail a strategy for conducting a practitioner-focused textual analysis of Twitter data, which I call a *meta-tweet analysis*. Third, grounded in my sample of meta-tweets, I map, from #MeToo participants' perspectives, the possibilities and shortcomings of hashtag activism as a feminist protest tactic. I then go on to document the performance maintenance

practices they used to juggle both. Finally, I conclude by considering the implications of my findings for existing scholarship on hashtag feminism and online activism and organizers mobilizing protest movements in the digital age.

Literature Review

Hashtag Feminism and Making the Personal *Visible*

The #MeToo debates illustrate, at a smaller scale, broader debates concerning hashtag feminism and the role visibility plays in feminists' conceptualization of political liberation. Existing research on hashtag feminism largely leans toward one of two sides: Some scholars, drawing on theories of discursive power and performance, frame hashtag feminism as a powerful practice in the *politics of visibility*, a form of activism focused on shifting how we represent, interpret, and, in turn, respond to marginalized groups and issues. But others have argued that while the tactic is helpful for raising awareness, hashtag feminism is often complicit in what Sarah Banet-Weiser (2015a; 2018a; 2018b) calls an *economy of visibility*, a form of activism that begins and ends with performance and does little to transform structures of inequality. With the polarized reactions to #MeToo as a reference point, I consider both sides of this tension in the literature below. This review lays the groundwork for my exploration of a set of research questions that works from the assumption that scholars at both ends of the spectrum may be correct. Instead of asking whether or not hashtag feminism works, I push toward a practitioner-centered understanding of what it means to grapple with both the affordances and limitations of hashtag feminism.

Hashtag Feminism, a Politics of Visibility

Despite their often anti-feminist sentiments, conservative critics implicitly acknowledged that the testimonies published under #MeToo had the potential to not only topple individual perpetrators, but to materially alter the social fabric as we know it. They frequently referred to the hashtag campaign as a “witch hunt” (e.g., Collective, 2018; Magness, 2018; Walsh & Blackwell, 2018), a “hysterical” rush to judgment that risked ruining lives and careers fueled by, in one director’s words, a “new man-hating puritanism” (Nyren, 2018). Beyond irreparable damage to the accused’s reputation, others argued that #MeToo, as the *New York Post* put it, “lumped the trivial in with legitimate sexual assault” (Peyser, 2017). The hashtag, in other words, triggered a “sex panic” that could sap the fun out of workplace banter, flirting, romance, dating, and casual hookups for men and women alike (Merkin, 2018; Sommers, 2017), an ironic reversal of the feminist Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s (Gessen, 2017). Still others ridiculed #MeToo supporters for enabling a “culture of victimhood,” which casts women as helpless and irresponsible for their individual actions or personal successes and silences anyone who challenges its logic (Phillips, 2018; Roiphe, 2018).

Embedded in these critics’ fears about the campaign’s long-term effects on everyday life was the tacit understanding that #MeToo engages in a *politics of visibility*, a representational struggle aimed at exposing power so that it might be transformed (Banet-Weiser, 2015a). Within a politics of visibility, the collective articulation of oppressive experiences, such as sexual violence, challenges social norms that silence and excuse such experiences and, when successful, transforms the structures of inequality those norms support. As Banet-Weiser (2015a) explains, identity-political movements have long practiced tactics geared toward making historically marginalized political categories

like gender visible. The demand to be seen, recognized, and valued has been a key component of feminist, anti-racist, queer and trans, labor, and humanitarian movements' fight for the expansion of rights for underprivileged communities (Chouliaraki, 2006; Hall, 1996; Taylor, 1997). For U.S. feminist movements dating back to the 1960s, engaging in a politics of visibility has often involved *making the personal political*, or calling attention to the taken-for-granted gender norms that constrain everyday life so that they might be denaturalized and deconstructed (Hanisch, 1969). Put differently, U.S. feminist activists have historically drawn on tactics that make the personal *visible*, from street protests and speak outs to the alternative media networks that preceded hashtag feminism, such as the second-wave underground press of the 1960s and 1970s (Hogan, 2016; Young, 1997).

The political implications of making the personal visible can be best understood through theories of discourse, performance, and power.

Stacey Young (1997) draws on Foucault's (1991) conceptualization of *discourse* — speech, writing, and actions that appear across a variety of sites, texts, and institutions, govern the way a topic can be talked and thought about, and, consequently, influence behaviors and practices — to describe feminist media practices that engage in a politics of visibility as *discursive activism*. Discursive activism is a form of collective action directed at “promoting new grammars, new social paradigms through which individuals, collectivities, and institutions interpret social circumstances and devise responses to them” (p. 3). Through this tactic, feminist media activists, past and present, have endeavored to make visible and deconstruct those hegemonic discourses that, on a daily basis, marginalize some bodies while privileging others. In their place, feminists

collectively construct and broadcast new interpretive frameworks for representing marginalized identities, understanding oppressive experiences, and responding to systemic injustices. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues, this process of feminist “rearticulation” (p. 32) speaks power into visibility so that its very foundation can be challenged, deconstructed, and replaced with alternative epistemologies, formed from a feminist standpoint. Here, speech is *performative*, but not in the colloquial sense of being inauthentic or superficial, a critique some commentators have leveled against hashtag activism. Rather, speech is performative in the sense that Judith Butler (1990), drawing on speech act theory, deploys the term to describe gender as a “stylized repetition of acts,” constrained by historically specific gendered discourses, which “founds and consolidates the subject” (p. 140). Speech, in other words, is *productive*, constituting subject positions and creating material effects for the speaker and listener beyond its transmission. And while discursive frameworks governing normative behaviors and identities constrict a speaker’s agency, the act of articulating and rearticulating, or, to use Butler’s (2011) term, “reiterating” (p. xviii) these dominant discourses presents an opportunity to creatively challenge and revise gendered scripts. Feminist politics of visibility are a *performative politics*, with the potential to produce change by highlighting the instability of the discursive formations shaping everyday actions and by modeling alternative ways of being.

Sustained social movements engaged in performative politics often develop their own repertoires of what Tilly and Tarrow (2015) call “contentious performances” (p. 11), a standardized array of tactics for one set of political actors to make claims on another, staged for proximal or distant audiences, repeated over time and adapted for particular

causes, which draw on familiar scripts with room for improvisation. Following Jeffrey Alexander's (2004) definition of *performance*, through these tactics, political actors appropriate shared cultural scripts and codes to "display for others the meaning of their social situation" (p. 529). Effective performances convince onlookers that the meanings actors convey are true and foster solidarity between actors and their audiences, thereby facilitating the type of discursive activism Young (1997) describes. In addition to in-person actions like street protests, sit-ins, and speak-outs, across their history, U.S. feminist movements have drawn on a repertoire of contentious, *mediated* performances. From 1960s-era manifestos on women's liberation (Lyon, 1999; Young, 1997) to today's viral hashtags, feminists' media practices have not only brought visibility to the social situations of women and other marginalized communities, but have, through their production and circulation, challenged assumptions surrounding whose voice matters.

While their tactical emphasis on visibility through discourse and performance predates the internet, as #MeToo has demonstrated, in the digital age, feminists take the contentious performances of discursive activism to a new level with networked visibility campaigns. Through practices like hashtag feminism, activists appropriate social media platforms' everyday accessibility and participatory nature, their convergence with traditional news and entertainment media outlets, and their transnational reach to collectively politicize the personal and articulate demands for recognition on a global scale. In previous generations, political actors' ability to gain a large audience depended upon their ability to gain news media attention, which in turn depended upon their organizational capacities and resources (Koopmans, 2004). Today, a compelling and timely Tweet can provide activists with immediate access to a sprawling network of

audience members, who can actively support and even join the performance by sharing a Tweet or posting a message under a hashtag, at little or no expense. These features make hashtag activism a tactic-of-choice for DIO feminists. Conservative critics' concerns about #MeToo's implications for the status quo of gender relations suggest that, beyond lowering the cost of mobilization, networked visibility offers an effective means to an end, a political performance with the potential to produce effects beyond visibility itself.

Much existing research demonstrates the positive sociopolitical impact, real or potential, of hashtag feminists' performative politics of visibility.

Scholars have, for example, begun documenting the role hashtags, through the diffusion of affectively compelling stories and images, can play in the pursuit of justice for a sexual violence survivor (Powell, 2015; Powell & Henry, 2017; Wood, Rose, & Thompson, 2018). But while these *individual* cases of "viral justice" (Wood, Rose, & Thompson, 2018) often raise important questions for law enforcement and policy makers, scholars have also drawn on theories of discursive power to identify hashtag feminism's implications for the *structural* level of society. What Yang (2016), in his study of #BlackLivesMatter, calls the "narrative agency" (p. 14) of the hashtag form enables participants to not only share their own personal narratives, but to collectively challenge the discursive frameworks shaping interpretations of and responses to social issues. Feminist media studies scholars have demonstrated how, through their narrative agency, feminist hashtag campaigns offer an especially effective tactic for challenging norms and myths that enable sexual violence (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer, 2017). Campaigns like #NotOkay, #WhyIStayed, and #YesAllWomen invite survivors to not only share otherwise silenced experiences, but to simultaneously rewrite the commonly

accepted narrative that victims are to blame for their own assaults, thereby shifting responsibility and shame onto the shoulders of offenders (Clark, 2016; Jenkins & Mazer, 2017; Lokot, 2018; Maas et al., 2018; Stenberg, 2017; Williams, 2015). Others, such as #StopStreetHarassment and #SafetyTipsForLadies, critique discourses that enable sexual violence and, in the process, limit women's autonomy and agency in public spaces, often through direct address to the predominantly male perpetrators of sexual assault and harassment (Eagle, 2015; Rentschler, 2015).

When feminist hashtags converge with traditional media outlets, their interpretive frameworks take on an even higher degree of visibility and resonance, amplifying their ability to have lasting effects on everyday discourse. This dynamic is especially evident in the case of hashtag campaigns targeting sexist and racist representations in news, advertising, and entertainment media (Clark, 2014; Horeck, 2014; Meyer, 2014; Stache, 2015). As I have argued in previous work, once a feminist hashtag goes viral, it becomes newsworthy, and, in the most successful cases, news media outlets adopt the interpretive framework the campaign advances (Clark, 2016). This was the case, for example, when journalists and news broadcasters adopted the #WhyIStayed campaign's narrative that domestic violence survivors should be supported, rather than blamed, a reversal of the longstanding victim-blaming narratives that have characterized news portrayals of rape and assault survivors (Clark, 2016; O'Hara, 2012). In another instance, following the viral 2014 #NotBuyingIt campaign, which targeted the traditionally sexist commercials that air during the Super Bowl, there was marked turn in advertising toward "femvertising," or advertisements that bend gender norms or offer positive depictions of women and girls (Clark, 2014; McGregor, 2017). In a similar fashion, others have

identified hashtag feminism as an effective tactic for challenging anti-feminist rhetoric and offensive stereotypes of feminists, as in the case of the #IAmAFeminist campaign (Lane, 2015; Kim, 2017).

The virality of a hashtag is typically short-lived, making each campaign described above seem more like what Tarana Burke, when articulating her concerns about the #MeToo campaign's sustainability, has described as a "moment" rather than a "movement" (NBC News, 2017). But feminist media studies scholars have argued that these hashtag campaigns have had three major long-lasting effects, for both feminist politics and society at large.

For one, hashtags have provided platforms for launching intersectional interventions into contemporary feminist politics and popular discourse. Jessie Daniels (2016) argues that while systems of oppression persist online and "white feminism" continues to manifest within feminist networks, Twitter offers new opportunities for activists to broadcast intersectional critiques of exclusionary feminist actions and movements. As black feminist blogger and author Mikki Kendall observes, "Twitter is changing everything. Now, people are forced to hear us and women of color no longer need the platform of white feminism to have their own microphones" (qtd. in Vasquez, 2013). Kendall, herself, used Twitter as a microphone to critique white liberal feminists' failure to address racism and support women of color when she ignited the hashtag campaign, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, which grew into a watershed moment for online feminism (Kendall, 2013; Loza, 2014). Others, such as Tynes, Schuschke, and Noble (2016), Brown et al. (2017), and Kuo (2016), have demonstrated how racial justice hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, and

#NotYourAsianSidekick enable a “digital intersectionality” (Tynes, Schuschke, & Noble, 2016, p. 22). Hashtag networks create an opportunity for people standing at the intersection of multiple, overlapping oppressions to build coalitions and deconstruct interlocking systems of power (Loza, 2014; Rodino-Colocino, 2014). The shift that Bennett and Segerberg (2013) describe from *collective* to *connective* action, from the at-times exclusionary organizations of 1960s-era feminist movements to the networked, participatory, open access nature of networked feminism, has created new possibilities for intersectional feminist critique. This, in turn, has led to productive, though at times difficult, public discussions concerning who feminism is for and what it means to be a feminist, contributing to the work of developing a feminist politics for the current political moment.⁸

Second, in addition to shaping a more intersectional feminist praxis, the interpretive frameworks feminist hashtags advance can inform responses to social injustices long after an individual campaign has reached peak visibility. Samantha Thrift (2014) argues that hyper-visible hashtags like #YesAllWomen take on the qualities of a “feminist meme event” (p. 1091), or a widely shared cultural reference. While #YesAllWomen was sparked by a particular event — the 2014 killings in Isla Vista, CA, in which 22-year-old Elliot Rodger killed six people and injured fourteen others to punish women for rejecting him — it quickly grew into a reference point for “how we

⁸ When feminist hashtags first began going viral around 2013 and 2014, a number of trending news stories described those that critiqued exclusionary feminist discourse and actions as “toxic.” For example, in the most prominent of these pieces, Michelle Goldberg, writing for *The Nation*, described “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars.” These pieces sparked a debate over whether hashtags featuring feminists of color “calling out” white feminists were productive or divisive. For an overview of these debates, see Thelandersson (2014) and Risam (2015).

conceptualize and choose to narrate misogynist aggression and gender violence in American culture” (Thrift, 2014, p. 1091). Beyond conceptualizing gender violence, hashtag feminism can also influence how we respond to it. Carrie Rentschler (2017) argues that hashtag feminists, through acts of “networked feminist witnessing” (p. 565), model intersectional interventions into everyday experiences of oppression. In particular, Rentschler’s analysis focuses on hashtag campaigns like #YouOkSis, which promote an anti-carceral, transformative justice approach to bystander intervention into gendered and racialized street harassment, one that seeks to support survivors and raise public consciousness rather than perpetuate further racialized violence by calling on the state to punish perpetrators. Their “activist pedagogy” informs not only individual responses to everyday encounters with street harassment, but has also pushed anti-street harassment organizations to adopt an intersectional approach that centers communities of color when addressing this issue. In their ethnographic work, Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose (2018) demonstrate that the act of circulating or participating in a hashtag campaign is a pedagogical experience in and of itself, in which women and girls learn to publicly document their encounters with sexual violence, so as to find support and develop collective responses to these injustices, as in the case of #BeenRapedNeverReported. Through their consciousness-raising work, feminist hashtags, these scholars suggest, can have a lasting material impact on participants and their audiences, reshaping how they interpret and react to everyday encounters with gender-based oppression well after any one campaign ends. Feminist hashtag campaigns, in other words, form a collective memory, a set of symbolic resources and scripts that can be utilized and invoked in the future.

Finally, the networking functions of feminist hashtags facilitate the formation of communal spaces and collective identities. Much existing scholarship on hashtag feminism describes hashtag networks as *counterpublics* (Drüeke & Zobl, 2016; Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016; Kuo, 2018; Sills et al., 2016). Nancy Fraser (1992) first defined counterpublic spheres as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses , which in turn permit them to formulate opposition interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 67). The invention and circulation of a hashtag’s counterdiscourse brings a counterpublic of hashtag practitioners and lurkers into being and within that space, participants collectively shape and refine a campaign’s message and reflect on its implications for their own personal lives and identities. For example, in their analyses of #YesAllWomen and its critical offshoot, #YesAllWhiteWomen, Sarah J. Jackson and Sonia Banaszczyk (2016) demonstrate how participants negotiate with one another “to define and redefine counterpublic narratives from their respective standpoints” (p. 392). In the case of these two campaigns, feminists of color and their allies worked to correct the original hashtag’s collapsing of womanhood along the axis of gendered oppression alone and to shed light on the particular ways in which women of color experience sexual violence. Feelings of solidarity, formed through affective ties, shared experiences, or a common identity, allow for this negotiation to take place without the counterpublic dissolving over disagreements (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer, 2017; Khoja-Moolji, 2015; Kim, 2017; Williams & Gonlin, 2017). The counterdiscourses circulated through these networked communities and the bonds that hold them together outlive a hashtag’s moment in the limelight. Even after a hashtag loses its newsworthiness, the record of its counterdiscourses remain and,

in some cases, hashtag counterpublics with especially strong bonds can be mobilized to respond to new issues and to support members long after the campaign's initial diffusion (Kim, 2017).

Taken together, much existing scholarship helps explain why a hashtag campaign like #MeToo, a tactic that some have dismissed as “slacktivism,” could so deeply disturb conservative critics. #MeToo, through the global reach of its performative politics of visibility, has the potential to not only change the way we talk about sexual violence, but to equip us with the intersectional feminist epistemologies necessary for better addressing harassment and assault and supporting survivors. Such a social transformation could overturn patriarchal systems of power.

Hashtag Feminism, an Economy of Visibility

But feminist #MeToo critics questioned whether the hashtag's unprecedented degree of visibility did more to harm the movement than to strengthen it.

#MeToo and its spinoffs exposed the prevalence of sexual misconduct across a variety of different sectors and industries and, in the process, had taken down a number of offenders. As Faludi (2017) laments, however, the hashtag and its accompanying media coverage overemphasized the stories of *individual* survivors and perpetrators, which, while important, undermined the campaign's ability to transform a *system* of gender-based oppression. Feminist critics like Faludi have charged that the most visible strands of #MeToo — the viral hashtag, the celebrity activists, the news cycles dedicated to the latest exposure of a high-profile perpetrator — limit engagement with these complicated issues to performance *alone*. Doreen St. Félix (2017), for example, describes the “theatre of accountability” that emerged within the television news industry following

the viral diffusion of #MeToo. When perpetrators like Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose were exposed, the accused's female co-anchors were tasked with publicly embodying networks' shock, grief, and shame, an emotional performance with the power to distract audiences from the structural inequalities that have plagued the industry for decades (St. Félix, 2017). Amanda Hess (2018) argues that the film industry has similarly transmuted #MeToo's politics of visibility through performance, using celebrity spokeswomen's red carpet activism to skirt "a conversation about its culture of harassment in favor of one about what an amazing job it is doing combating that harassment." Critics like Hess also point out that once #MeToo was "fed through the Hollywood machine," the campaign's collective action against sexual violence was commodified into individualistic acts of consumption and self-styling.

Others have asked who benefits from the campaign's pop culture currency and whose suffering is given space on the #MeToo stage. Women of color and women in low-wage jobs face higher rates of sexual assault and harassment than white women, but their experiences and activism have been overlooked within media coverage of the campaign (Lockhart, 2017). Meanwhile, the experiences and activism of conventionally beautiful, white, heteronormative, affluent, and educated women have dominated the #MeToo-related media coverage (Lockhart, 2017; White, 2017). This differential access to visibility played out most clearly as media coverage of white celebrity activists eclipsed the grassroots organizing efforts of Tarana Burke; the movement's founder was omitted from *Time Magazine*'s "Person of the Year" cover image in favor of white celebrities Ashley Judd and Taylor Swift.

Still other feminist commentators weighed the negative consequences of #MeToo's hypervisible performance of feminist politics against any possible benefits. Rather than turning attention exclusively toward perpetrators, the campaign placed the burden of visibility on survivors, who relived traumatic experiences as they shared and read stories through the hashtag (LaMotte, 2017) and who faced harassment and trolling with the onslaught of "the #MeToo backlash" (Gianino, 2017; Tolentino, 2018).

For these critics, #MeToo's politics of visibility too often slip into what Banet-Weiser (2015a; 2018a; 2018b) calls *economies of visibility*, neoliberal systems of exchange underpinned by the marketplace logics of individualism and monetization in which representation in consumer media culture is positioned as the height of empowerment. Whereas, within a *politics* of visibility, representation and recognition are parts of a collectively organized struggle to achieve political goals, within an *economy* of visibility, political action begins and ends with representation. This system has far sweeping implications our everyday social, political, and economic practices that are beyond the scope of this chapter. But importantly for my purposes here, it dovetails neatly with U.S. feminists' longstanding demands to be *seen* and *recognized* in laws, media, the workplace, and other institutions, making feminist movements particularly vulnerable to absorption within it. As Fraser (1995), in her critique of Butler's work, argues, feminists' tactical emphasis on the symbolic power of discourse and performance leaves them highly susceptible "to commodification, recuperation, and depoliticization — especially in the absence of strong social movements struggling for social justice" (p. 163). The viral Twitter hashtag, which promises easy access to large audiences without

the resources of a highly organized movement but which is simultaneously embedded in a corporately owned platform, appears especially open to this cooptation.

Certain aspects of the #MeToo movement illustrate Banet-Weiser's and Fraser's point. The most visible forms of #MeToo flow through the "attention economy" of commercial media, where clicks, likes, ratings, and ad revenues are the primary goals and where experiences as complex as sexual violence are easily simplified and commodified (Banet-Weiser, 2018a). This mainstreaming makes feminist discourse accessible to broad audiences, but it simultaneously constrains feminist politics. Economies of visibility restrict political engagement to representation in the marketplace; within its monetized logic, seeing or buying feminism is equated with *doing* feminism, with acting to transform patriarchal structures of power (Banet-Weiser, 2018b). Following Banet-Weiser's argument, the hypervisible, commodified strands of #MeToo obscure and, worse still, *enable* systems of inequality by limiting activism against sexual violence to individualistic performance, spectatorship, and consumption, rather than collective organizing.

Moreover, because systems of inequality structure access to representation in the marketplace, economies of visibility compound intersecting oppressions by further marginalizing underprivileged actors, as seen in white women's domination of #MeToo. Like the TV and film industries' performances of remorse in response to #MeToo, economies of visibility drain the "politics" from the politics of visibility, such that addressing social injustice begins and ends with performance, leaving behind-the-scenes structures of inequality intact. In a similar fashion as the postfeminist sensibility described in Chapter 2, economies of visibility turn the feminist politics of visibility on

its head; rather than making the personal political, economies of visibility constrain political action to an individual's performance of self in consumer culture. In this way, economies of visibility also reflect and warp the do-it-ourselves ethos of contemporary feminist actions and movements. Rather than encouraging the collective, extra-institutional actions of DIOF, economies of visibility emphasize individually focused and enacted performances. If feminist *politics* of visibility are performative in the sense of being productive, *economies* of visibility are performative in the sense of being individualistic, superficial, inauthentic, and politically ineffectual.

While most existing scholarship takes a celebratory approach toward hashtag feminism's political potential, more critical research identifies economies of visibility at work in other recent feminist hashtag campaigns.

Hashtag campaigns trade on short but compelling narratives told in 140-280 characters or less, which risks, as some scholars have argued, oversimplifying and even replicating structural inequalities. Caroline Dadas (2017) argues that hashtag activism "simultaneously draws attention to a cause and obscures important facets of the cause such as historical background or socio-political context" (p. 18). This has been especially evident in hashtag campaigns that address non-Western contexts but are dominated by Western participants. For example, in the case of the 2014 #BringBackOurGirls campaign, which followed the abduction of nearly 300 Nigerian school girls by the extremist group Boko Haram, the hashtag's attempts to promote women's rights in the Global South were undermined by its possessive, paternalistic, and imperial language (Berents, 2016; Dadas, 2014; Khoja-Moolji, 2015; Loken, 2014; Maxfield, 2016).

Others have argued that the hypervisibility of hashtag feminism inevitably leads to backlash in the form of online trolling and harassment (Banet-Weiser, 2015b; Cole, 2015; Drüeke & Zobl, 2016; Woods, 2014). While U.S. feminist movements have historically faced backlash, hashtag campaigns, due to their emphasis on viral performances rather than sustained organizing, do not possess the capacity to collectively address harassment and the Twitter platform's reporting mechanisms often fail to cut harassment off at the source.

Relatedly, scholars have expressed concerns that the performative qualities of hashtag feminism — the satisfaction that comes with participation and the illusion of having “done something” — might lead to the erroneous belief that offline activism is not necessary, while its hypervisibility can mask any offline organizing that is taking place (Maxfield, 2016). Plus, as scholars of postfeminism have argued, when a feminist movement is limited to a hashtagged performance, it is easily coopted for non-feminist purposes; the act of posting a hashtag, for example, can be morphed into a self-branding strategy (Pruchniewska, 2017) or even hijacked by trolls (Ganzer, 2014).

Lastly, hashtag feminism's networked visibility can exclude those most marginalized communities. Not only is representation in economies of visibility structured by race and class, but access to and literacy in the technologies necessary to participate in networked visibility campaigns requires a certain degree of economic and cultural capital (Latina & Docherty, 2014).

Critical feminist media studies scholarship points toward the political limitations of hashtags as a feminist protest tactic. When read together with more celebratory takes, this body of research suggests that hashtag feminists' viral performances may edge news

media and popular culture toward more feminist discourse, but their emphasis on *symbolic* power risks leaving *structural* systems of domination — patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism — untouched.

Methods, Data, and Theoretical Resources

At the heart of the hashtag feminism and #MeToo debates are a number of questions concerning the efficacy of networked visibility and performance as protest tactics. Is the hashtagged performance compelling and convincing? If so, does it go beyond moving its audience to transforming systems of power? Or does it sacrifice structural analyses in favor of poignant sound bites? Which actors are given time in the spotlight and which are ignored? What risks come with making one's experiences of trauma and injustice visible on a globally networked stage? And does the performance proceed smoothly, or is it interrupted or coopted by others with ulterior motives?

The tensions in both the polarized responses to #MeToo and the existing scholarship on hashtag feminism indicate that these questions lack straightforward answers. A viral hashtag's performance cannot easily be categorized as successful or unsuccessful, given its many reverberations throughout media, its audiences' multiple and competing interpretations, and its simultaneous uptake in both the political arena and consumer culture. In what follows, rather than offering a critical reading of the #MeToo performance, its qualities, and its effects, I draw on theories of visibility, discourse, and performance to interpret activists' perspectives on the political affordances and limitations of hashtag feminism and their strategies for juggling both.

As an analytical entry point, I follow the lead of Alexander (2004), who, in his theory of cultural pragmatics, describes performance *not* as a text that speaks for itself, but as a communicative *process*, whose meaning unfolds through interactions among

actors, audience members, and their physical and social contexts. In order for political performers to effectively communicate their message, the activist-actors must create what Alexander calls a moment of “fusion” (p. 534) with their audience: “The aim is to create, via skillful and affecting performance, the emotional connection of audience with actor and text and thereby to create the conditions for projecting cultural meaning from performance to audience” (p. 547). Performance, in other words, is an agentive *practice*, one that requires actors to flex not only their dramaturgical skills, but their ability to strategically navigate the constraints of their sociopolitical settings. Here, I take up Alexander’s analytical focus on political actors’ agency and context to explore how feminists imagine and employ the political affordances of networked visibility campaigns like #MeToo. Only, in my case, the *mise-en-scène* of a hashtag network, unlike a stage in a theater, reaches indefinitely in countless directions and even beyond the Twitter platform. Given the complex terrain of a hashtag network, I add to Alexander’s original formulation an empirical emphasis on the strategies actors use to course correct when they lose control of their performance, when audiences misinterpret their message, or when their performance inadvertently undercuts their political goals. This processual approach to performance helps highlight simultaneously the promises and perils of networked visibility as a discursive activism tactic and how practitioners respond to both.

In sum, this chapter takes up two questions regarding the do-it-ourselves feminist practice of networked visibility and performance through viral hashtag campaigns: 1) how do feminists understand the political affordances and limitations of hashtag activism? And 2) what strategies do they use to take advantage of the tactic’s strengths,

while coping with its weaknesses? Given its extremely high degree of global visibility, #MeToo offers a critical case study for this line of inquiry (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

To explore these questions, I conducted a textual analysis of two subsamples of #MeToo tweets, drawn from a larger master sample. #MeToo tweets published between October 15, 2017 and January 15, 2018 — the first three months of the hashtag’s existence — were selected for inclusion in the master sample using the Annenberg Twitter Project at the University of Pennsylvania’s Annenberg School for Communication. Since August 2012, the Annenberg Twitter API has archived, through a semi-random sampling mechanism, approximately one percent of all public tweets.⁹ The search for #MeToo tweets returned an output of 27,419 tweets, excluding duplicates or retweets.

From this master sample of tweets, I first coded and extracted a subsample of *meta-tweets* published during the campaign’s first 24 hours of existence, a critical period in a hashtag’s diffusion. I define meta-tweets as tweets in which activists comment on a hashtag campaign, directly address hashtag participants and readers, reflect on their own experiences participating in the hashtag, and/or encourage others to participate in the hashtag campaign. As scholars who have taken a dramaturgical approach to studying collective action and social life have documented, any performance includes a variety of

⁹ Researchers working with Twitter data have two options for collecting their sample: the Twitter Firehose, which provides full access to all public tweets at a premium price, or the Twitter Streaming API, which provides access to approximately one percent of all public tweets at no cost. The Annenberg Twitter Project is connected to the Twitter Streaming API. I use the phrase “semi-random” to describe the Streaming API because there is no public documentation on the sampling mechanism behind it. González-Bailón et al. (2014) and Morstatter et al. (2013) provide an overview of the selection biases in the data returned by the Twitter Streaming API. Because my goal here is to develop a sense of #MeToo activists’ experiences and perspectives, rather than a representative network map of the campaign, these biases should have limited impact on my analysis.

“characters,” each with a particular role to play (Snow, Zurcher, & Peters, 1981). In the case of a hashtag campaign, meta-tweeters play an active supporting role from the wings, talking about, analyzing, and calling attention to the campaign’s central performance while also providing encouragement and reinforcement for the campaign’s main performers. #MeToo meta-tweeters amplified the campaign and its participants but did not necessarily participate in the performance at the center of the campaign – publicly sharing sexual violence and harassment narratives. Using this definition as a guide, I manually identified 737 meta-tweets from the first day the hashtag went viral.

This subsample of meta-tweets provided primary source material for reconstructing activists’ perspectives on the political affordances and limitations of the hashtag as a protest tactic. I draw on this textual analysis approach rather than other participatory research methods, such as ethnographic observations and interviews, for several reasons.

For one, observing hashtag campaigns poses a number of logistical issues. Twitter is a large, public-by-default, social networking platform, making it difficult to bound the platform as a field site or determine who or what should be included in an ethnographic study (Marwick, 2013). While scholars have proposed delineating Twitter field sites by tracing hashtag networks (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Marwick, 2013), a rich, contextual understanding of hashtag uses and meanings requires going beyond individual campaigns, tracing its connections throughout the media landscape, and following practitioners long after the campaign has stopped trending. This longitudinal work, while important, is beyond the scope of my project here.

Interviewing hashtag participants comes with similar practical concerns. Recruitment can be challenging, as potential recruits may ignore requests from strangers, which in turn makes developing a representative sample of participants difficult (Marwick, 2013). Moreover, interviewing someone about their participation in a hashtag campaign may involve asking them to reflect on an experience long after it happened, raising concerns about not only about the quality of their recollections, but also about the passage of time altering their perspectives on the campaign.

A meta-tweet analysis helps circumvent these issues by providing a large sample of activists' commentary on a hashtag campaign, articulated and published while the campaign was still unfolding. Although it is not ethnographic, this type of data allows the researcher to observe in-group discussions of protest tactics, as activists' tweeted commentaries on hashtag campaigns are often directed at fellow activists. This method also comes with the added benefit of not requiring activists to repeat themselves in interviews and reproduce labor they have already performed, but still enabling an analysis grounded in their perspectives. While scholars have used "meta-tweets" as a coding category in content analyses of hashtag campaigns (e.g., Schrading et al., 2015), no existing scholarship has taken up meta-tweets as primary source material for analysis. One contribution of this chapter is the development of this method as a practitioner-focused, qualitative approach for studying hashtag activism.

I took an inductive coding approach to my subsample of meta-tweets (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). First, I coded the meta-tweets for emergent themes. I analyzed approximately half of my sample of meta-tweets and recorded themes that emerged from feminists' commentary on the hashtag campaign. Next, I identified

connections across these themes and grouped them into four major categories: 1) hashtag participants' understandings of the *political potential* of #MeToo, 2) their takes on the tactic's *political limitations* along with their attempts to redress these shortcomings, 3) their concerns regarding *whose voices and what experiences* are included in the hashtag's interpretive framework, and 4) their efforts to *support* the campaign and protect its survivor-participants. Then, I analyzed the entire sample of meta-tweets and coded them according to these four categories.

To supplement my subsample of commentary on the hashtag, I also ran a search on the entire three-month sample of #MeToo tweets for posts that contained keywords relevant to existing critiques of the campaign or controversial flashpoints in the campaign's trajectory, including "celebrities," "women of color," "white women," "Tarana," and "Golden Globes," among others. These keyword searches yielded approximately 2,400 tweets, some of which overlapped with my subsample of meta-tweets. My goal in using this keyword sampling technique was to identify how hashtag feminists responded to specific representational struggles that emerged as the networked visibility campaign grew.

In addition to this keyword-based subsample, I also continued to follow Tarana Burke's tweets to keep tabs on her reflections on #MeToo in the months beyond my sample time frame.

As is the case in many feminist hashtag campaigns, the tweets included in my subsamples and quoted throughout the remainder of this chapter often contain deeply personal and potentially compromising stories of trauma, abuse, and recovery. Analyzing this material consequently calls for a feminist ethic of care (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002).

Following the Association of Internet Researchers' (2012) recommendations for ethical decision making, I chose to take a contextual approach to #MeToo participants' privacy to limit any risk to those quoted throughout this chapter. While all of the tweets captured by the Annenberg Twitter API were publicly available when archived, I recognize that #MeToo participants have not consented to publicizing their tweets and identities within other contexts beyond the Twitter platform. With this in mind, throughout this chapter, I use pseudonyms in place of Twitter handles or omitted handles altogether. I also made minor alterations to participants' word choices, such that their tweets retain the same meanings but cannot be traced back to the authors through a Google search. Exceptions have been made in the cases of nonprofit organizations, celebrities, and public figures.

Drawing on theories of visibility, discourse, and performance, I argue that hashtag feminism is a type of performance that enables activists to bridge *two* levels of visibility — the individual and the collective — in order to make the personal political and advance new interpretations of everyday experiences of oppression. Within this practice in the politics of visibility, the latter is not possible without the former; in the case of #MeToo, for sexual violence to be made visible as a systemic injustice, individuals needed to publicly perform their status as survivors or their allies. The process of building up from an individual to a collective performance of visibility, however, introduces a variety of different personal and political vulnerabilities. Grounded in my sample of meta-tweets, I highlight what I call the *performance maintenance strategies* feminists developed to negotiate between the affordances and limitations of hashtag activism and to push toward an intersectional, transformative politics of visibility.

Findings and Discussion

The Radical Act of Saying “Me, Too”

For many #MeToo participants, simply tweeting the two-word phrase was a radical act. Across my sample, participants frequently described sharing stories of survival under #MeToo as a “brave” and even “revolutionary” practice in “breaking silence,” “standing up,” “speaking out,” and shining a “light...in the darkness.” These activists’ reflections suggested that to tweet #MeToo was to take an action akin to protesting in the streets, to speak power into visibility, and to loudly call attention to sexual violence such that it can no longer be ignored:

@Spreading_L0ve: To all of those bravely sharing their stories of sexual assault/harassment using #MeToo: we stand with you and by you. (October 15, 2017, 8:16pm)

@colecato6: Me too. There shouldn't be so many of us, but there are. Let them hear us, we're silent no more. #MeToo (October 15, 2017, 9:21pm)

@Amy_Siskind: I have never seen anything so amazing as what we started today with #MeToo. This is the beginning of a revolution. Strength and compassion. (October 15, 2017, 10:54pm)

@AVAprject: To all those who are speaking out with #MeToo. Your collective roar is more powerful than you can imagine. Thank you! (October 16, 2017, 8:07am)

As these tweets make clear through their use of direct address and plural pronouns — “all of those,” “us,” “we,” “collective,” “you” — the revolutionary power of #MeToo stemmed from the sheer volume of people publishing their stories under the hashtag. The hashtag created a platform for hundreds of thousands of survivors, who, through their networked assembly, demanded recognition of sexual violence as a global, systemic, social injustice.

But before there could be a plural “we,” the campaign needed to start with the singular “me.” While a hashtag’s influence is often described in terms of its mass and spread, #MeToo’s initial spark and viral diffusion depended upon individual activists, who made the personal decision to participate in the campaign. Prior to #MeToo, many participants reported that they had rarely, if ever, spoken about their trauma in public. Some even gave voice to experiences they had repressed for decades; as one participant wrote, “60 years old and I still have trouble saying it out loud. #MeToo (October 15, 2017, 8:02pm).” The hashtag’s semantic structure made taking this potentially painful or terrifying step somewhat easier. The phrase, “me, too,” stands on its own as a complete statement that, when read within the context of the viral hashtag campaign, requires no further elaboration or explanation. This meant that participants could speak out and stand in solidarity with other survivors without necessarily having to detail traumatic experiences. While some tweeted #MeToo and nothing else, others offered reflections on their experiences participating in the campaign that shed light on the power of its simplicity:

@LJonasDaughter: #metoo tried to figure out how to explain it with the character restriction. Decided #metoo said enough (October 15, 2017, 8:28pm)

@LieutenantDainty: #MeToo because while I’m not ready to share my story, I can be strong enough to admit that it happened. (October 16, 2017, 7:15pm)

@iamhelene: I don't think I'll ever be comfortable enough to talk about it publicly but #MeToo (October 15, 2017, 8:43pm)

To tweet #MeToo, regardless of the rest of the message, was to perform a public demand for recognition on behalf of the staggering number of sexual violence survivors worldwide.

The relationship between the “me” of #MeToo and the hashtag’s “collective roar” indicates that there are two types of visibility at play in the campaign. First, *individuals* needed to make themselves visible as survivors of sexual violence. When aggregated and connected through Twitter’s hashtag function, their individual performances became the building blocks for the campaign’s *collective* visibility. This relationship between the individual and the collective is a key characteristic of any activist hashtag campaign. Activist hashtags can be understood as what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) call “personal action frames” (p. 744), or “easily personalized ideas” (p. 744), which unite many activists under a common interpretive framework while also leaving room for individuals to share their specific reasons for participating in a protest action. The social and technical processes behind the spread of a hashtag’s personal action frame bridge the individual and the collective. #MeToo’s personal action frame, for example, invites individuals to share their particular stories of survival while joining a mass movement of people posting the same hashtag. The same individual/collective dynamic has unfolded through all of the major activist hashtag campaigns of the past decade.

For U.S. feminists, however, the hashtag’s ability to network *individual* performances into *collective* protest is an especially key political affordance. A hashtag’s aggregation of individual expressions under a collectively shared framework parallels the feminist practice of making the *personal political*. Through public performances and personal storytelling, feminists have, since the Civil Rights Era, identified commonalities in women’s experiences in order to call attention to gendered systems of power (Hanisch, 1969). Hashtag feminism digitizes this process, rejuvenating feminist activism for the internet age and re-politicizing the personal in the age of neoliberalism (Baer, 2015). The

feminist hashtag not only marks and organizes a particular topic, but symbolically indexes a set of personal experiences that, while varied in their specific details, are rooted in a shared context of oppression (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). In this way, hashtag feminism engages in a performative politics of visibility, in which one person's narrative, when shared and connected with many others, makes power visible so that it might be deconstructed and challenged. Like the discursive activism of previous generations, hashtag feminists' performative speech popularizes alternative epistemologies for interpreting and responding to injustices.

Tweeting #MeToo, in other words, produces a generative visibility, a performance that, beyond asking for attention, has material effects for the performer and her audience. Much of the activist commentary in my sample argues that, just as #MeToo bridges individual and collective levels of visibility, its performative politics can spark change at both the personal and structural levels of society.

At the level of the individual, the sheer volume of #MeToo tweets elicited intense emotional responses from those watching the campaign unfold, ranging from shock, anger, and sadness to relief and even pride, suggesting that the hashtag's performance resonated deeply with many audience members. For some, seeing friends, family, and colleagues using the hashtag made the magnitude of the problem hit home, gave sexual violence statistics a human face, and inspired them to take action:

@JennyS38: #MeToo brings so many emotions right now...But one overwhelming emotion is admiration towards the people who have stood up and shared their experiences so that the everyone will realize this problem is real and can't be buried and ignored. (October 16, 2017, 8:08pm)

@hmetal250: #MeToo as a man I am so shocked this has been happening to so many women. It has to stop. Speak out women and be brave (October 16, 2017, 8:33pm)

@BolderSpeed: Every #MeToo tweet in my timeline is a kick to my stomach. I have no words. Sad. Angry. Not surprised. Keep speaking out (October 16, 2017, 8:17am)

For others, seeing their social media feeds filled with survivors' stories, paired with words of support from allies, removed the shame associated with being a victim of sexual violence and encouraged them to speak out about their own experiences. The process of retelling their stories, from their perspectives and in their words, enabled survivors to simultaneously wrest agency over their own narratives away from dominant frameworks for interpreting sexual violence, facilitating a personal transformation. One participant framed her decision to share as a refusal to feel shame or guilt for her own assault: "I struggled with posting publicly. So, I made myself do it, because that's the point. It isn't my shame. It wasn't my fault. #MeToo" (October 15, 2017, 8:17pm). Others described a therapeutic feeling of catharsis that came with reading #MeToo tweets or participating in the campaign:

@BonnieLMann: Being a voice in the silence tears down walls and brings healing. #MeToo (October 15, 2017, 10:29pm)

@topreject: #MeToo It took me many years to be able to cope. In the end I decided talking about it removed all of its power (15 October 15, 2017, 9:27pm)

While much commentary on the campaign focused on its implications for individual survivors, some #MeToo participants took up the hashtag to directly address individual perpetrators and bystanders and, more specifically, to ask men to take action against sexual assault and harassment. In response, individual male allies used the hashtag to document how #MeToo had changed their perception of sexual harassment and assault and what steps they were going to take to combat misogyny and sexual violence in their everyday lives. When read alongside survivors' reflections on

participating in the campaign, their tweets evidence a shift at the individual level in who carries the burden of shame for sexual violence, from victims to perpetrators and bystanders:

@oughthere: The #MeToo hashtag is heartbreaking but not surprising. I have definitely harassed women before. I must do better. We must do better. (October 15, 2017, 8:11pm)

@Tejano2200: Reading stories of sexual harassment makes me feel ashamed of my gender for staying quiet. We need to speak out against injustice. #MeToo (October 15, 2017, 7:20pm)

These reactions and reflections from #MeToo participants suggest that the campaign created what Alexander (2004) calls a moment of emotional “fusion” between the hashtag’s performers and individual audience members. Survivors’ #MeToo stories moved their readers to reevaluate their perspectives on sexual violence and take actions against it, either by coming forward with their own experiences or by making a commitment to change their behavior and challenge that of others.

As the hashtag campaign grew from individual survivors coming forward to a collective protest that spanned the globe, so, too, did #MeToo’s ability to implement change at the structural level of society.

Repeatedly throughout my sample, activists identified the hashtag campaign’s virality as a powerful tactic for illustrating the pervasiveness of sexual violence. One sentence frequently copied and pasted throughout the campaign’s first few days described the hashtag’s power in numbers: “If all who have been sexually harassed or assaulted posted #MeToo, people might understand the magnitude of the issue.” While each narrative shared under the hashtag is unique, the “too” in #MeToo’s discursive framing explicitly points toward sexual violence as a repeated and systemic, rather than private or

personal, issue. The hashtag's ability to network a large variety of sexual violence narratives under a common interpretive framework enabled activists to politicize personal encounters with harassment and assault, contextualizing participants' individual stories against the shared backdrop of the gendered systems of oppression that enable sexual violence to persist. In turn, #MeToo helped survivors to break through the shameful alienation that often comes with sexual violence and mobilize around their shared trauma. One activist described the feeling of collective solidarity and power that #MeToo generated: "My entire feed is filled with survivors saying #MeToo. Something powerful is happening. We're everywhere, and together, we're unstoppable" (October 15, 2017, 7:18pm).

The hashtag's aggregation of survivor stories combined with its eventual takeover of mainstream media called attention to sexual violence such that it can no longer be ignored or normalized into invisibility. As one activist put it early on in the campaign, "Willful blindness will no longer excuse our silence. #MeToo" (October 15, 2017, 6:54pm). But beyond bringing visibility to the issue, #MeToo's emphasis on the pervasiveness of sexual violence also busted the victim-blaming myths that have come to dominate discourse surrounding harassment and assault (O'Hara, 2012). The hundreds of thousands of stories compiled under the hashtag implicitly challenge the notion that sexual violence results from a one-off encounter with a "bad guy" or from a victim's irresponsible choices. In a common sentiment shared among activists reflecting on the campaign, one survivor tweeted, "#MeToo, just like most other women" (October 16, 2017, 6:45am), framing sexual violence as an issue that is deeply rooted in gendered systems of power and that cuts across all industries, sectors, and cultures. Others

emphasized this point more explicitly, using the hashtag as an opportunity to take up common victim-blaming myths and debunk them: “It's not your clothing. It's not your politics. It's not your education. It's your assailant. #MeToo” (October 15, 2017, 10:50pm). The activists in my sample frequently made connections between #MeToo's discursive activism and its potential to create material changes at the structural level of society. By pushing against the discourses that excuse sexual harassment and assault, the hashtag campaign might just “stop the cycle” of sexual violence “for future generations.”

From many participants' perspectives, #MeToo was far more than just another trending hashtag. As personal stories grew into a movement, the hashtag became a collective demand for recognition that, through its very performance, had far reaching implications at both the individual and structural levels of society. The American Civil Liberties Union summed up this sentiment succinctly in a tweet: “This is how change happens, one brave voice at a time. #MeToo” (October 16, 2017, 9:52am).

The Challenges of Saying “Me, Too”

At the same time, those who participated in the campaign recognized that hashtag feminism is not without its limitations. Relying on visibility as a protest tactic opened #MeToo participants up to a number of different vulnerabilities, from targeted harassment and re-traumatization to celebrity cooptation and representational exclusion. These shortcomings map on to the same individual/collective, personal/political dynamic that makes hashtag activism so conducive to U.S. feminist goals and values. Taken together with their vision of hashtag feminism's political affordances, participants' views on the tactic's pitfalls point toward the double entanglements of networked visibility campaigns for feminist activists.

Existing scholarship and commentary on hashtag activism often frame digital protest as a tactic that is generally less dangerous than street protest, making it an especially appealing practice for those for who, because of their identities or political context, cannot safely practice public dissent (Eagle, 2015; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Yang, 2009). Repeatedly throughout my sample, however, #MeToo participants highlighted the personal risks that came with choosing to make oneself visible as a survivor of sexual violence on a globally networked platform like Twitter. As the tweets quoted in the previous section emphasize, posting #MeToo with or without a detailed narrative required “bravery” and “strength,” precisely because the poster opens herself up to a number of different risks. Publicly performing the identity of a survivor in a cultural context where sexual violence victims are shamed and doubted leaves one vulnerable to personal attacks. Activists in my sample were quick to remind those commenting on the remarkable reach of the campaign that, in one participant’s words, “There’s so much shame around sexual abuse/assault/harassment. What you see publicly here is just a sliver #metoo” (@MeghanEMurphy, October 15, 2017, 2:21pm). For many, the difficulty or danger of having friends, family members, the general public, and possibly even their abusers see their #MeToo stories likely outweighed the benefits of participating in the campaign:

@EzerRising: Too many women are unable to say #MeToo because they are being silenced by abusers and fear being called a liar. (October 15, 2017, 8:31pm)

@jennyanthro: A reminder — #MeToo might not appear on all your social media feeds because survivors might still be virtually connected to their abusers (October 16, 2017, 2:28pm)

@bnack: if you see some women not posting #metoo they’ve probably been harassed but feel silenced by a society that often punishes the woman who was harassed and not the man who harassed her (October 16, 2017, 8:00am)

Those who chose to engage with the hashtag described a range of negative personal outcomes.

While some survivors found comfort in the campaign, for others, seeing #MeToo trending across their social media feeds was distressing. Tweets in my sample repeatedly described #MeToo as a “triggering” campaign that required survivors to “relive their trauma.” One participant found the campaign “brutal” and “overwhelming”: “Sometimes, knowing you are not alone isn’t inspiring. It’s tragic. When the world screams they’ve all been through the same thing, it can make a survivor feel like there is no safe place and every person they pass, every dark alley or bar, could be the next rape” (@Grace_Durbin, October 15, 2017, 6:34pm). For audience members less familiar with the reality of sexual violence, the stories of survival shared under #MeToo were emotionally stirring and inspiring. But for many survivors who saw their stories reflected back at them in their social media feeds, #MeToo became a nearly inescapable reminder of their personal trauma.

Participants were also subjected to harassment. My sample includes several instances of people appropriating #MeToo to launch attacks against the campaign’s participants, promulgate rape myths and jokes, accuse participants of lying and “attention seeking,” and, in a painfully ironic testament to the campaign’s relevance, sexually harass and threaten participants with rape. As one participant put it bluntly, “Twitter is NOT a safe space” (October 15, 2017, 1:13pm), particularly for women, who are more likely than men to face sexual violence online and off (Casteel, Wolfe, & Nguyen, 2017; Duggan, 2017). In turn, those who shared their #MeToo stories risked being doubly victimized, first by their assailants and again by Twitter “trolls.” To make matters worse,

when participants reported harassment to Twitter Support, the platform often failed to adequately address the problem: “While #MeToo goes viral and everyone is outraged about Weinstein, @TwitterSupport does not consider rape taunts a violation of their Terms of Service” (@danibostick, October 20, 2017, 2:54pm). At the same time Twitter benefitted from the traffic generated by #MeToo, it failed to address sexual violence on its own platform.

Just as individual visibility lays the foundation for collective visibility, for #MeToo participants, these personal vulnerabilities quickly scaled up into political vulnerabilities.

Noting the personal risks and strain that went along with posting #MeToo, many campaign participants questioned why the hashtag asked survivors, rather than perpetrators, to disclose their status and personal trauma:

@CatherineShu: #MeToo...but I also ask, why is the onus for change once again placed on victims reliving their trauma? (October 15, 2017, 9:05pm)

@chescaleigh: solidarity counts for something. but this shouldn't be our problem to fix #MeToo (October 16, 2017, 1:58am)

@krisboid: Why isn't there an "I'm sorry" tweet for every #MeToo tweet? (October 16, 2017, 5:36am)

As the hashtag's popularity suggests, #MeToo stories resonated deeply with audiences around the world, but some activists worried that the campaign asked too much of survivors while doing too little to hold their assailants accountable or target the systems of oppression that enable sexual violence to persist. For these participants, #MeToo joined other campaigns like #WhyIStayed and #YesAllWomen in encouraging sexual violence victims to publicly reflect on their experiences without explicitly pushing perpetrators to examine their own behavior. The result, they feared, was yet another

emotionally charged hashtag campaign that might capture the short attention span of news cycle but would do little to actually change the status quo:

@shannonclaire9: I'm sick of seeing hashtags like #MeToo every couple of months. It's yet another effort to get people to believe us. How many hashtags will it take to make people see that sexual violence is a systemic issue? (October 16, 2017, 10:35am)

@LinLibrarian: #MeToo and, yes, you, too. But I already knew that since we did #YesAllWomen three years ago. Now I need to know what men are doing to change this. (October 15, 2017, 11:15pm)

@DebStanish: Men, we've been here before. We reported, we avoided, we did #YesAllWomen and #MeToo. We've DONE our share, what have you done? (October 16, 2017, 8:33am)

Other activists were more apprehensive about whether the #MeToo movement provided an inclusive platform for *all* victims of sexual assault and harassment. In the days and weeks after #MeToo first took off, feminists of color used the hashtag to call out white celebrity women's appropriation and domination of the campaign and its accompanying media coverage:

@chisuleyman: As important as #MeToo has been, remember the movement only took off when rich white women spoke out. Women of color have been vocal for a long long time but no one cared. Realize what that says about your communities. (November 11, 2017, 8:11am)

@VenkaylaH: A black woman launched this movement & white women tried to take credit for it until people made it clear that Tarana Burke was the creator. #MeToo is supposed to center the marginalized, not the privileged who have access to adequate resources. (December 6, 2017, 8:13am)

@FwdTogether: We can't have a full conversation about gender-based violence if cis white women are the only ones heard. #MeToo #UsToo (December 1, 2017, 9:16am)

Similarly, others pointed out that most discourse surrounding the campaign worked from the assumption that sexual violence is an issue that only affects cisgender, heterosexual women:

@ItsNathanielT: It's interesting that people assume that no men have #MeToo stories. We have also experienced these things. (October 16, 2017, 3:47am)

@JinPossible1: I feel uncomfortable adding my #MeToo because I am not a woman, but trans and non-binary people need a voice, too, so here I am. (October 16, 2016, 1:14am)

@LindseyManson1: Men are not the only ones who assault. I rarely share my story because of the embarrassment that my attacker was a woman #MeToo (October 15, 2017, 6:38pm)

And, as celebrities became the movement's most visible spokespeople, #MeToo participants also questioned the movement's neglect of working class survivors of sexual violence, as well as survivors who may not have the resources necessary to participate in online activism:

@arjunsetti82: #MeToo will be on full display tonight at the Golden Globes. But will celebrities remember & include undocumented women & those from communities of colors who toil in factories, restaurants, homes, and elsewhere? (January 7, 2018, 10:07am)

@akdwaz: This hashtag is just tip of the iceberg. There are millions without a computer or access to the internet who have experiences abuse on a daily basis (October 16, 2017, 2:59am)

@christiesland: There are women whose stories will never be heard. Women who slip through the cracks, consigned to silence from poverty and circumstance. #MeToo (October 16, 2017, 1:55pm)

While a diverse range of narratives were aggregated under the hashtag, those most retweeted and reported stories of survival involved women who fit the longstanding trope of the "ideal victim," the demographic most likely to have their allegations of sexual violence taken seriously: affluent, white, cisgender, heterosexual, and conventionally attractive women (Lockhart, 2017; Randall, 2010). #MeToo, these activists argued, needed to better center and amplify the experiences of those most marginalized victims in order to dismantle rape culture and its intersections with racism, classism, heterosexism,

and transphobia. Their critiques highlight a major limitation of viral visibility as a political tactic — a hashtag may enable broad participation, but access to mainstream media representation continues to be structured by race, sexuality, and class.

In addition to concern over *who* was included in #MeToo, activists also questioned *what* issues and experiences fell under the hashtag campaign's broad umbrella. The simplicity and flexibility of the phrase, "Me, too" — two words that can gloss a wide range of experiences — made the campaign compelling, easy to join even if sharing the complete details of one's story could be difficult, and especially conducive for success on Twitter, where brevity is key. But the hashtag's ambiguity, combined with the tendency for accounts of more severe instances of sexual violence to gain more retweets, led some participants to feel apprehensive about whether or not their narratives fit within the #MeToo framework:

@MadisonLesc: I have been debating whether or not my experiences were bad enough to warrant a #metoo tweet. (October 15, 2017, 11:07pm)

@ChefTorrie: When you post #metoo & immediately debate taking it down because you feel embarrassed & figure your harassment wasn't bad enough to count. (October 15, 2017, 9:03pm)

@laurphelps: Something messed up about #metoo — I feel like being groped several times is too mundane to mention & not "real" assault (October 16, 2017, 1:32am)

Combined with conservative critics' charge that the hashtag lacked a clear platform (Peyser, 2017), #MeToo participants' concerns over whether their story "counts" suggest that the same degree of flexibility that enabled the hashtag to go viral may leave the movement's core message somewhat unclear.

Above all, participants feared that the ease with which one could support the campaign, alongside #MeToo's news media takeover, would create the illusion that no

further work was necessary and lull the public into inaction. They shared Banet-Weiser's (2018b) and other feminist critics' concern that a protest tactic that prioritizes visibility and representation through performance risks limiting action to performance alone. If participation in the #MeToo movement was equated with performing solidarity through symbolic actions like sharing a hashtag or dressing in all black for a red carpet event, anyone could feign support for survivors or appropriate the campaign for their own profit without actually taking steps to end sexual violence:

@arnajain1: To the “woke men” now expressing their sympathy for #MeToo on social media, I say this — if you consider yourself an ally, you need to do more than just post a hashtag. (October 16, 2017, 11:07pm)

@KellyIceSkates: If you're a male celebrity you should be doing a hell of a lot more than just wearing a black suit you were going to wear anyway. Plus there were known sexual assaulters participating. #MeToo (January 8, 2018, 6:45pm)

@isaakvall: celebs wearing black for #MeToo at the golden globes don't deserve to celebrated. it's an empty gesture without actual actions and words to back it up. (January 11, 2018, 3:54pm)

For these activists, the media spectacle of a viral hashtag campaign, while an effective tactic for raising awareness and initiating important conversations, was not enough on its own to transform structures of power or hold others accountable for taking action. As several #MeToo participants put it simply, “We must do more.”

The Maintenance of #MeToo

Participants who voiced critiques of #MeToo often began by acknowledging the movement's real or potential impact before lamenting its limitations, starting their tweets with a celebratory tone but following quickly with a caveat. As one participant, commenting on the toll the campaign was taking on survivors, put it: “#MeToo is important & powerful *but* I'm getting tired of women having to bare everything for ppl to

consider sexual violence a systemic issue” (October 15, 2017, 7:58pm, emphasis added).

The challenge, then, for hashtag feminists becomes how to attain collective visibility while circumventing these tactical shortcomings.

Throughout my sample, #MeToo participants engaged in a number of what I call *performance maintenance* practices to balance the affordances and limitations of hashtag feminism, as described in the previous sections. Participants developed these practices to support #MeToo storytellers, correct erasures in the campaign, maintain narrative control over audience’s interpretations of #MeToo, and model actions audiences could take after the hashtag’s viral performance came to a close. In other words, performance maintenance practices helped ensure the successful transmission of meaning from actors to audiences, all while caring for those participating in the emotionally taxing performance and proposing actions to extend engagement beyond the performance itself. These strategic correctives mitigated the personal and political vulnerabilities of networked visibility campaigns and moved activists toward a hashtag activism practice that reflected their feminist values.

By far the most widely practiced performance maintenance strategy involved offering support for those who shared their #MeToo stories as well as those who did not or could not. Often written in the form of direct address, hundreds of tweets in my sample included statements of *recognition* that acknowledged survivors, legitimated their experiences, and expressed solidarity with them:

@TheJimmyWatson: I hear you, I see you, I believe you, I stand with you.
#MeToo (October 16, 2017, 8:43am)

@kejames: My unconditional love, acceptance, and solidarity to everyone
tweeting #MeToo and to those who can’t yet, or ever. (October 15, 2017, 5:46pm)

@RachelTGreene: To everyone who has a #MeToo story whether you're able to share it or not — it's not your fault, you're not alone, and you're not "overreacting." (October 16, 2017, 5:37am)

Participants also frequently reminded #MeToo audience members that they were not obligated to share their story, especially if doing so would be painful or dangerous, and encouraged survivors to practice self-care:

@petitecaitlin: as awesome as #metoo is PLEASE don't feel obligated to publicly share your trauma if you don't want to, if you aren't ready, or if sharing will be harmful for you (October 17, 2017, 4:47pm)

@karenkhdesigns: If #MeToo is triggering, it's okay to log off. It's okay to not participate. It's okay to not be okay. Remember to take care of yourself. (October 16, 2017, 10:02am)

Others offered more tangible forms of support, such as a listening ear, links to resources for survivors online, and phone numbers for sexual assault hotlines. Through this outreach work, campaign participants embodied the original "me too" movement's emphasis on "empowerment through empathy" (Just Be Inc., 2013) and performed emotional care labor for sexual violence survivors. Sharing stories of assault and harassment or reading others' testimonies is often a difficult and even traumatic experience for survivors living in a culture that normalizes sexual violence and shames victims. But campaign participants' interpersonal expressions of support and solidarity represented a collective effort to alleviate at least some of the personal strain that came with posting or reading #MeToo tweets.

In another popular performance maintenance strategy, participants worked to shift #MeToo's attention away from survivors altogether and refocus the campaign on those who commit sexual violence and those who have the power to stop it. A common trend

among participants was to suggest new hashtags that called on perpetrators and bystanders, rather than victims, to publicly reflect on their behavior:

@LeenaVonD: We need more than #MeToo. We need #ididnt: “#ididnt listen,” “#ididnt do enough when she asked for help,” “#ididnt support her” (October 15, 2017, 10:20pm)

@photografiona: Instead of #MeToo, I want to see #ImSorry, #iUnderstand, #ItWasMe, #IWasWrong, #iChanged, #iBelieveYou #iHelped (October 19, 2017, 4:50am)

@patlibrarian: In the face of #MeToo, I say #MenWeMust step up, speak up, listen up, and shut up (October 16, 2017, 6:09am)

Taking a different approach, some participants encouraged the hashtag’s readers to view #MeToo as an indicator not only of the number of sexual violence survivors in their social networks, but also as an indirect measure of the number of perpetrators and enablers likely lurking among their network connections:

@BillMcKendrick: hey dudes if you're shocked at how many women you know are posting #metoo, realize what that means about the men you know (October 16, 2017, 1:36am)

@danishacarterr: #MeToo can also be used to address how many men stay silent or let others get away with assault because they're friends with the abuser. (October 15, 2017, 7:08pm)

Other activists reframed the purpose of #MeToo in terms that transferred the burden of responsibility to bystanders and allies, with a special focus on men, who are less likely than women to experience sexual violence, but more likely to be in a position to stop it. For these tweeters, the hashtag campaign’s most important work was not in creating an outlet for women to express themselves openly, but in demanding that men pause, listen, learn, and take action. In one highly retweeted post, for example, a participant called on “men everywhere to scroll through #MeToo, because ending sexual violence against women is ultimately on you” (October 15, 2017, 8:48pm). In each case, participants’

tactics for recasting the campaign's primary actors as men rather than women added a new element of accountability to #MeToo.

#MeToo participants highlighted and corrected other gaps and exclusions in the hashtag campaign's platform, especially its emphasis on white women's activism and experiences. From the campaign's earliest days, feminists of color amended the record and called out journalists who misattributed the origins of #MeToo to Alyssa Milano rather than Tarana Burke; my sample includes nearly 300 tweets that explicitly name Burke as the movement's founder. For these activists, drawing attention to black women's organizing labor was especially important given their historical marginalization in U.S. feminist movements:

@blackfeministaa: Journalists who have written pieces on #MeToo — go back and add the correction that Alyssa Milano did NOT start the movement. @TaranaBurke did. (October 17, 2017, 12:24pm)

@Luvvie: White women do not get to take credit for creating #MeToo. Yes, credit matters b/c our work STAYS getting co-opted and our names erased. (October 17, 2017, 12:25pm)

Activists took this consciousness-raising work a step further by inserting intersectional analysis into #MeToo and articulating the ways in which rape culture has converged with other systems of oppression to produce particular experiences of sexual violence for marginalized communities:

@Karnythia: We're not going to solve the problem of sexual violence by ignoring that some victims are targeted because of their race. Or that racism means they are less likely to get support. We need to address all of rape culture #MeToo (November 19, 2017, 12:39pm)

@monaeltahawy: #MeToo is not about white women. It's about patriarchy — its ubiquity, how it intensifies other oppressions such as racism, ableism, classism, etc. It must not be exclusively about what powerful men do to white women nor which white women say they're ok w/powerful men's "seduction." (January 14, 2018, 11:07am)

@katypellinger: Women & girls face systemic harassment & violence for simply existing. Add intersectionality & it gets worse. You're queer? Trans? Racialized? Disabled? English isn't your first language? The violence intensifies. #MeToo (October 16, 2017, 5:23pm)

Through performance maintenance practices aimed at broadening #MeToo's scope, participants advanced the intersectional analysis missing from news coverage of the hashtag. Above all, activists emphasized that, regardless of the specificities of one's identity or experience, every survivor's story is valid: "#MeToo. Whatever happened to you, whether it was rape or inappropriate jokes or groping, it counts. You count" (October 17, 2017, 7:28pm). These activists viewed the variety of narratives collected under #MeToo as evidence that rape cultural exists along a "continuum of violations" (October 16, 2017, 6:29am) from verbal harassment to physical assault, all of which are rooted within a common matrix of oppression. Rather than being vague or ambiguous, their intentionally expansive conceptualization of sexual violence productively highlighted the connections between verbal harassment and assault.

In addition to expanding the hashtag's interpretive framework, #MeToo participants developed strategies to maintain control of the campaign's narrative and correct misinterpretations of its message. A large number of participants anticipated and addressed problematic audience responses to #MeToo, shoring up the movement's message in the process:

@hannahchoreo: To anyone saying #MeToo tweets are attention-seeking, you are the reason women are afraid to speak up after being sexually assaulted. (October 15, 2017, 7:54pm)

@jimmelville: If you are a troll mocking people posting #MeToo as "snowflake liberals," you need to recognize that you are part of the problem. (October 16, 2017, 12:29am)

Once mainstream news outlets began covering the viral Twitter hashtag, engaging in performance maintenance practices enabled #MeToo participants to keep a firm handle on the movement's framing. This became especially key as commentators on the movement, ensnared in the media frenzy surrounding high-profile victims and perpetrators, lost sight of the movement's original purpose:

@arrenjj: In the wave of accusations against celebrities and politicians, it's easy to forget the point of #metoo: sexual violence is widespread across all industries and walks of life. (December 23, 2017, 9:32am)

@TaranaBurke: This is a movement for and about survivors. If you let the mainstream media define who the 'survivors' are then we will always only hear about famous, white, cis-gendered women. But they don't own this movement – we do. YOU DO. Survivors need to take ownership. #MeTooMVMT (March 21, 2018, 5:47pm)

Unlike highly structured social movements, hashtag campaigns lack the organizational capacity to issue unified, collective responses to their critics. Even so, individual participants can make up for this limitation by using social media platforms to directly respond to and redress backlash and misconceptions about the campaign.

Lastly, #MeToo participants proposed actions their audiences, especially male allies and bystanders, could take to support survivors and combat sexual violence in their everyday lives:

@EzerRising: Men. Pay attention & follow #MeToo and please spare us the #NotAllMen speech. Just listen & call out your bros who ARE part of the problem. (October 15, 2017, 8:46pm)

@DaniCaprielle: Men, your solidarity w/ #meToo means nothing unless you also call out sexual assault & harassment, refuse to work w/ abusers, believe survivors, demand your female coworkers are paid equally & hold other men accountable. Don't just talk about it, be about it (January 7, 2018, 3:27pm)

@MatthewELouis: Solidarity with everyone out there sharing #MeToo. Men, teach your kids about consent & abuse of power, hold your peers accountable. (October 16, 2017, 2:28am)

Their suggestions encouraged activism against sexual violence beyond simply sharing or reading the hashtag and laid out a roadmap for long-term engagement after the hashtag's viral media moment had come to an end. There is, of course, no guarantee that audience members will follow through. Participants' proposals, however, offered answers to a much-asked question in the aftermath of #MeToo — *now what?* — and challenged the assumption that posting a hashtag was enough to end sexual violence. Through these maintenance strategies, activists offered an antidote to the performative “slacktivism” of the economy of visibility in the form of action plans that audience members and allies could implement in their day-to-day lives.

MeToo participants' performance maintenance practices illustrate the creative strategies feminists have developed to juggle both hashtag activism's affordances and limitations. From the simple act of expressing support for survivors who shared their stories to the more complex work of intersectional analysis, participants drew on a variety of tactics to reduce the personal costs and political shortcomings that came with participating in the #MeToo campaign. Their continual efforts to strengthen the campaign shed light on hashtag feminism as a reflexive performative practice, in which actors constantly evaluate and negotiate between their scripts, their audience, their goals, and their social and technical contexts. In the process, these activists pushed #MeToo toward a more inclusive, transformative politics of visibility, even as they wrestled with the pitfalls of performing protest actions on a globally networked media platform.

Conclusion

Following #MeToo's unprecedented global diffusion, critics and commentators rehashed a debate that has haunted networked visibility campaigns since the first activist

hashtags surfaced on Twitter — can a hashtag create social change? Does tweeting “count” as protest? Will a viral trend distract us from the real issues? In this chapter, rather than considering these familiar debates through the lens of #MeToo, I work from the assumption that those standing on either end of these yes or no questions may be telling part of a much more complicated story about hashtag feminism. With this starting point in mind, instead of evaluating the effects and qualities of the #MeToo campaign, I pursued a different line of inquiry, aimed at understanding how practitioners perceive the possibilities and shortcomings of hashtag activism as a feminist protest tactic and what strategies they use to juggle both. Existing scholarship suggests that hashtag feminism is doubly entangled in both liberatory politics and systems of oppression. And yet, due to its ease of use, participatory nature, and low cost, the tactic remains central to the contemporary do-it-ourselves feminist repertoire. Understanding how practitioners navigate the contradictions of hashtag activism, then, is a key step toward theorizing feminists’ digital media practices and building a more feminist approach to networked activism.

Drawing on a large sample of meta-tweets, I mapped, from #MeToo participants’ perspectives, the affordances and limitations of hashtag feminism and documented their strategies for taking advantage of the former while coping with the latter. I found that, for feminists, hashtag activism is a contentious *performance*, through which actors collectively articulate their individual experiences with oppression on a global stage. The networking functions of the hashtag bridge the personal and the political, recasting, in the case of #MeToo, sexual violence as a systemic, rather than private, issue and calling for structural changes in response. The activist commentary in my sample suggests that the

process of making the personal political and scaling up from individual to collective visibility can be transformative. A hashtagged performance can advance new interpretations of and responses to oppressive experiences like sexual assault and harassment, with material consequences for both individual victims and perpetrators and society as a whole. Participants also recognized, however, that relying on visibility as a protest tactic opened the movement up to a variety of different personal and political vulnerabilities, including re-traumatization, backlash, cooptation, complacency, and the exclusion of those most marginalized victims. In order to mitigate these shortcomings, #MeToo participants developed *performance maintenance practices* to correct erasures in the campaign, maintain narrative control over the hashtag, and model actions audiences could take beyond sharing the hashtag. Activists developed these remedial strategies through their observations of, reflections on, and conversations about the campaign to convey their message to a broad audience without sacrificing their personal wellbeing or feminist values. Over time, their efforts have led the movement toward a more intersectional and influential politics of visibility.

The iterative process outlined in this chapter — initiating a hashtag, observing its strengths and limitations, developing strategies to intervene on its shortcomings — suggests that hashtag feminism is an interactional, reflexive process. The performance maintenance practices highlighted in this chapter do not address *all* the ways in which hashtag activism can be politically problematic. Notably, the activist commentary captured in my sample did not address the contradictions of performing feminist protest actions on a corporately owned platform, nor did they grapple with the data and privacy concerns that come with sharing one's trauma on social media. My intention is not to

suggest that feminists have developed a politically pure practice of hashtag activism that includes, uplifts, and protects all participants at all times. Rather, my goal is to shed light on hashtag feminists as thoughtful, agentive actors who are just as incisive as their sharpest critics and just as aware of the pitfalls of networked visibility campaigns. Feminists engaging in this tactic often do so with great care, intentionality, and creativity, negotiating among their politics, the Twitter platform, and their audiences to craft a distinctly feminist practice of hashtag activism. Much existing scholarship on hashtag feminism in particular and digital protest tactics more generally focuses on *either* the affordances *or* limitations of networked visibility campaigns. Consequently, researchers often overlook the complexities of hashtag feminism as a *practice* with both strengths and weaknesses that involves reflection and remediation. Illuminating the strategies through which feminists navigate the contradictions of networked activism offers a more holistic view of hashtag feminism and opens up a new line of inquiry for feminist media scholars at a moment when this tactic is growing in popularity and significance.

But more importantly, documenting and naming activists' practices for building a more feminist approach to networked visibility stands to benefit all movements and organizers mobilizing for civil rights and social justice in the digital age. The media-as-practice approach taken in this chapter centers feminist activists' perspectives. Their voices are neglected resources for both academics and activists seeking to identify when and how social media platforms best serve social movements' goals and what strategies might help mitigate their structural constraints. In light of the lack of accessible alternative outlets with comparable reach, the practitioners studied here model a feminist ethics for engaging in networked activism on platforms like Twitter and Facebook with a

critical sense of care and accountability. Though #MeToo may fade from news headlines, its participants' organizational labor and knowledge-building work have long-lasting implications for future movements.

CHAPTER 4 – “Girls to the front!”

Networked Feminist Communities: The Search for Safety Online

Late one night in August 2015, a young mother published a post in a feminist Facebook group describing a series of harrowing events that had unfolded just hours prior. “Posting because i am sick of it and need to vent,” she began. Earlier that evening, she needed to make a trip to the supermarket to purchase medicine for her daughter. Her car would not start, so she strapped her daughter into her stroller and walked to the store. On the way there, she was catcalled three separate times. Once she and her daughter arrived at the supermarket, an older man followed her into the store and talked her while she shopped, all the way through the checkout line. When she made eye contact with him, he winked and licked his lips. She refused to exit the store until he left and waited an additional five minutes afterwards to begin her walk home, only to face two other street harassers on the way: “I hate that I have to explain what these men are doing to my daughter when she is old enough to understand (she is only 1 and a half). I am however so glad i didn't have to tell her this time why we had to stand awkwardly after we checked out because I was afraid of being raped.” In the comments section, about a dozen of the group’s more than 850 members offered empathy, expressing support and sharing their own experiences with catcallers. Others suggested strategies for coping with street harassment, ranging from talking back to perpetrators to carrying concealed weapons. Several members made plans to organize a self-defense class for the group. One member, a mechanic, even offered to fix her car. “Thank you for listening,” the mother commented toward the end of the thread, “i am glad im in this group and that I feel *safe* to talk about things like this here.”

On an unbearably hot afternoon in the summer of 2015, approximately 50 zine-makers, or *zinesters*, and distributors (*distros*) pack into the Rotunda, a university-owned community center in West Philadelphia, for the annual Philly Zine Fest, their handcrafted pamphlets and other homespun goods spread across a few dozen folding tables. In an age of the ubiquitous internet, the death of print, and the monopolization of commercial media, perusing an exhibitor's photocopied and stapled paper magazines, typically exchanged through barter or trade, feels like a throwback to simpler times for activist life in the United States. The festival's broad selection of feminist-inspired media, for example, harkens back to the Riot Grrrl punk zines of the late 1980s and 1990s, their historical roots stemming forth from the alternative presses of the Civil Rights Era and even reaching as far back as the pamphleteers of the suffrage movement. In fleeting moments, however, these age-old print media tactics converge with contemporary digital media platforms: zinesters use iPhones to snap photos and share their displays on Instagram; distros hand out business cards directing future costumers to their websites; organizers update the festival's Facebook event page and Twitter hashtag in hopes of boosting attendance; unclickable URLs and email addresses printed across inside covers direct readers to connect with zinesters online. Later, an exhibitor explains to me that, without this digital outreach work, readers would struggle to get their hands on zines because zinesters often choose not to share electronic copies of their work online for *safety* reasons: "There are things that you can write about in zines, various hard things, that you don't want Google-able, that you don't want associated with your name." Underlying the zine fest's commitment to alternative print media and the face-to-face

encounters they foster are digital networks, whose virtual connective tissue serves as the glue that holds the zine community together.

Kai, an organizer for Permanent Wave Philly (PWP), grabbed the mic after the opening act to speak on behalf of the collective: “Thank you so much to everyone who is here, and who's here to support spaces like this...The DIY community is only as strong as the people who come to support it. So let's continue to support spaces like this — *safe*, inclusive spaces.” About 100 people had crammed into the Philadelphia Mausoleum of Contemporary Art (or PhilaMOCA for short), an ex-tombstone-business-turned-performance-space, for PWP’s first feminist punk show of 2015. The temperature had dipped well below freezing that January night and while the streets in North Philly were quiet for a Saturday, the collective’s handmade flyers, emailed newsletters, and Facebook event page had brought a decently sized crowd to the unconventional venue. Attendees were met at the door with a small poster that outlined the collective’s “Safer Spaces Policy”: “We aim, to the best of our abilities, to have all participants, organizers, and volunteers feel supported in our events: 1) Do not make assumptions about people’s identities. 2) Respect everyone’s physical and emotional boundaries. 3) Check in before discussing topics that might be triggering. 4) Respect the venue and its policies.” Dee, a PWP organizer who worked the door, admitted anyone willing to follow these guidelines and pay the \$7-\$10 sliding scale admission fee, stamping every newcomer’s hand with a purple Venus symbol. When The Shondes, a woman-led rock band from Brooklyn and the show’s headliner, take the stage, they invite people to dance and kick off their set with a song about “sexism in the music industry,” which the lead singer explains is only

appropriate for “this feminist night.” The audience shifts into a semicircle, forming a small pit in front of the stage, where a couple dozen women dance together, twirling, jumping, laughing, and holding hands. Rows of people behind the pit sway side to side and men in the audience step toward the back of the crowd. Looking on from Permanent Wave’s merchandise table, I was reminded of the Riot Grrrl mission to uplift punk musicians and fans who were not white men, summed up in the movement’s rallying cry, “Girls to the front!”¹⁰ *This, I thought to myself, is what a feminist mosh pit looks like.*

These three vignettes — the outpouring of support in a Facebook group, the hustle and bustle of a zine festival, the scene at a DIY punk show — tell the story of a longstanding political quest for feminist activists — the search for *community*.

Starting with the rise of “second wave” feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. feminists have consistently valued community-building as a radical intervention into a sociopolitical context that marginalizes and alienates women, queer people, and people of color. Feminist communities take on a variety of forms and focal points, but they have historically shared a common goal — *safety*, or the ability to speak, act, and move freely, unfettered by repressive ideologies and the material and symbolic violence they enable. In separatist *safe spaces*, second-wave feminists distanced themselves from both the men in their lives and patriarchal thought to openly discuss shared experiences of gender-based oppression and to begin building platforms for organizing against sexism (Kenney, 2001). The Women’s Liberation Movement grew out of meetings held behind closed doors, where women met to safely explore and deconstruct the ways in which systems of

¹⁰ See Marcus (2010) for a historical overview of the Riot Grrrl movement and what bringing “girls to the front” looked like in practice.

power had shaped their personal lives (Kenney, 2001; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). A network of underground press publications sustained second wave communities between meetings, helped reach those without access to feminist collectives, and provided supportive outlets for women to formulate the collective identity frameworks that would later function as the bases for public protest actions (Farr & Harker, 2015; Hogan, 2016; Young, 1997). For this generation of feminists, in other words, finding safety in community was a means to an end.

In today's context, where public platforms for launching feminist critiques and actions abound but misogyny continues to shape discourse and policy, *safety* has become a political end in itself for feminist activists. From digitally mobilized global protest movements like the 2017 Women's March described in Chapter 2 to the feminist hashtag campaigns discussed at length in the previous chapter, social media platforms have given rise to an unprecedented degree of visibility for feminist figures, actions, ideas, and rhetoric (Banet-Weiser, 2015b). This "popular feminism," however, has been met in equal measure with "popular misogyny," a "misogynistic political and economic culture, where rape culture is normative, violent threats against women are validated, and rights of the body for women are either under threat or being formally retracted" (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016, p. 172). The heightened visibility of feminist cultures, Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) argue, has triggered an anti-feminist backlash, ushering in "a new era of the gender wars" (p. 171). This backlash is especially rampant on social media platforms, where women face high levels of sexual harassment, death and rape threats, and doxxing attacks (Duggan, 2017). Just as social media have given feminist activists a new platform from which to broadcast their claims, they have also fed what Banet-Weiser

and Miltner (2016) call “networked misogyny,” a highly visible form of white male supremacy that works to block marginalized groups’ participation in online environments through threats of violence.

Networked misogyny, alternatively referred to as “trolling,” “flaming,” “cyberbullying,” or “e-bile,” has been traced back to the earliest days of computer-mediated communication in the 1980s (Jane, 2014; 2015). But Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) argue that “this particular historical moment is host to an especially virulent strain of violence and hostility towards women in online environments” (p. 171), as demonstrated by recent outbreaks of gender-based online harassment like the 2014 #GamerGate controversy (Massanari, 2015) and the ongoing digital culture wars of the so-called “alt-right” (Marwick and Lewis, 2017). The damage networked misogyny inflicts is staggering. According to a 2017 Pew Research Center report, while roughly four in ten Americans have experienced some form of online harassment, women are far more likely to encounter gendered or sexualized forms of abuse; 21% of women between the ages of 18 and 29 report facing sexual harassment online, more than double the share among their male counterparts, and women are twice as likely as men to describe their most recent encounter with online harassment as extremely upsetting (Duggan, 2017). Online harassment has led women journalists, writers, and activists to leave their homes, cancel speaking events, retreat from online engagement, and even withdraw from public life altogether (Jane, 2014). Worse still, victims of harassment are often reluctant to speak out against networked misogyny for fear of appearing humorless, weak, and censorious, and consequently opening themselves up to more attacks (Jane, 2014). For users of color, queer and trans users, and disabled users, networked misogyny is compounded when it

intersects with racism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism (Daniels, 2009; Nakamura, 2013; Noble and Tynes, 2016; Shaw, 2014).

Within this culture of popular misogyny, where bodies marked by gender face violence online and off, constructing *safe* feminist communities from the ground up has become an important self-care strategy and a political tactic for do-it-ourselves feminists, who operate without the support of formally structured organizations. Networked misogyny functions as what Cole (2015), drawing on Foucault, calls a “disciplinary rhetoric” (p. 356), a form of biopower that restricts women’s participation in the public sphere through threats of bodily harm. In response to this “silencing practice” (Shaw, 2013, p. 94), contemporary feminists have cultivated enclaved communities, closed off from the disciplinary surveillance of popular misogyny through the privacy settings of a secret Facebook group or the symbolic boundaries of a safer space policy. Their goal is to create empowering communities where members can speak and act freely without facing threats of violence.

“Community,” however, is and always has been a politically troublesome project for U.S. feminist movements. Repeatedly throughout history, feminists’ attempts to foster a sense of collective identity through shared experiences of gender-based oppression have fallen short when faced with the true complexities of “women” as a category. Critics of the 2017 Women’s March, for example, called out the movement’s prioritization of white, cisgender women over women of color and transgender women in its logistical execution, imagery, language, and mission (Bates, 2017). Their frustration carried the weight of more than a century of struggles for inclusive feminist communities. They echoed Sojourner Truth’s famous question, posed to white suffragists gathered at the

1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio: "Ain't I a woman?" They echoed the Combahee River Collective who, speaking on behalf of black lesbian feminists in their 1977 statement, argued that "no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression" (qtd. in Smith, 1983, p. 267). And more recently, they echoed feminists of color who shared their stories of exclusion from liberal feminist communities that center white, educated women, often dubbed "white feminism," under the 2013 viral hashtag campaign, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen (Loza, 2014). At every turn, U.S. feminist community-builders have grappled with the need to both foster unity and account for difference.

The social and technological affordances of digital networks, outlined in the introduction, present new possibilities for feminists striving to build their own safe, intersectional communities. But while, as I discussed in the previous chapter, scholars have shed light on the role the internet plays in mobilizing more inclusive, public-facing protests, (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Brown et al., 2017; Daniels, 2016; Kuo, 2016; Tynes, Schuschke, & Noble, 2016), little attention has been paid to the relationship between digital media and feminists' practices for building more private, inward-facing communities. These less visible activist spaces are difficult to access and, in turn, to study. Consequently, scholars analyzing digitally networked feminist "communities" today tend to prioritize public-facing sites for discursive exchange, such as feminist blogs and hashtags, but overlook *counterpublic* "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment" (Fraser, 1992, p. 124). Scholars' overemphasis on highly visible forms of feminist media activism parallels the bias in social movement research toward public performances of

contentious politics (Melucci, 1989). In both cases, scholars neglect to consider marginalized groups' struggles to attain legitimacy within the public sphere and efforts to develop alternative modes of political engagement. Consequently, contemporary feminists' digital media practices for internal community-building remain under-theorized, despite the renewed importance of the enclaved safe space against the contemporary backdrop of networked misogyny. A search for "feminist" on Facebook, for example, reveals dozens of private groups, many with upwards of 2,000 members or more, that purport to offer "safe space" for marginalized users.¹¹

These inward-facing feminist communities are important objects of study for a number of different reasons. For one, they are often where publicly directed feminist actions are discussed, as demonstrated by the role Pantsuit Nation, a private Facebook group for Hillary Clinton supporters, played in mobilizing the Women's March on Washington (Stein, 2017). But more importantly, they enable a fundamentally different social setting than public-facing sites, one removed from the misogyny and harassment that plague many deliberative spaces, online and off. In recent years, feminist media studies scholars have called on the field to build theoretical frameworks that help illuminate strategies for creating safe, inclusive online spaces (Rodino-Colocino, 2014) and push social media users to "reimagine how we use these spaces and by whom these spaces are used" (Shaw, 2014, p. 273). Reflecting critically on *why* and *how* feminists participate in these enclaved communities can shed light on the obstacles they face in more public arenas for political engagement and point toward methods for building safer

¹¹ This does not include "secret" Facebook groups, which do not appear in Facebook searches, suggesting that the number of online feminist safe spaces hosted on Facebook is actually much higher.

online spaces. Feminists' do-it-ourselves communities, which are intentionally crafted to fulfill particular political goals, prefigure their visions for a more inclusive public sphere and, in the process, reconfigure existing models for collective discourse and action. Their experiences have much to contribute to broader debates concerning what Jessa Lingel (2017a) calls "the durability of community" (p. 6) in the internet age, the capacity of digital media platforms to facilitate authentic and empowering social connections.

In this chapter, to address this gap in existing scholarship and to contribute to ongoing activist and academic movements for safer online spaces, I explore feminists' digital media practices for building and maintaining *networked communities*. Drawing on Nancy Baym's (2000) work on early online communities, I define "communities" as social groupings "maintained through the ongoing practices of their members" (p. 31), who are collectively engaged in some common project. Here, I am interested specifically in internal communities, or purposefully closed-off, inward-facing social groupings, whose members share certain aspects of their identities, experiences and/or politics in common and who construct and maintain boundaries around the group. Like Coleman (2011), I use the descriptor "networked" to highlight both the technological and social affordances of digitally mediated communities and the sociotechnical practices feminists invest into their construction. Following Lingel (2017a), I also use "networked" to capture a "sociotechnical assemblage" (p. 15) of people, technologies, and practices that includes, but extends well beyond, digital media platforms. A "media landscape of online and offline tools" (Lingel, 2017b, p. 3) underpins networked communities, whose members connect with one another through a range of different channels and contexts. With "networked communities" as my entry point, I consider the following questions:

How do DIO feminists use digital media to build and maintain safe communities? What shape do these communities take and what political needs do they fulfill? How do feminist community-builders negotiate between their political visions and the structural constraints of digital media platforms? What struggles do feminists face in their search for safety and community online?

To begin answering these questions, I analyze the practices of three feminist communities: 1) Girl Army, a secret feminist Facebook group; 2) U.S. feminist zinesters, a nationally dispersed network of alternative print media makers, who explore gender justice themes in their work; and 3) Permanent Wave Philly, a Philadelphia-based grassroots feminist arts collective. Each community takes on different networked forms. Girl Army moderators adapt the Facebook group interface to cultivate a separatist feminist enclave. Feminist zinesters use digital platforms to both promote and protect their countercultural community, spreading the word about their work on social media but keeping their zines in print, where they can express themselves freely without fear of online harassment. Permanent Wave Philly members use an email listserv to coordinate meetings and plan underground punk shows that center women, LGBTQ+ people, and people of color. But while their particular tactics vary, all three communities are *networked* — practitioners use digital media platforms to facilitate connection across a horizontally dispersed group of people — and *media-oriented* — members participate in each community by engaging with or producing media. All three communities are also partially enclosed, meaning that prospective members must cross certain barriers to entry in order to join these spaces. None of these communities is associated with a formally structured organization. Instead, they emerged from the *do-it-ourselves* media practices

of feminists who saw a need for a particular type of community and decided to make their own. And while historically, feminists have struggled to both define and achieve “community,” practitioners across all three sites use the term to describe their groups *and* to gesture toward their aspirations for these activist spaces. Above all, all three communities strive to bring, through a variety of practices, *girls to the front*, centering bodies and voices that, because they are marked by gender, are marginalized in the public sphere. Through participant observations and interviews with practitioners alongside theories of communities (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Joseph, 2002; Polletta, 1999), safe spaces (The Roestone Collective, 2014), and counterpublics (Fraser, 1992), I put these three unique case studies into conversation with one another. My goal is to highlight their shared political purposes and reflect on best practices for feminist community-building.

Across these three communities, I argue, feminist activists engage in a common political project. They endeavor to create what I call *networked safe spaces*, or carefully bounded, inward-facing communities, closed off from popular misogyny and fostered through the technological and social affordances of digital media. Networked safe spaces do *not* fit traditional frameworks for understanding activist work, which define political engagement as highly visible, state-targeted, public performances (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Drawing on the media-as-practice framework, however, I trace the connections among feminist practitioners’ contexts, goals, and digital community-building tactics to illuminate the distinctly political work networked safe spaces perform. In their search for safety, feminists in each community appropriate digital media platforms to enact three particular political interventions. First, they *construct community boundaries* intended to separate the group from the public at large and protect members from misogyny. Second,

inside these bounded spaces, feminists experiment with intersectional organizing strategies to *center marginalized voices* silenced within more mainstream arenas for political participation. Third and finally, feminists in each community endeavor to *foster open expression* among members, who often lack other safe outlets for their particular experiences and concerns. Ultimately, for these activists, the objective is *not* to grow networks that, like the hashtag or blogosphere, extend outward indefinitely in a multitude of directions and broadcast political claims far and wide. Instead, their technological and discursive practices produce counterpublic spheres that draw like-minded activists inwards, together, where they develop empowering modes of social engagement and create communities that prefigure the kind of society they seek to bring about. Community members' participation within these networked safe spaces is often transformative at the individual and collective levels, challenging conventional notions of what "counts" as political work.

Certain limitations, however, haunt feminists' networked community-building practices. Networked safe spaces are the product of active negotiations between members' feminist values and digital media platforms. In the push and pull of these negotiations, feminists' efforts to cultivate safe spaces at times fall short. Through the technological and discursive boundaries they draw around the group, members of each community exclude multiply marginalized voices, reify power hierarchies, and silo feminist discourses. Platforms' user interfaces and terms of service restrict feminists' ability to ensure community members' safety and to practice nonhierarchical organizing. Participation within these communities is predicated on digital media access and literacy, suggesting that membership is largely limited to younger, educated, middle-class

participants, who are accustomed to using these media forms. Moreover, the diffuse, informal nature of these communities raises concerns about activist burnout and sustainability over time. These shortcomings are due in part to both the structural constraints embedded in social media platforms and the always already incomplete state of all safe spaces. The story of each community illustrates the relational, fluid, partial, and imperfect nature of networked safe spaces and pushes toward a more robust conceptualization of what safety might look like online.

Taken together, these three case studies indicate a need to treat “community” not as a closed object, but as a *political practice* that requires constant reflection and maintenance. As Miranda Joseph (2002) argues, “To invoke community is to immediately raise questions of belonging and power” (p. xxiii). Feminist activists must constantly revisit these questions as they build their own communities while navigating the political affordances and limitations of digital media platforms.

This chapter is divided into five sections. I begin by contextualizing the networked safe space within a longer history of feminist tactics for cultivating community, online and in person. Then, taking up the three case studies in turn and drawing on participant observations and interview data, I explore how feminists in each community use digital media to create and maintain boundaries, center marginalized voices, and foster open expression, highlighting their successes and struggles in the process. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the lessons these three feminist communities offer researchers and activists grappling with community-building in the digital age.

Literature Review

The Search for Feminist Community

Contemporary feminists' networked communities are rooted in a long history of activist organizing strategies. Alongside other "new social movements" (Melucci 1989) of the late twentieth century, whose participants prioritized identity politics over material inequalities, second-wave feminists pioneered tactics for cultivating communal *safe spaces*. These countercultural arenas granted women "a certain license to speak and act freely, form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance" (Kenney, 2001, p. 24). The archetypal feminist safe space was the separatist, women-only, consciousness-raising group, where the license to speak and act freely was instated not merely for the therapeutic purposes of voicing personal experiences but also "to get to the most radical truths about the situation of women in order to take radical action" (Sarachild, 1978), to identify the systematic injustices women face in order to collectively organize for change. In this way, Civil Rights-era feminist safe spaces functioned as what social movement scholars have called *free spaces*, "small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization" (Polletta, 1999, p. 1). Melucci (1989) identifies second-wave feminist safe spaces as "submerged networks," where activists could meet outside the public eye to discuss social issues, develop frameworks for interpreting them, and organize collective action accordingly. While formal and informal impediments curtailed women's participation in the public sphere, as Fraser (1992) argues, feminist safe spaces operated as subaltern *counterpublic* spheres, or "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit

them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 67). Second-wave counterpublics required active maintenance; members had to work to expose and remedy obstacles to participatory parity in order to create a space conducive to free expression (Fraser, 1992). As such, Polletta (1999) argues that second-wave feminists cultivated these women-only, counterpublic communities to “prefigure the society the movement is seeking to build by modeling relationships that differ from those characterizing mainstream society” (p. 11). Whether conceptualized as safe spaces, free spaces, submerged networks, or counterpublics, second-wave feminist communities were built on the premise that women share common experiences of injustice and could develop a collective identity that would function as the basis for collective action (Taylor & Whittier, 1992).

The cultivation of safe, communal spaces for free and open expression has remained a key political priority among feminists organizing in the age of digital media.

Early scholarship on computer-mediated communication builds on Howard Rheingold’s (1993) groundbreaking work on “virtual communities” to provide rich, ethnographic accounts of how women and other marginalized users adapted some of the first web forums to foster communal bonds across time and space. Baym (2000), for example, demonstrates how the predominantly female members of a Usenet newsgroup for soap opera fans “dynamically appropriate a wide range of resources drawn from the structure of Usenet and the soap opera text and combine them with other resources in unpredictable yet patterned ways, ultimately constructing a social space that feels like community” (p. 24). While the newsgroup community was ostensibly organized around soaps, it also functioned “as a community in which traditional female concerns and

values are honored” (p. 16). Others describe women’s early struggles to cultivate safe communities online via bulletin board systems and listservs (Fredrick, 1999; Gajjala, 2002) and the tactics these community members performed to keep trolls at bay (Herring, Job-Slider, Scheckler, & Barb, 2002; Phillips, 1996). Like the in-person consciousness-raising groups of the second wave, these “cyberfeminists” (Plant, 1997) hoped to create communal spaces where women could connect with one another and speak openly about personal experiences with gender-based oppression.

While much has changed in the nearly forty years since Usenet first became publicly available, more recent research reflects similar community-building practices as those Baym (2000) describes. Keller (2016), in her ethnographic study of girl feminist bloggers, argues that blogs function as an accessible “discursive space” (p. 14), where young women develop feminist identities and alternative feminist histories through personal reflections and interactions with one another, forming a “networked counterpublic” (p. 80). Drawing on danah boyd’s (2008, 2014) theory of networked publics, Keller explains that unlike second-wave counterpublics, the *networked* counterpublics of girl feminist bloggers are persistent, replicable, searchable, and often, participants can remain invisible to one another. Due to their networked nature, online feminist counterpublics also have a greater capacity for growth, which in turn amplifies their ability to launch interventions on the broader public sphere (Keller, 2016). Feminist counterpublics networked across a variety of online platforms have mobilized highly visible collective action campaigns against online and offline misogyny and have fostered transnational feminist communities. Rentschler (2014) highlights how digital feminist tactics, like hashtag feminism, feminist blogging, and the anti-street harassment app

Hollaback!, create “feminist networks of response-ability to rape culture” (p. 68), which foster the capacity for collective responses to sexual violence. In a case study that exemplifies this networked response-ability, Mendes (2015) traces how the networked counterpublic of the feminist blogosphere was crucial for sparking the global SlutWalk movement, described in Chapter 2. The same networks later became critical spaces for feminists to debate the inclusivity of the movement’s tactics and messages. Another study conducted by Rentschler and Thrift (2015) demonstrates how “networked community building” (p. 330) has unfolded through the viral spread of feminist memes, like the 2012 Mitt Romney-inspired “Binders Full of Women” meme. By constructing and circulating memes, feminists not only engage in collective acts of political critique, but also foster communal ties through shared humor that cut across differences (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015). Keller et al. (2016) refer to communal ties formed via social media among women and girls as “affective solidarities” (p. 29), or connections rooted in emotional responses to shared experiences, such as sexual violence. In her research on the Australian feminist blogosphere, Frances Shaw (2013) highlights the range of strategies feminist bloggers use to successfully defend these communal ties against disruptive trolls and violent harassers, including moderation, exposure, and humor. Collective efforts to develop digital tools for navigating and interrupting online harassment compliment these networked, public-facing, community-building efforts, such as FemTechNet’s (2017) Center for Solutions to Online Violence, a digital hub for rapid response and educational resources, and HeartMob (2017), an online tool for documenting and requesting support for harassment.

But, despite their enduring salience for feminist activists and scholars, “safety” and “community” are fraught concepts.

“Safe” is a relative term, one whose meaning varies from person to person, from one setting to the next, in relation to its binary opposite, *unsafe*. Safe space practitioners, however, often overlook the highly contextual nature of safety. As Betty Barrett (2010) laments, the ambiguity of “safe space” has led the term to become “an overused by undertheorized metaphor” (p. 1) in both academic and activist discourses, a shortcut that gestures toward presumably shared attitudes regarding the friendliness of a space for certain identities and ideologies. Polletta (1999) offers a litany of social scientists’ “different names for the same thing” (p. 1) when it comes to research on safe spaces: “protected spaces,” “spatial preserves,” “havens,” “sequestered social sites,” “cultural laboratories,” and “spheres of cultural autonomy,” in addition to social movement theorists’ “free spaces” and “submerged networks.” Beyond social scientists, groups as varied as educators (Stengel & Weems, 2010), performance artists (Hunter, 2008), climate scientists (Rockström et al., 2009), people with environmental illnesses (Coyle, 2004), doomsday preppers and survivalists (O’Brien, 2012), and even white supremacists (Futrell & Simi, 2004) have adopted the term. Across these cases, “safe space” is often invoked as “code” that “covers rather than clarifies the logic of safe spaces” (Stengel, 2010, p. 524). Participants rarely articulate specific guidelines for protecting the space prior to the action or discourse that occurs within it. Instead, safe space principles often develop relationally as interactions unfold within the designated space and participants respond to one another’s behavior. This flexibility in practice helps explain the popularity of safe space as an organizational tactic. At the same time, however, the interactional construction of safe spaces often means that participants only reflect on their practices when unspoken assumptions about the space are violated and conflict arises. In both

theory and practice, then, “safe space” has been treated as a closed concept, erasing the context-specific work required to construct and maintain its material and symbolic boundaries in a particular setting.

Like “safety,” “community” eludes precise definition. As Lingel (2017) highlights, “many people have powerful associations attached to being part of a community and yet struggle to define what separates a community from a group, family, neighborhood, or place of employment” (p. 5). Joseph (2002) argues that these powerful associations lead to the romanticization of community “as an unequivocal good” beyond critique, an “indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging” (p. vii) enriched by deep social connections. Consequently, “community,” like “safe space,” is often treated as a closed concept that can be taken up and transplanted across a variety of contexts, without adaptation, specification, or reflection on the work required to actually cultivate communal bonds (Joseph, 2002; Stengel, 2010). When “community” is invoked in both popular and scholarly discourse to describe a particular set of social relations, the individuals in question are typically presumed to already share some essential identity and concomitant experiences, values, and goals, such that active community-building work is not necessary (Joseph, 2002). This elides important differences among so-called community members and, as Joseph (2002) argues, replicates and reifies existing hierarchies of gender, race, class, and sexuality.

Among feminist activists in the United States, the search for safety in community has historically raised concerns about *who* feminist social movements fight for and represent, a question that has troubled gender justice projects since at least the nineteenth

century. Reflecting on the second-wave era, feminist theorists and activists writing in the 1980s grappled with the strengths and limitations of community-building tactics grounded in identity politics (Joseph, 2002). On the one hand, identity-political movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S. exposed the exclusions of liberal ideologies, which frame public institutions as rational and objective and all citizens as equal under the law regardless of their private differences (Joseph, 2002; Young, 1997). Second-wave feminists, in their efforts to make *the personal political*, raised consciousness about the ways in which power operates at the level of everyday life through discourses regulating gendered identities, roles, and performances that privilege men and disenfranchise women. Their activism pushed women's concerns, once labeled as "private" and therefore nonpolitical, into public deliberation and won concrete gains in the form of civil rights legislation and social resources (Joseph, 2002; Young, 1997). In the process, second wavers fostered community ties rooted in women's shared experiences and needs, which not only generated positive self-definitions and alternative epistemologies, but also functioned as a foundation for solidary collective action (Collins, 2000; Joseph, 2002; Taylor & Whittier, 1992).

On the other hand, however, the identity-as-community approach signature to much second-wave organizing ironically reproduced many of the same elisions as liberalism, erasing politically salient differences among women in the name of unity. As Joseph (2002) argues, "the invocation of a community of women has often served to produce a white women's movement that could not adequately address or account for women who were simultaneously or even primarily faced with oppressions based on race or class or sexuality" (p. xvii), instead reproducing the racism, elitism, and heterosexism

of society at large. Critiques launched by feminists of color in the decades following the second wave, such as Cherrie Moraga's and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1981) *This Bridge Called My Back*, Audre Lorde's (1984) *Sister Outsider*, and bell hooks' (1981) *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, among many others, questioned whether communities built around singular identity categories could ever enact revolutionary change. These early "third-wave" theorists, in other words, argued that existing frameworks for community based on some shared, essential identity or experience do more to obfuscate than challenge traditional power relations. They called for a more multifaceted conceptualization of subjectivity, one that recognizes the ways in which gender interacts with race, class, sexuality, and other identity categories, in order to build more inclusive and generative feminist communities. While their critiques were lodged at twentieth-century feminist movements, they reiterated the concerns of nineteenth-century abolitionists and suffragists like Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Anna Julia Cooper, who questioned black women's marginalization in abolitionist and women's rights movements, despite their simultaneous oppression along the axes of race and gender (Hancock, 2015; May, 2015).

It is from this history of critique that Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) concept of *intersectionality*, outlined in Chapter 2, emerged. In contrast to the "single-axis framework" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139) for interpreting identity built into the second-wave identity-as-community framework, the intersectional framework's multidimensional theorization of identity and power necessitates a feminist community-building practice grounded in what Vivian May (2015) calls "a politics of coalition: to contest shared logics across systems of domination, solidarities need to be forged via mutual

commitments, not via principles of homogeneity or sameness” (p. 4). In place of the homogenizing essentialism of the identity-as-community framework, an intersectional approach to community-building prioritizes coalitional solidarity across lines of difference, with an eye toward the utopian goal of dismantling the many overlapping oppressions that constitute the matrix of domination (Collins, 2000; May, 2015).

Intersectionality, in other words, can be understood as what Joseph (2002) calls “an ethical practice of community” (p. 5), a reflexive method of collective organizing that incorporates a critical awareness of the potential erasures and exclusions embedded in communal safe spaces. As the Roestone Collective (2014) argues, scholars and activists aiming to practice intersectional politics should “treat safe space as a living concept, identifying tendencies and variations in its use, and recognizing its situatedness in multiple contexts” (p. 1347). Instead of approaching “safe space” as a prefabricated social structure that can be implemented across different settings, the Roestone Collective reconceptualizes safe space as “relational work” (p. 1348), as constantly unfolding social processes rather than structures that preexist their participants’ interactions. While cautioning against a normative theory of how safe spaces should be cultivated, the Roestone Collective highlights certain “paradoxes” that emerge from the relational work required to create a safe space in any context. According to the Collective, the relational work invested into safe spaces involves both reifying the binaries that marginalize groups in order to create a space explicitly for them and drawing inevitably exclusionary boundaries around the people that space is meant to protect and uplift. The Collective’s aim is not, however, to suggest that safe spaces should not exist; rather, by framing safe spaces as constantly in flux and always already incomplete, they direct researchers’

attention toward the processes through which safe spaces are cultivated and encourage safe space organizers to incorporate reflexivity in their cultivation practices. When practitioners underscore the relational work required to actively maintain safe, communal spaces, they move toward a more reflexive, intersectional community-building practice, one that is conscientious of whose voices and needs are centered, and whose are not.

Over the past two decades, thanks in no small part to the wide variety of accessible definitions of intersectionality available online, Crenshaw's theory has jumped from law journals to everyday activist vocabulary, spreading, as Ange-Marie Hancock (2015) argues, like a "viral meme" (p. 18); in 2016 alone, the Wikipedia page for "intersectionality" was viewed more than 500,000 times, averaging approximately 1,400 views per day (Pageviews Analysis, 2017). Digital media platforms have contributed to the diffusion of intersectionality as popular shorthand for evaluating the inclusivity of political organizations, events, actions, analyses, and more.

But have digital media platforms facilitated the *practice* of intersectionality as a method for community-building? As discussed in the previous chapters, existing research illustrates the technological affordances of social media platforms for promoting intersectional *discourse* (Brown et al., 2017; Daniels, 2016; Kuo, 2016; Tynes, Schuschke, & Noble, 2016). The role digital media play in feminists' cultivation of intersectional *communities*, however, remains understudied. Although scholars have also used the term "community" to describe networks of hashtag users and bloggers (e.g., Keller, 2016; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018), these public, openly accessible, densely populated platforms facilitate a fundamentally different type of sociality than the "submerged networks" (Melucci, 1989) of second-wave feminist consciousness-raising

groups. My focus here is on the sociotechnical practices contemporary feminists engage in to foster closed-off, separatist safe spaces, where participants meet, virtually and face-to-face, to find community with like-minded activists outside the public eye. While much research on media and social movements emphasizes how digital networks have altered the shape and reach of public protest actions, in this chapter, I analyze how digital networks are creating new possibilities and challenges for feminists when it comes to internal community-building.

Methods, Data, and Theoretical Resources

Here, taking up Joseph's (2002) call for more ethical practices of community and the Roestone Collective's (2014) reconceptualization of safe space as a "living concept," I analyze the relational work invested into the construction and maintenance of three networked communities: Permanent Wave Philly, the feminist zine community, and the Girl Army Facebook group.

My study of contemporary feminist communities began with Permanent Wave Philly, whose members describe the group on its tumblr page as "a network and community of feminist artists and activists" (Permanent Wave Philly, 2015) committed to producing an empowering arts and music scene that centers women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ people. I met a handful of PWP members in 2014 at the rally for the first March to End Rape Culture protest I attended, where the collective had setup an informational table. I attended my first PWP meeting about a month later, in October 2014. Following the meeting, I joined the PWP listserv, where I explained my research interests and asked if the collective would be willing to allow me to join as both a participant and an observer. They agreed and I officially began fieldwork with the collective at its monthly meeting in November 2014.

As a new PWP member, I quickly learned about the feminist zine community. The collective publishes an annual zine, collaboratively authored, edited, and produced by its members. During my first month of fieldwork, I volunteered to work with another member to sell copies of the PWP zine at the 2014 Philly Zine Festival, one of dozens of annual exhibition events for zinesters that take place in the U.S. (Stolen Sharpie Revolution, 2016c). I was curious to learn more about why these paper-based goods, which reach an intrinsically limited audience, generated enough interest in the internet age to warrant an entire festival circuit. Talking to festival-goers at our table and observing exchanges between zine-makers and readers at others, it became apparent that zines perform an important community-building function, particularly within marginalized communities whose members may otherwise be alienated from one another or may lack safe spaces to connect and express themselves.

In January 2015, a year into my fieldwork, a member invited me to join Girl Army via Facebook. The group, which at the time had approximately 800 members, was made up primarily of feminists based in the greater Philadelphia area, including participants from both of the Philly feminist field sites discussed in this study – Permanent Wave Philly and the March to End Rape Culture. I immediately recognized the group as a communications hub for all things feminist in Philadelphia; members posted details about local events and organizations and called for volunteers to support local efforts. But, as I watched members share personal stories and request advice, it soon became clear to me that Girl Army was much more than a channel for learning about feminist happenings in the Philadelphia area. Like Permanent Wave, the Facebook group was a community for likeminded feminists to connect with one another, only instead of

meeting in person once per month, they met every day and often several times throughout the day in this digitally mediated space.

Together, these three communities represent three different mediated modes of feminist community-building: PWP meets in person, holds in-group discussions via an email listserv, performs public outreach through their social media accounts, and produces zines and music events; the feminist zine community creates and exchanges printed booklets and connects with fellow zinesters via the internet and at festivals; Girl Army members may sometimes meet up offline at local events, but they connect primarily through the Facebook group platform. The overlap in membership across these sites suggests that each mode fulfills a particular function within the contemporary feminist repertoire. In this chapter, I put these three case studies into conversation with one another to better understand how do-it-ourselves feminists are using media to build communities, what affordances and limitations different mediated community-building practices offer, and what role these communities play in members' activism and personal lives.

For each case study, I followed the grounded, practitioner-centric, media-as-practice approach outlined in the Introduction and conducted a combination of participant observations, interviews, and/or textual analysis. Following the lead of existing scholarship on publicly accessible online feminist communities, I draw on theories of communities (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Joseph, 2002; Polletta, 1999), safe spaces (The Roestone Collective, 2014), and counterpublics (Fraser, 1992) to examine the boundaries feminists draw around these three sites and the political affordances and limitations these boundaries create.

Below, I outline in further detail my methodological approach to each case study.

Permanent Wave Philly

Of all three field sites, Permanent Pave Philly most resembles the feminist communities that constituted the second wave; the group meets in person to hold focused discussions about inequities in the arts and music scene and to plan events and projects aimed at countering these inequities. Drawing on three years of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with three of the collective's core members, I describe PWP's successes and struggles to build a community that reflected the world they wanted to see.

As a participant observer, I attended the collective's monthly meetings, participated in listserv discussions between meetings, assisted with the organization and execution of PWP-hosted events, and contributed to, edited, produced, and sold PWP zines. While in the field, I took photos and recorded "jottings," which I later used to produce formalized, typewritten field notes. I estimate that I conducted approximately 100 hours of fieldwork with PWP.

Six months into my fieldwork, I conducted interviews with three of PWP's most reliable and committed members – Callie, one of the collective's founders, Jenny, a long-time member, and Dee, a relatively new but highly active member widely considered to be PWP's most reliable organizer who often took on informal leadership positions within the group.¹² Interviews were semi-structured, with a loose agenda open to participants' directions and interests, and included questions related to members' reasons for joining

¹² To protect participants' privacy, I use pseudonyms throughout this chapter in place of all participants' real names. Exceptions were made for zinesters, who wished to retain attribution for their creative work.

the group, their joys and frustrations as group members, their aspirations for the group, and what they understood to be the group's greatest strengths and weaknesses.

Feminist Zines

Unlike either Permanent Wave Philly or Girl Army, the U.S. feminist zine community is a dispersed, national network, whose members often only convene at zine festivals, libraries, and stores and across a variety of different websites and platforms. While my analysis in this section is informed in part by my own experiences creating and reading zines, the diffuse nature of the zine community makes more extensive participant observation difficult. Instead, in order to understand how they build communities through their print media practices, the role digital media play in this process, and the relationship between these communities and their feminist politics, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a dozen feminist zinesters.

Given that both “feminist” and “zine” are highly contested, difficult to define terms, I drew my sample of interviewees from a zine exhibition with an explicit link to feminism – the Philly Feminist Zine Fest (PFZF). Held most recently in June 2014 and distinct from the more general annual Philly Zine Fest, PFZF is one of the three most visible feminist zine exhibitions in the U.S., alongside NYC Feminist Zine Fest and Feminist Zine Fest Pittsburgh (Stolen Sharpie Revolution, 2016c). I invited each of the more than 50 PFZF exhibitors listed on the 2014 fest's website to participate via email. Twelve exhibitors agreed to participate, and I conducted each interview through the medium of the participants' choosing: via email or face-to-face in a public setting.

Interviews were semi-structured and included questions related to participants' zinester biographies, motivations for zine-making, processes of zine production and

circulation, understanding of zines' political roles, reach, and efficacy in comparison to and in conjunction with digital networks, and experiences within feminist zine publics. Using NVivo, I coded interview transcripts following Miles', Huberman's, and Saldana's (2013) two-level qualitative coding scheme: a general etic level of coding including categories related to the three key analytics outlined above (practices, publics, and material cultures) and a specific emic level of coding grounded in participants' own terminology for describing their experiences. To develop a holistic understanding of participants' media-making practices, I also analyzed print copies of their zines and, when applicable, zinesters' websites or online zine shops.

Girl Army

Girl Army's highly digitally mediated nature sets it apart from both Permanent Wave Philly or the feminist zine community. Still, its members share a similar goal – to cultivate a space where marginalized people can openly connect and reflect on their shared experiences, free from the threats or censorship they might face in other, more public-facing arenas.

To establish a holistic understanding of the construction of Girl Army as an online safe space community, I spent nine months as a participant observer within the Facebook group. I gained formal entry to Girl Army as a research site with permission from the group's six moderators, who in turn assigned me as an official seventh moderator, so that I would have access to the group's backstage interface, where the screening process for new members and posts unfolds. To inform members of my status as a researcher, I published a post within the Girl Army group, explaining the measures I would take to

protect their privacy and inviting members to communicate questions or concerns to me via comments to the post or via direct Facebook message.

During my online fieldwork, I engaged with the Girl Army group page as any other active Facebook user might, checking notifications from the group periodically throughout the day and publishing and commenting on posts via Facebook's mobile app. I also set aside one hour dedicated to participant observation within the group via desktop web browser on a daily basis. I spent approximately 300 hours interacting with Girl Army on the go or at my desktop. Whether mobile or sitting at my desk, I took screen captures and field notes to record especially significant moments of interaction within the group, which I later used as the source material for more formal memos reflecting on emergent themes and patterns. Given the often-sensitive nature of Girl Army posts, I stored screen captures in password-protected files and used pseudonyms for all members in notes and memos; pseudonyms are also used throughout this chapter.

Interviews with moderators, members, and ex-members shed light on how, why, when, and where members visit the Girl Army Facebook group, on members' perceptions of the group as safe space, on the ways in which members construct boundaries around the group, and on the role the Facebook group played in members' everyday lives. Using direct Facebook messages, I recruited seven interviewees who belonged to four different categories within Girl Army: 1) one group moderator, 2) three active members who, on at least a weekly basis, posted to the group or commented on others' posts, 3) two less active members who are more likely to "lurk" than participate in group discussions, and 4) one former member who exited the group on her own accord during the course of my fieldwork. Given that the bulk of Girl Army communication happens via Facebook, I

offered to conduct interviews in whatever setting and via whatever medium members felt most comfortable. Three interviews were conducted in person at coffee shops, two interviews were conducted via Facebook message, and two interviews were conducted via Skype video chat. Interviews varied in length from 25 to 45 minutes, were semi-structured, and covered participants' history of membership within Girl Army, reasons for joining the group, particular moments of fulfillment through or frustration with the group, and, most importantly, their understanding of what qualifies as a feminist safe space, how Girl Army is cultivated as a safe space online, and what role the Girl Army safe space plays within their personal lives and activist engagements.

Lastly, I analyzed posts and comment threads published to the group during and before my fieldwork to develop a sense of the different types of posts members made and the discursive practices used during discussion. Data collected through all three methods – participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis – were coded for emergent themes. After drafting an initial version of my analysis, I shared my findings with participants through a post in the Girl Army group; their feedback helped further refine the argument presented in the next section.

In each of these three communities, I argue, feminists attempt to foster *networked safe spaces* and their digital community-building practices model radical new possibilities for collective discourse and action, on- and offline. The boundary maintenance work necessary for cultivating these spaces, however, paradoxically limits their inclusivity, impact, and sustainability, suggesting a need for more reflexive, processual models for building and maintaining safe communities.

I begin with Girl Army and the search for feminist safe spaces on Facebook.

Findings and Discussion

Girl Army

In 2012, a small group of Philadelphia-based women connected over a shared desire for sisterhood. Each felt that their social lives were lacking deep friendships with other women, which, in turn, created a lack of access to empathy for their gender-specific experiences and concerns. They decided to make a conscious effort to build a community whose bonds were rooted in womanhood in all of its multiplicities. As the group's official description explains, they dubbed their group "Girl Army" in hopes of fostering a reserve of women who could be rallied at a moment's notice to offer members a "supportive community." In its earliest days, the Girl Army community often took the form of regularly scheduled "night picnics," an effort to reclaim women's right to move through public after dark while enjoying safety in numbers. One member started a secret Girl Army Facebook group to facilitate communication, coordinate logistics, and invite friends to night picnics. As friends and friends of friends joined the group, what started out as a meeting space for a small number of women grew into an active feminist network. By the time I began fieldwork in September 2015, Girl Army, open only to Facebook users invited by current members and approved by one of six moderators, had expanded its ranks to more than 850 members who identify as trans or cisgender women or nonbinary individuals from the Philadelphia area and beyond.

On any given day, Girl Army members discuss current events, exchange resources, call for backup against online harassment, ask for advice, tell deeply personal stories, share feminist memes, support causes through online petitions and fundraisers, and organize offline meetups. But while posts vary widely, one key feature keeps Girl Army members, most of whom have never met in person, returning to the community day

in and day out — the promise of *safety*. Members consistently describe Girl Army as a “safe space,” frequently invoking the term in posts as a preface before sharing a personal story, requesting support, or starting a discussion on a controversial issue, reminding readers to be gentle in their responses and signaling toward the danger of discussing these topics elsewhere: “It feels like a safe space to ask...,” “I feel sooo foolish for letting this effect me in anyway and even mentioning this out loud but ya know, safe space...,” “I need to talk some shit out in a safe space where advice or opinions or whatever else are welcome and encouraged...,” “I don’t usually post in here but I have a problem that I’d love to get some advice on/vent about in a safe space...” Since its inception, the primary purpose of Girl Army has been to provide members with a digitally networked safe space that can be accessed anywhere instantaneously through the Facebook app or website.

But what does *safety* mean in this context? And how do members create and maintain safety through the Facebook platform? In this section, drawing on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with members and moderators, I describe the technological and social practices Girl Army members perform in an attempt to reconfigure a Facebook group into a *networked safe space*. For Girl Army members, I argue, achieving “safety” involves 1) constructing technological and symbolic boundaries that separate the group from rape culture; 2) centering the voices of women and nonbinary individuals; and 3) creating the conditions for the open discussion of oppressive experiences. Members and moderators appropriate and adapt the Facebook group interface in an attempt to create a space apart from the violence of popular misogyny, where they imagine and attempt to build an online community that embodies feminist values. But faced with the always already incomplete nature of safe

spaces and the structural constraints built into the Facebook platform, their efforts inevitably fall short. Through the technological and social boundaries they draw around the group, Girl Army members center white, cisgender, female experiences, excluding marginalized voices and reifying the very binaries feminism seeks to upend. Ultimately, the relational work invested into the construction and maintenance of Girl Army is both necessary for and paradoxical to its constitution as a networked safe space.

Constructing community boundaries. Given that “safety” is a relative term, the Roestone Collective (2014) argues that safe spaces only become meaningful when compared to *unsafe* spaces, or public spheres that pose some threat of violence. In Girl Army, members often use the term “rape culture” to name the unsafe public against which the group forms an oppositional stance as a counterpublic safe space. Throughout my fieldwork, members frequently mentioned “rape culture” in discussions, but never paused to explicitly define the term, suggesting that it serves as tacit shorthand for a shared set of experiences. Many Girl Army members organize and participate in Philadelphia’s annual March to End Rape Culture, the city’s local chapter of the international SlutWalk movement, discussed at length in Chapter 2. Each year, members use the group to recruit March volunteers and to promote fundraising events for the annual protest. With the group’s support for the protest in mind, I draw on the March’s official definition of “rape culture,” repeated from Chapter 2, here to help shed light on how Girl Army members define *unsafe* space:

Rape culture is a term used to describe a culture in which sexual violence is accepted as a part of everyday life. There are many different aspects of society that contribute to rape culture including victim blaming, rape jokes, transphobia, slut shaming, keep survivors in silence, racism, the use of bodies as sexual objects, lack of education around consent, intimate partner violence, homophobia,

sexist media messages, the list is never ending (March to End Rape Culture, 2015).

“Rape culture,” in other words, captures an intersectional understanding of oppression, a “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2000, p. 18) in which the vectors of gender, sexuality, and race interlock to produce a particular system of power rooted in sexual violence and the discourses that enable it. As the March’s list suggests, rape culture encompasses a spectrum of oppressive experiences that range in severity, from sexist media messages to intimate partner violence. Accordingly, Girl Army members occupying a variety of subject positions call on the term in posts to explain a wide variety of everyday encounters with oppression, including sexual violence and fear of sexual violence, harassment from catcallers in the street or trolls online, sexism in the workplace, and belittlement from medical authorities. At the crux of the capacious term is an undermining of marginalized individuals’ autonomy over their own bodies, which results in a range of violent experiences. Importantly for my purposes here, in interviews, members frequently linked rape culture’s material violence with its symbolic violence, pointing toward a system of power that threatens the physical safety of gendered bodies while also silencing its victims. Rebecca, a recent Girl Army recruit, put it this way:

In the mainstream world, for some reason, being a person who might have a vagina, or who might identify as a girl, or might be identified as a woman-lady-person is enough reason for someone to not listen to you and to shut you down. And the experiences that many people have every day of just being followed and harassed on the street, or stalked or raped or beaten by people we know, or don’t know, the idea that something about our very existence is either a threat or an aberration, to be met by real and symbolic violence. That’s where I think the idea of safety matters. (personal communication, November 18, 2015)

For Girl Army members, *safety* means freedom from rape culture, from the misogynistic norms that demean, suppress, and enable violence against women and nonbinary individuals.

As with other safe spaces, in Girl Army, the search for safety starts with the construction of community boundaries. Members and moderators draw technological and discursive boundaries around the group to separate their safe space community from the broader rape culture.

This boundary maintenance work begins with moderators' strategy for admitting new members into the group. In an interview, Jasmine, Girl Army's founding and primary moderator, explained that, like second-wave safe spaces, the group "is a non-men space" (personal communication, December 9, 2015). *Unlike* second-wave safe spaces, where membership was controlled through face-to-face encounters, these contemporary feminists use digital media to guard their safe space's boundaries. Girl Army moderators take advantage of Facebook's "secret" group settings to carefully screen users' requests to be added to the group. Only existing members can find Girl Army on Facebook and view posts in their newsfeed. To join the group, new members must first be invited by an existing member and then approved by a moderator. This screening process enables moderators to limit membership to users who, through their profile pictures and names or through communication with moderators outside the group, identify as women or nonbinary individuals. The group's separatism is informed in part by the very practical consideration that perpetrators of sexual violence and harassment are typically men. But Girl Army's gendered boundaries also emerge from a desire to correct the gendered power dynamics of rape culture, which privilege and excuse male

perpetrators while casting doubt on victims, most of whom are women (Casteel, Wolfe, & Nguyen, 2017). As Rebecca explained, in *Girl Army*,

You can have a discussion without immediately being interrupted or trolled about experiences related to gender, sex, and sexuality, and particular types of embodied experiences. You can just not have people saying, “Well, that's not true,” or “You're wrong about your own experience,” or “Hashtag not all men,” or “Why do you hate men?” (personal communication, November 18, 2015)

By filtering the group's membership, moderators aim to foster a culture of respect and validation that counteracts members' everyday experiences of rape culture.

Alongside this technical boundary work, members also discursively construct *Girl Army* as a safe space in opposition to the broader rape culture by sharing personal stories of navigating unsafe space, online and in person. Jasmine captured the constant threat of offline physical violence many women experience when moving through public space in a post inviting members to

talk about the risks of getting from A to B. The risks we experience in just passing through public space to get from one place to another. The things we do or carry, or avoid to try to minimize those risks or defend ourselves. The stress this causes and the toll it takes.

A transfeminine member of color and sex worker described *Girl Army* as a space that provides respite from the everyday dangers of rape culture's interlocking systems of oppression in an interview:

As long as patriarchy, and ciscentricism, and racism exist, I am not safe. As long as whorephobia is a thing, I am not safe. As long as NB-phobia is a thing, I am not safe.¹³ And I'm very aware of that everyday, when I get dressed in the morning...I need to pick my wardrobe somewhat more carefully than I would like to because the image that I present to the world could get me arrested. It could get me killed. (personal communication, November 11, 2015)

¹³ Here, “NB” is an abbreviation for “nonbinary.”

In addition to frequent posts describing encounters with either physical violence or the threat of it offline, members post stories detailing encounters with rape culture online. Members often share screen captures of men harassing them through various digital platforms and frequently call for backup fending off bigotry in discussion threads elsewhere online. From deeply disturbing insults to rape threats, members have posted stories detailing the consequences faced for ignoring men's messages or refusing men's sexual advances on dating applications, for sharing feminist viewpoints via social media, or for simply, as one member put it, "internetting while female." Girl Army members' practice of naming the countless digital and in-person manifestations of rape culture they encounter on a daily basis not only draws a discursive boundary around Girl Army as a safe space formed in sharp relief to rape culture; their personal storytelling also forges bonds of solidarity through shared experiences and creates opportunities for collective interventions into everyday forms of oppression.

Paradoxically, however, the group's dependence on the notion of unsafe rape culture to construct Girl Army as a safe space risks reifying safe/unsafe spatial binaries that "can enact or reflect masculinist social control to regulate women's use of and movement through public spaces" (The Roestone Collective, 2014). On the one hand, as a "secret" Facebook group, Girl Army provides members with a support base to rally in times of need and to develop responses to oppressive situations in private. In the case of both offline and online violence, Girl Army as a digital object can create material interventions. The group, accessible through Facebook's mobile app, provides a constantly available resource for requesting support for a situation unfolding in the moment or thinking through a repeated experience, such as street harassment, so that

members might react differently in the future. Yet, on the other hand, Girl Army's technologically enabled insulation from broader publics inadvertently supports the relegation of certain voices to the margins by carving out a specific space for those voices. Fraser (1992) cautions that counterpublics risk becoming "enclaved" unless they take up "a publicist orientation" and, in addition to functioning "as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment," perform "agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (p. 124). One interviewee described Girl Army as a "potential space," a community whose bonds might provide the foundation for collective action directed outside its boundaries, but which has primarily remained a site for intragroup dialog, which she feared might lead the group to become an "echo chamber." While Girl Army members practice separation in order to collectively strategize personal practices of resistance and healing outside the public eye, the group's necessary foregrounding of the safe/unsafe binary raises questions about feminist safe spaces' reification of the very dualisms they seek to dismantle and, in turn, their ability to engage with the broader public sphere.

Moreover, the group's digital nature undermines the boundary members draw between Girl Army as safe and broader online and offline publics as unsafe. Facebook's technical settings may afford the group a certain degree of privacy but, given that the majority of members registered accounts under their real names, deeply personal and potentially compromising posts are inextricably linked with members' identities. One member remarked in an interview that the lack of anonymity enables members to hold each other accountable, whereas anonymity elsewhere on the web has enabled users to threaten and harass women and queer and gender-nonconforming people. Even with privacy settings in place, however, the lack of anonymity has also resulted in members

with ulterior motives taking screen captures of conversations and publishing them in other contexts. In one particularly egregious example, a member shared her story of having to file a complaint with the police because a man she met through another Facebook group threatened to rape her; another member screen-captured the conversation and sent it to the man in question. While Girl Army moderators removed this member for violating the safe space, it remains impossible to prevent members from publishing potentially compromising information about one another in contexts outside the group. As a former member who left Girl Army precisely for this reason told me in an interview, “It’s the internet. Nothing is safe” (personal communication, December 9, 2015). Paradoxically, the same digital accessibility that bolsters Girl Army’s reach and influence as a safe space also threatens its safety. While, in interviews, some members said the risks of publishing private information online were negligible in comparison to moving through public space with feminine, trans, or queer bodies or bodies of color (to quote one interviewee, “For me, life is not safe”), social media platforms present new challenges for feminist safe spaces.

Centering marginalized voices. Girl Army’s diminutively feminine yet militant name stems from the legacy of the Riot Grrrl movement of 1990s, which emerged at the intersection of punk music and U.S. feminism’s “third wave” and aimed to reclaim femininity as a source of strength rather than weakness (Marcus, 2010). As one member explained in an interview, Girl Army takes up the Riot Grrrl proclamation that “femininity is worth celebrating...it’s not a bad thing to, you know, be radically feminine.” Girl Army is, in form and content, a space where “girl” is treated, to quote one member, as a “radically inclusive” and fluid term that captures “gender beyond the

binary” and imagines “the possibility of a different gender order and one that’s better for all of us.” Members and moderators understand Girl Army to be a space that provides safety for users who identify as women or whose gender identity transcends the male/female binary, blurs the boundaries imagined to separate the binary’s polar extremes, or fluctuates over time. In other words, the group serves users excluded from what Fraser (1992) describes as the “masculinist conception of the public sphere” (p. 117), which limits political participation to the realm of men and political discourse to the concerns of hegemonic masculinity. Girl Army emerged as a counterpublic in response to these exclusions to “help expand discursive space” (Fraser, 1992: 124) and re-center marginalized bodies and issues.

On multiple occasions, Jasmine has described Girl Army’s mission as an effort to “fill the void of a ‘safe space’ for women to speak to other women.” Zola, a longtime member, referred to the group as “a sisterhood online” that, in a society where women are encouraged to “constantly compete with each other” rather than forge bonds of solidarity, provides a much-needed source of community (personal communication, November 10, 2015). Another interviewee described the bonds of that sisterhood as a shared struggle: “Women, both trans and cis, usually share a lot of history with aspects of their oppression, with the sources of their oppression.” Girl Army is, in theory, meant to unite women and nonbinary individuals who are marginalized and alienated from each other within the public sphere; the group’s safety is predicated on its status as an inclusive space for otherwise excluded people.

In practice, however, Girl Army members’ technological and social practices privilege cisgender womanhood.

While moderators' membership screening practices help center *some* marginalized voices, they exclude others. Facebook users who do not pass as women in their account names or profile pictures or who do not identify themselves to moderators as genderqueer are excluded from the group. Transgender men, who experience high levels of gender-based violence and harassment (Meicher, 2017), are also barred from Girl Army's "non-men space." One interviewee drew attention to the contradictions between Girl Army's strict drawing of boundaries between femininity and masculinity and its intersectional conceptualization of gender-based oppression:

I'm interested in whether or not we should include transmasculine or male-identified people in the group because effeminate men face a lot of similar intersections of oppression as cis and trans women. In a patriarchal culture, a lot of people, both men and women, are victims of misogyny. (personal communication, November 11, 2015)

Girl Army's technological boundaries also raise questions about exclusion along the axes of race and class. The strategy moderators use to control access to the group suggests that Girl Army is largely an extended network of mutual "friends," which, in turn, implies that racial and economic hierarchies may be reproduced within the group. Plus, group membership requires digital media access and literacy, which suggests that the group likely privileges young, educated, middle- to upper-class women.

Similar biases are reflected in Girl Army members' social practices. In group conversations, members tend to discursively center cisgender womanhood. When, in August 2015, Jasmine published a post asking members if Girl Army should be open to people who do not identify as women, only a few members said that they think the group should be inclusive of all gender identities. Most others requested that they group continue to bar men and expressed desires to keep the group "safe" for discussing female-

specific concerns without feeling guilt for excluding people, particularly transgender women, who may not share these physiological experiences. The vast majority of posts published in the group throughout my fieldwork revolved around female experiences, including reviews of feminine hygiene products, questions about birth control, stories about childbirth, and discussions of issues related to women's reproductive health rights. While the group claims to be open to transgender women and nonbinary individuals, in practice, Girl Army discussions often focus on experiences connected to female physiology and cisgender womanhood.

Girl Army members link safety to inclusion and openness. As one member alluded to in an interview, within the broader public sphere, women, women of color, queer and trans women, and nonbinary individuals are often silenced or discredited on the basis of their identities, adding an extra burden to their presentation of self in everyday life. Girl Army limits membership to these groups in order to re-center marginalized voices within the safe space's boundaries and foster solidarity through coalitional bonds. However, the group's privileging of cisgender womanhood through its technological and discursive practices raises questions about Girl Army's inclusivity. Toward the end of her thread on whether or not to admit people who do not identify as women into the group, Jasmine stated, "I want everyone *EVERYONE* to feel good in here." Conversely, in a thread three weeks later, Jasmine, frustrated with a member who criticized moderators' practices for screening new members, stated firmly, "Anyone who doesn't get why restricting membership is important maybe doesn't understand the purpose of a safe space." At the heart of Girl Army lies a tension between creating a space that is inclusive of some marginalized identities and drawing boundaries that are exclusive of others. Girl

Army ties safety to open access, but in order to draw protective boundaries around particular identities and experiences, moderators must limit accessibility, demonstrating the partial and incomplete nature of the community as a safe space.

Fostering open expression. Throughout my fieldwork, Girl Army's moderators established but one guideline for the group, decreed concisely in the group's description: "This group has one basic rule and that is Real Talk. Silencing or bullying members won't be tolerated. Checking each other's privilege is encouraged, disagreeing is fine, debate is good." Repeatedly in group posts and interviews, members suggested that Real Talk is the most important affordance of a safe space. As Zola explained to me, the ability to speak openly without being silenced or criticized is the signature achievement of safe spaces:

A safe space is an inclusive spot where it doesn't matter who you are, that if you have any kind of issue, or just want to kind of talk without any judgment, that's a safe space. It doesn't matter whether it's in person, or if it's online, or if it's your mom, or your dad, if you have that safe space where you just feel so, like, all that burden is just gone, and you don't have to put on any kind of mask. That's a safe space. (personal communication, November 10, 2015)

The group, in other words, empowers members to speak freely, unfettered by the "silencing practices" (Shaw, 2013, p. 94) of online or offline misogyny. Like the in-person consciousness-raising meetings of the second wave, Girl Army promises members a safe space for openly sharing experiences they might not feel comfortable sharing elsewhere, such as accounts of sexual violence and harassment, mental health struggles, or relationship issues. In discussion threads, members not only offer one another support and exchange resources; they also identify patterns across their experiences and trace connections between their personal lives and overarching systems of power. To borrow Collins' (2000) term, these open dialogues are the first step in the process of

rearticulating personal issues as collective struggles, of developing new frameworks for interpreting and responding to everyday manifestations of oppression. Providing a safe space to engage in Real Talk is perhaps the group's most transformative political intervention.

But, as Zola's definition suggests, safe spaces are not bounded fields located in particular places and times, but interpersonal achievements. Safety requires *work*. It is not built into the Facebook platform and "Real Talk" is not guaranteed in a Facebook group with hundreds of members. Instead, the relief from the weight of burdensome masks that Zola describes, the freedom to "talk without any judgment," must be actively cultivated and maintained.

Following Fraser's (1992) theory of subaltern counterpublics, whereas other deliberative spaces might "bracket" inequalities and proceed as if they do not exist, Girl Army members "*unbracket*" (p. 120) inequalities and address them head-on. While the group's description does not outline explicit rules for encouraging and engaging in Real Talk, in practice, Girl Army members and moderators draw on a variety of sociotechnical strategies to create the conditions necessary for open expression. In the process, the group prefigures a more empowering mode of online sociality informed by a politics of validation and care that honors individuals' right to speak openly about their own experiences, free from threats of violence.

Within Girl Army, fostering open expression begins with fostering respect for individuals' personal authority, so as to counteract the delegitimization of marginalized voices in more mainstream publics. Members occupying dominant sociocultural positions are often asked to step back from discussions concerning the lives of more marginalized

groups. For example, when, in November 2015, a member began a thread on cultural appropriation, members of color asked their white counterparts to either cede the floor to members from the culture in question or consult the writing of people of color published elsewhere online. Similarly, in her aforementioned post about street harassment, Jasmine made space specifically for marginalized voices: “Not all harassment is identical...I want to invite everyone to discuss their experiences, but especially want to hear from those who are not white or cis, since your voices are often not heard in this conversation.” When privileged members do not share the floor, they are typically kicked out of the group. Moderators have also removed members who, at various points throughout my fieldwork, questioned the validity of survivors’ accounts of sexual violence.

Members also maintain open discussion with care for one another’s emotional wellbeing through the use of trigger warnings or cautionary notes that precede potentially distressing content. While the group does not have explicit rules requiring trigger warnings, members use them to mark posts whose content might induce trauma-related stress, especially personal stories related to sexual violence, domestic violence, and self-harm, or add them to posts after moderators instruct them to do so. Moderators also intervene on discussion threads when members “tone police,” or derail discussions related to experiences of oppression to ridicule a commenter for using angry or impassioned speech. Girl Army moderators’ stance against tone policing creates a safe space where participants have the freedom to fully express emotions that are often invalidated within the broader public sphere. While expectations for behavior within Girl Army become clear only through participation within the group, several interviewees

commented that members who misstep are often given second chances. As one interviewee commented,

I genuinely feel like I can say whatever I want on Girl Army and I feel like even if I say something that people disagree with or even something that's wrong, I can at least have an opportunity to learn from it. (personal communication, November 11, 2015)

The safe space is meant to be a comfortable one for learning through discussion.

Still, even within this safe space, members sometimes wish to share a story or request anonymously, a challenge given that Facebook requires users to register their accounts under their real names (Facebook, 2018). Girl Army moderators, however, have developed a workaround. Using Facebook Messenger, Members can send a moderator a message to post in the group on their behalf. While the moderator will know the true identity of the author, the rest of the group will not.

And yet, despite the group's combined ideals of accessibility and openness, there are several barriers to entry when it comes to Real Talk in Girl Army. What Jasmine and others have referred to as "101 questions," or questions about the basics of intersectional feminism, are not allowed in Girl Army, which presumes access to engagement with feminist theory prior to joining the group. While this rule, which is not stated in the group's description, prevents women of color, queer and transgender women, and nonbinary members from feeling obligated to educate more privileged members about oppression, nowhere do moderators or members explicitly define intersectionality or provide resources about intersectional feminism. The group description advises members to be open to disagreement, an inevitable byproduct of "real talk" among more than 800 members, but this appeal to an undefined set of values draws boundaries around what can be discussed.

This discursive boundary-making took on a technical dimension when, after the previously mentioned question about cultural appropriation was later deemed offensive, Jasmine banned the member who posed the question and changed the group's privacy settings to require moderators to prescreen all posts prior to their publication. The Facebook group platform does not provide any mechanisms through which members can challenge moderators' choices to censor posts or ban users. Moderators are not democratically elected; rather, a Facebook group's founder becomes the default moderator and she can grant moderator status to any other members of her choosing, who, in turn, may grant moderator status to other members. Once a moderator chooses not to publish a post, it disappears from the Facebook platform altogether. Similarly, once a moderator chooses to remove a member from the group, that member will not be able to find the group through Facebook's search function, cutting her off from a potentially valuable source of support. Banned members can attempt to make amends with moderators via direct messages on Facebook but these, too, can be blocked. As such, Facebook's group platform is not conducive to the democratic values or horizontal organizing traditionally favored by feminist activists (Freeman, 1972). Each moderator has complete control over the group and members must ultimately rely on moderators to foster safety within the group.

Through their technological and social practices, moderators encourage discussion while also protecting members from certain types of content, making the Girl Army safe space simultaneously open to but limiting of discourse, just as it is both safe but unsafe, inclusive but exclusive. The Girl Army safe space would not exist without the

boundaries members establish to guard group access and regulate group interactions, but these boundaries also paradoxically reify the very social inequities Girl Army, as a feminist community, aims to transform. Like all safe spaces, the group is always already incomplete and imperfect, and the structural constraints of the Facebook platform add new challenges to the process of safe space cultivation. Still, the group's sociotechnical practices for building and maintaining a networked safe space point to the obstacles marginalized users face in more public arenas while also modeling more empowering practices of online discourse and engagement.

Feminist Zines

Zines are handcrafted, self-published, self-funded physical ephemera, usually resembling a magazine or book, on any topic that interests the author(s) and can be shared with few or many readers. The small booklets have played a big role in the feminist media repertoire since at least the 1980s, when the earliest proponents of the Riot Grrrl movement first began publishing manifestos on sexism in the punk music scene (Duncombe, 2008; Piepmeier, 2009). These young feminists appropriated the zine, which got its start in the 1930s among mostly male science fictions fans before expanding in the 1970s to the male-dominated world of punk rock, as a community-building tool (Duncombe, 2008), as a community-building tool. Zines offered the Riot Grrrl generation a variety of political affordances. Feminist zines opened up productive third spaces for authors who fell outside the boundaries of white, heterosexual masculinity and who, consequently, lacked access to or representation in media outlets (Licona, 2005). The medium offered an accessible venue for these underrepresented voices, unfettered by the restrictive norms encoded into commercial media representations of gendered, racialized,

and sexualized bodies (Chidgey, Payne, & Zobl, 2009). Feminist zinesters performed the important work of making those encoded norms visible, cutting and pasting images from commercial print media to critique them and offer alternatives (Zobl, 2009). Through their circulation, zines forged communal bonds that facilitated the collective formation of critical feminist subjectivities (Harris, 2003) and created spaces for the negotiation of complex feminist identities (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Piepmeier, 2009). Moreover, feminist zinesters' politics extended beyond content to infuse the production and circulation processes, which typically unfolded through alternative economic practices that subverted capitalist marketplace norms and blurred the boundaries between producers and consumers (Chidgey, 2009). The democratic exchange and, more recently, the diligent efforts to archive these feminist ephemera have created a vibrant record of feminist history grounded in the work of grassroots activists and makers, whose extra-institutional voices are typically underprivileged within dominant discourse (Chidgey, 2013; Eichhorn, 2013).

Nearly 40 years since the start of the Riot Grrrl movement, print zines are making an unexpected resurgence. It is impossible to estimate the number of contemporary zinesters in the United States, whose subversive, hodgepodge texts are not catalogued in the Library of Congress or issued ISSNs, but recent mainstream news headlines have heralded their comeback: "Zines Have a Resurgence Among the Web-Savvy" (Wortham, 2011); "Are Zines Making a Comeback, Too?" (Bose, 2014); "How Zines Survive in the Internet Age" (Carville, 2015); "Yes, Zines Still Exist, and They're Not Antiques" (Berube, 2013). Today, there are more than 60 active zine festivals (Stolen Sharpie Revolution, 2016b), dozens of distros and stores (Stolen Sharpie Revolution, 2016a;

Stolen Sharpie Revolution, 2016c), and about 120 zine libraries and archives across the United States (Barnard Zine Library, 2016). At the time of writing, a search for zines on Etsy, a popular craft marketplace website where many zinesters sell their wares, returns approximately 32,000 listings. Among U.S. feminists, the genre remains an important political tactic; more than 600 feminist zines are currently listed for sale on Etsy, annual feminist zine festivals in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and New York attract hundreds of makers and readers every year, and feminist zine collections, like the Barnard Zine Library, are thriving.

Why do feminists continue to handcraft and self-publish zines when they can, and have with great success, blog or tweet? The push-button publishing platforms of Web 2.0 have streamlined all of the aforementioned features of zines. Like the Riot Grrrl zinesters, feminists have coopted digital media platforms to create accessible, participatory spaces for alternative discourses, activist communities, and the formation of critical subjectivities. Many feminists do both, printing zines *and* maintaining an active social media presence. The genre's resurgence, however, suggests that zines fulfill a need for feminist communities unmet within the digital media landscape. The humble do-it-yourself zine perseveres in spite of, but perhaps more accurately, *because* of the rise of blogging and social media platforms.

In this section, I argue that feminist zinesters merge print and digital media tactics to cultivate a form of community otherwise unavailable online. Feminist zinesters use social media platforms to promote their work, but rarely make copies of their zines available for reading online. In this way, digital networks act as porous yet protective boundaries that provide access to the zine community, but not to the actual content of

zines themselves. Feminist zinesters' combined print and digital practices produce a *networked safe space*, open to newcomers but closed off from the gender-based harassment that tends to plague online spaces. Like Girl Army and Permanent Wave Philly, feminist zinesters draw on a number of different sociotechnical strategies to construct boundaries around their networked safe space, to center the voices of women, LGBTQ people, and people of color, and to foster free expression without fear of violent backlash. While there are limitations to the genre as a community-building tactic, contemporary feminist zinesters' practices have implications for what safer, more empowering online spaces might look like.

Constructing community boundaries. Zines have an intrinsically limited distribution. Whereas a blog post's reach can grow exponentially among a limitless number of readers, a zine's circulation is restricted by its print run, or the number of copies its author produces. Even so, a zine's reach is difficult to measure. Bloggers might operationalize their audience's size in terms of subscribers or unique visitors, but zinesters, who typically do not use subscription-based models to circulate their print booklets, cannot be certain how many hands their work passes through; a dozen readers may purchase copies of a zine and share them with friends and family, while a dozen others might peruse an issue in a bookstore. Bloggers and other social media users also typically have a means to engage in dialogue with their followers, such as comments sections. A zinester, on the other hand, stands at the end of a one-way communication flow from zine maker to zine reader. In other words, a zinester's public is often invisible to her, only coming into view at festivals and through Etsy transactions.

And yet, my interviewees spoke of the feminist zine network as a *community* and identified community-building as one of their primary motivations for making zines.

Some described zine-making as a community-building practice that brings people together, face-to-face, to coauthor a zine or to mingle at a zine festival. Moose Lane highlighted this as a significant accomplishment in an increasingly mediated world:

Even though zines are not a good medium for back-and-forth, I think the actual zine community is stronger than online ones, in part because there is a lot more face-to-face interaction...I have met almost all of my friends on the East Coast through zines in some way. In most online communities, I kind of lurk. I'm not much of an active participant. It's a really good way to be exposed to a wide variety of experiences and views, but at the end of the day I'm still sitting at home behind a computer screen. (personal communication, March 29, 2016)

The face-to-face production and exchange of zines paired with the medium's extra-institutional, do-it-yourself nature makes it ideal for building communities that prefigure their authors' political goals and values. For Kerri Radley, "One of the things that I love about the zine community is that I feel like we can shape it to be what we want to. Through active participation, putting on and attending events, and sharing our zines, we work to create the type of community that we want to belong to" (personal communication, April 19, 2016).

But while these in-person interactions are important, a more abstract sense of connection figures centrally into zinesters' experiences of community. My interviewees frequently described zinesters as sharing, at some fundamental level, a common set of experiences and politics, such that a zine maker can imagine addressing an audience who already understands her perspective: "The zine community, for the most part, is such a welcoming and supportive space, that it makes sense that feminists have been drawn to the medium," Kerri Radley explained, "It's a space that is generally safer, one in which

they have a voice and can be heard” (personal communication, April 19, 2016). This sense of safety and camaraderie is grounded in the zine’s historical association with countercultural and leftist movements (Duncombe, 2008). A feminist zinester may never meet all of her readers but, by virtue of their interest in zines, she can safely guess that they share at least some of her political goals and values. She cannot make the same assumption on highly public social media platforms like Twitter, where users span the political spectrum. As Moose Lane quipped, “Most of the rabid misogynists, transphobes, homophobes, racists, et cetera, you meet online don’t read zines” (personal communication, March 29, 2016). The countercultural roots of the medium form a symbolic boundary around the zine community, creating a space “of withdrawal and regroupment” (Fraser, 1992, p. 124), where likeminded activists can engage exclusively with one another without facing suppression or interruption.

Feminist zinesters, in other words, preach to the choir. For some critics, this makes zines a weak medium for political engagement. Sandoval and Fuchs (2010), for example, argue that “the success of alternative media depends on their ability to gain public visibility for their critical media content...to do more than to ‘preach to the converted,’ they have to try to increase their public visibility and to attract as many recipients as possible” (p. 148). Reaching a wide audience, however, is not the primary purpose that zines fulfill within feminists’ repertoire of media practices. While a social media platform would undoubtedly offer greater visibility, feminist zinesters prioritize what many of my interviewees referred to as “personal impact” over readership numbers. Christine Stoddard, who runs a popular online magazine that generates ad revenue, also makes zines in small runs, producing no more than 100 copies of a single title. “I’m not

looking to communicate en masse with a zine,” Stoddard said, “that’s what the Internet is for. I’m looking to make that personal impact, to give someone a print artifact to cherish and remember” (personal communication, March 26, 2016). Moose Lane, who publishes work on a Tumblr blog, expressed a similar sentiment:

I’m on Tumblr, and I post a lot of art there, as well as reblog puns and cat pictures. A lot of what I post isn’t all that personal, and the stuff that is feels like shouting into the void. Sometimes, that’s what I want — self-expression without examination or response. But I don’t use zines in the same way. (personal communication, March 29, 2016)

Regardless of whether or not they ever meet their readers in person, zinesters expressed a feeling of personal connection with their readers, facilitated through the exchange and circulation of zines, that they do not experience online. Several interviewees framed zines as objects of mediation that, in comparison to digital media, foster more authentic relationships between authors and readers. Christine Stoddard explained that

So much web content is meant to be consumed quickly. People usually are clicking around too much to really focus on any single piece for too long. Zines require a longer time commitment. They engross you in a way that most web content does not. That alone can impact the reader very personally and make your message resonate with them for years to come. (personal communication, March 26, 2016)

While each of my interviewees maintains an active social media presence, they turn toward zines to share personal experiences with a small, supportive audience.

The underground, alternative nature of zines enables this intimate community experience. The degree of countercultural capital required to participate in the zine community, however, can make the accessible DIY practice ironically inaccessible to readers not yet acquainted with the medium. Duncombe (2008) describes early zine scenes as “self-ghettoized” (p. 176), unsustainable, and even “elitist” (p. 174) underground communities, whose members struggled to engage with more mainstream

publics or extend a hand to newcomers. This elitism is especially problematic for feminists, given women's historical exclusion from the cultures and movements surrounding zine scenes (Duncombe, 2008). Moreover, zinesters are often not inspired to start making zines until they get their hands on someone else's self-published work (Piepmeier, 2009); repeatedly in interviews, feminist zinesters reported that it was a serendipitous first encounter with zines in an offbeat bookstore, a public library, or a classroom that sparked their zine-making careers.

Contemporary feminist zinesters use digital media platforms to democratize access to zines, a practice that may have much to do with zines' apparent resurgence. Christine Stoddard reported that "the internet has made it so much easier to discover new titles and zine festivals" (personal communication, March 26, 2016). While, true to their roots, interviewees reported selling zines at alternative bookstores, 10 out of 12 interviewees also sell their zines online, through their own personal websites or through Etsy shops. Others send their zines to distros, who sell and ship zinesters' work, almost always through an online store, to readers for a portion of the cover price. All interviewees have blogs linked to their zine projects, usually hosted on Tumblr, which has garnered a reputation as a platform for leftist "social justice warriors" (Brandt & Kizer, 2015). Importantly for the zine community as a whole, social media have also facilitated what my interviewees described as the recent surge in zine festivals. While, like all aspects of zine culture, the history of zine fests has not been well documented, interviewees speculated that these exhibits and pop-up shops, often hosted in community centers and open to zinesters who pay small tabling fees, are a recent phenomenon. "I have seen more zine fests pop up in the last half-decade and many more are continuing to

go strong,” Moose Lane observed, suggesting parallels between the rise of zine fests and the development of Web 2.0 (personal communication, March 29, 2016).

For my interviewees, modern-day zine-making is a material social practice channeled in large part through digital media, mirroring the structure of networked publics, or “spaces and audiences that are bound together through technological networks” (boyd, 2008, p. 125). Feminist zinesters, readers, and newcomers to the zine world use digital media to facilitate interactions online and face-to-face. In contrast to the “self-ghettoized” zine communities of previous generations, to borrow Duncombe’s terminology, social media platforms have contributed to what Rauch (2015) calls “a converged media environment” (p. 126), blurring the boundary separating zinesters’ alternative discourse from the mainstream. Nonetheless, the boundary remains, and feminist zine communities, while networked, are *counterpublics*, purposefully formed in juxtaposition to wider publics that marginalize women, trans and queer folks, and people of color. The boundary encompassing feminist zine counterpublics, while made permeable via digital networks, is protected through many zinesters’ strict policies against scanning and publishing their zines online. Kerri Radley, for example, never shares digital copies of her zines:

I’m a firm believer in my zines remaining in physical form and on paper only and I do not allow any of my zines to be digitally archived ... Even though I can never truly 100% control what happens to my zines or their content, keeping them out of the digital sphere does allow me better control over what happens to my writing—where it’s shared, who it’s shared with, who it’s attributed to, and who makes money off of it. (personal communication, April 19, 2016)

Most of my interviewees only make their zine content available to those who take the steps necessary to acquire physical copies, through online shops or in-person festivals.

Anyone interested in a feminist zinester’s work is likely to be granted access, as zines are

often made available at low prices, on a sliding scale, or for barter or trade, but the reader must first invest energy into obtaining a copy of her work. This practice not only grants zinesters more control over the distribution of their work, but also makes it difficult for readers to harass writers with whom they disagree. While some may view zines' one-way flow of communication as a weakness when it comes to building communities, Adelaide Barton explained that for feminist zinesters, "this is actually a benefit. The internet is rife with trolls, especially ones that are looking to attack a woman voicing her opinion, or anyone challenging the patriarchy" (personal communication, April 6, 2016).

Feminist zinesters merge digital and print media practices to cultivate a distributive communication structure (Rentschler, 2015), forging network ties with new readers, maintaining relationships with existing readers, and connecting with one another, but keeping their zines' content offline. Digital networks, then, constitute a boundary between zine-makers and readers, providing entry to the feminist zine community, but not immediate access to feminist zines, themselves. Feminist zinesters' boundary maintenance work gives shape to a networked safe space, where marginalized media-makers can express themselves freely without facing harassment.

Centering marginalized voices. The tools and materials zinesters use to practice their craft range in degree of professionalism, from paper, pens, Sharpies, glue sticks, scissors, and stolen time on the office's Xerox machine to cardstock, artist-grade inks and paints, silk screen, lithographs, letterpresses, Photoshop, and professional printers. But while feminist zinesters' creative practices and aesthetics may vary, the community shares a common set of norms, which guide the zine production process. As Moose Lane explained, "What separates zines from other self-publications is a commitment to do-it-

yourself ethics (or do-it-together ethics) and the prioritization of the spread of ideas and art over making money” (personal communication, March 29, 2016). My interviewees’ zines are often explicitly feminist in content, dealing with questions related to gender-based inequities, but the DIY ethics of the zine-making *process* itself prefigures feminist ideals in ways that digital media platforms and commercial media outlets simply cannot. Christine Stoddard observed that

Zines are about as approachable as media-making gets. As long as you have a pen and paper, you can make a zine. If you have access to a copier, you can make multiple copies of it... You can be the writer, artists, and publisher. Because the barrier to entry is low, making zines is very empowering. Anybody can make their voice heard... Traditional media is full of barriers and, historically, those barriers have been less amendable to female creators. Those barriers don’t exist in the zine world. (personal communication, March 26, 2016)

Christine’s comments point toward what Fraser (1992) describes as the “informal impediments to participatory parity that can persist even after everyone is formally and legally licensed to participate” (p. 119), the everyday systems of power that structure participation in the public sphere. White male producers dominate commercial media industries (Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, 2017), gender-based harassment silences women on social media platforms, and economic privilege restricts access to both, but anyone with a pen and paper can “make their voice heard” through a zine. Although some of my interviewees expressed concerns about an aesthetic shift toward more “slick and professional” zines, to borrow Kerri Radley’s description, a zinester can invest as much or as little artistry and resources into her work as she chooses and still participate in the zine community (personal communication, April 19, 2016). Aesthetics may shift, but accessibility remains a key value of the feminist zinesters’ DIY ethics. At its core, feminist zine-making constitutes an accessible alternative media practice that eschews

marketplace values, subverts the producer/consumer binary, and, in the process, creates outlets for marginalized voices, unrestricted by gendered or class-based barriers to entry.

Just as the zine community opens up new opportunities for otherwise marginalized media-makers, it also creates spaces for the representation of bodies and subjectivities excluded from dominant discourse and commercial media. Moose Lane's zine series, *Get the Fuck Outside (GTFO)*, focuses on exploring the great outdoors and represents a diversity of characters in the process: "The illustrations in *GTFO* are centered around ladyfolk, though the content is for anyone. I do this deliberately because, socially, men tend to have easier access to the outdoors, either due to social expectations growing up, or due to perceived dangers for women of traveling alone in remote places" (personal communication, March 29, 2016). Generating visibility through alternative media representation is especially important to Kerri Radley, whose zine, *Deafula*, shares her experiences navigating the world as a deaf woman:

Deafula has garnered a wider reach than I ever expected or thought possible, reaching into the thousands annually. Given how near and dear the topics I cover in *Deafula* are to my heart, and how important it is to me to increase visibility for deaf and disabled folks, my zine having reach is meaningful to me. (personal communication, April 19, 2016)

Through the representation of underprivileged identities, zinesters critique, explicitly or implicitly, the discourses that relegate those identities to the margins of society and construct counterdiscourses of inclusion and empowerment.

But while some authors, like Kerri, reach an impressive number of readers, cultivated in part through their online promotional work, the enclaved nature of the zine community raises concerns about whether the medium silos already marginalized voices. As is the case with Girl Army, the feminist zine community networks a safe space for

bodies and issues that, because they are marked by gender, are often excluded from more mainstream arenas for political discourse and action. In doing so, however, the community risks reifying the hegemonic norms that enable the white male domination of the public sphere by creating a release valve for the oppressed, a counterpublic sphere where women can freely critique systems of power without actually disrupting them. Still, while they acknowledged this critique, my interviewees insisted that zines are not intended to serve as launching pads for public-facing actions and critique; like Christine Stoddard said, “that’s what the internet is for” (personal communication, March 26, 2016). Rather, while social media platforms offer spaces for planning and executing broader outreach, the feminist zine community offers a space for uninterrupted engagement with others who share similar experiences of marginalization.

Fostering open expression. As demonstrated by the variety of topics, aesthetics, and forms that characterizes the genre, zines offer creators an outlet for open expression, free of censorship, limitations, and interruptions. “Zines are a medium where it is easy to express ideas without (much) fear of repercussion, or without bending to outside influence,” Moose Lane explained, “This makes it a good medium for feminists to express personal experiences, stories, theories, etc.” (personal communication, March 29, 2016). With the zinester as author, editor, and producer, she subverts the producer/consumer binary and is not beholden to filter her work through the perspectives and expectations of anyone else. Adelaide Barton’s gendered experiences as a woman zinester illustrate that this is an especially important affordance for feminist media-makers: “There’s something about the expression of a zine which doesn’t allow for interruptions. I feel that as a woman, I’ve been socialized to tolerate interruptions, even

when it results in me not being able to finish articulating my point” (personal communication, April 6, 2016). While, as Moose Lane suggested, sharing personal stories on social media often “feels like shouting into the void,” zinesters described feeling as if their audience, however small, actually listened to what they have to say (personal communication, March 29, 2016). As Adelaide Barton explains to the uninitiated in her zine about zines, *You Should Know About Zines*, “It’s not easy to ‘spam’ zines, so folks are more likely to actually read them and consider what they have to say.”

The materiality of zines enables this uninterrupted freedom of expression. Zines, unlike digitally mediated expressions, are not easily traceable back to their authors, granting zinesters the option to publish under true anonymity. As Dee, a member of Permanent Wave Philly, explained, “With zines, you have a little more control than the Internet. Google is a helpful tool, and also a very hurtful tool. There are things that you can write about in zines, various hard things, that you don’t want Google-able, that you don’t want associated with your name” (personal communication, May 24, 2015). Zines, as ephemera, are temporary and potentially anonymous material artifacts, providing zinesters an outlet for deeply personal stories and the freedom to experiment with feminist identities and theories without worrying about damage to their future reputations. The genre’s materiality also makes it difficult to troll or harass zinesters. It is precisely zines’ intrinsically limited audience that makes the genre so attractive to feminists in an age where reaching large audiences is easier than ever, but often comes at the cost of harassment, violent threats, and hate speech. In Adelaide Barton’s experience, “Zines don’t really provide a platform for abusive comment sections. Anyone who wants

to harass a feminist zine-maker must put in more effort to do so, and do so in a way that is not immediately attached to their zine” (personal communication, April 6, 2016).

Zines, as accessible DIY media that operate outside of both marketplace logic and sociopolitical constraints, enable the invention and circulation of counterdiscourses that might otherwise find no outlet within commercial media. Almost all of my participants described zines as affording them more authentic, intimate, or personal expressions than other media outlets. According to Moose Lane, for example, the internet “tends to reward short pieces or snippets, where zines can really be as long as you want” (Moose Lane, personal communication, March 29, 2016). Similarly, Kerri Radley observed that “Digital expression is much looser and less controlled, more exhibitionist and a curated expression of the self. Zines are more intimate and truer to the self” (personal communication, April, 19 2016). The medium also grants authors greater flexibility when it comes to incorporating more personal touches into the design of zines. As Candice Johnson, a Permanent Wave Philly member, explained, the materiality of zines offers a degree of personalization not readily accessible through digital platforms: “There’s more of a human imprint on a zine, because you can see the way that they chose to type it and design it, whether it’s collage or there’s doodles and drawings and stuff. It feels personal, and its tangible, so you can have it and refer back to it and keep it in a collection” (personal communication, May 24, 2015). The unfiltered, slow, low-risk, hands-on process of zine production lends itself to personal meditations one might not otherwise share publicly. The topics considered across my interviewees’ zines attest to the medium’s intimate nature: personal experiences with street harassment, disability, sexism

in academia, menstruation, sexual health, gender identity, familial relationships, trauma, and more all find an outlet in their handcrafted booklets.

Free from digital surveillance, online harassment, the capitalist value of fast production and consumption, and the approval or resources of a commercial host, zines offer feminists an unrestricted and unregulated medium for expression. While limited in reach and impact, for feminist community-builders, zines offers a safer, more empowering alternative to digital media platforms, where violent threats and hate speech continue to suppress marginalized voices. If, as Couldry (2012) argues, media are practices that emerge in response to users' needs within a particular context, zine-making practices supplement feminists' digital media repertoire with a networked safe space free of the harassment and vitriol that has characterized web 2.0 platforms. Zines' resurgence comes at a time when feminists are seeking alternatives to digital media platforms, where violent threats and hate speech continue to suppress marginalized voices.

Permanent Wave Philly

In 2010, feminist writer and musician Amy Klein started a blog to document her band's tour and share her thoughts on gender and the male-dominated punk music scene. Soon after, she began receiving messages from young women who identified with her perspective and wanted to establish feminist connections beyond the blogosphere. Klein, inspired by her readers, took to Twitter and Facebook and called for a gathering of feminists at her Brooklyn apartment in December of that year. About twenty people attended and brainstormed ideas for empowering women in the arts, media, politics, and everyday life. After the meeting, Klein started an email listserv to facilitate

communication within the budding feminist community and to begin putting their ideas into action. The group eventually came to be known as Permanent Wave (PW), a playful riff on both the feminist wave metaphor and the chemical hair treatment. A descendent of the Riot Grrrl movement, PW grew into a key player in both the DIY arts scene and the grassroots activist network of New York City, hosting feminist punk shows on some weekends and organizing feminist street protests on others. But PW's most important actions took place outside the public eye. The collective created closed-off spaces, virtual and in-person, where members could safely discuss experiences of oppression and request support. Although Klein founded PW, the group had no formal leaders or structure; if you were a member of the listserv, you were a member of Permanent Wave. And while PW had a loose focus on gender and the arts, members' interests drove the group's particular projects. As the mission statement published on PW's website explained, "PW is YOU! There is no secret organizational code or anything. The organization is simply small groups of people working together and making shit happen" (qtd. in Jen G, 2012).¹⁴

Over the course of the next year, Permanent Wave grew both its local and online presence and the listserv expanded to include hundreds of members from across the country. Among them was Erin, a seventeen-year-old aspiring punk musician living in Philadelphia and looking to make her own feminist intervention into the city's underground music scene. Erin founded Permanent Wave Philly (PWP) with the help of older women musicians and activists and organized a meeting of Philadelphia-based listserv members in December of 2011. Following Permanent Wave NYC, the

¹⁴ This account is gleaned from Plitt, 2012.

Philadelphia chapter's mission was to create a space where feminists could connect with one another via email and in person, openly discuss issues related to gender, politics, and culture, and work together to organize shows and events that prioritized women, LGBTQ people, and people of color. In pursuit of these goals, PWP met at least once per month, hosted several punk music shows, film screenings, and visual art showcases every year, often as benefits for local feminist organizations, and published an annual zine. Like the original PW, a listserv demarcated membership and facilitated communication within PWP between meetings. But unlike PWNYC, PWP had staying power. After the New York chapter began to dissolve in 2012 due to an organizational dispute over the group's lack of racial diversity, PWP continued to meet and host events until members, suffering from burnout, decided the group should go on "hiatus" in early 2017.

On its official website and social media pages, Permanent Wave Philly describes itself first and foremost as a *community*. When I asked Dee, one of the group's earliest members, about the political significance of PWP in an interview, she echoed this emphasis on community:

The only show organizers I knew existed were white men. Like, they're the only people who book shows...And they do a lot of things based on who they're friends with and who knows who, and it was just like, very, very, exclusive...Everyone has definitions of community, everyone defines what *their* community is personally. But I for sure knew that *that* was not *my* community. And I was really excited by Permanent Wave Philly building a community and doing their best, doing *our* best, to help a better community, a better scene, exist. (personal communication, May 24, 2015)

But how did PWP build a feminist community out of a listserv? What practices did members perform to cultivate a feeling of safety and solidarity within the group? Permanent Wave Philly is, I argue, a *networked safe space*, built by its members from the ground up during their free time, with only digital media platforms and their own

personal skills at their disposal. Starting from scratch without the resources of a formal organization, PWP worked to construct their own community boundaries and to develop community practices that centered marginalized voices and fostered open expression. The networked affordances of an email listserv presented PWP members with both the opportunity and the challenge to create a new social formation that, unlike other punk, DIY, and leftist scenes in Philadelphia, called “girls to the front.”

Constructing community boundaries. Unlike Girl Army, Permanent Wave Philly, as founding member Callie told me in an interview, is an “open collective,” a group whose boundaries are fluid and whose core membership is constantly rotating. “You don’t need an application to do it,” Dee explained, “We don’t require a screening, but I feel like if somebody comes to a meeting, that’s the screening of if they fit or not. And we’re always going to say, ‘Come on back’” (personal communication, May 24, 2015). The group is open to anyone, regardless of gender identity, who wants to join. As a testament to this, the group’s mission statement includes an open call for participation:

Permanent Wave Philly is a network and community of feminist artists and activists. We seek to challenge gender inequality not only in all forms of the arts, but also in politics, our personal lives, and anywhere else it seems necessary. We want to continue what was started generations ago by creating a revolutionary arts movement and community that's relevant to women, LGBTQ-people, people of color, and anyone who has been excluded from subjective mainstream norms. We want you to join, collaborate, and inspire us. (personal communication, May 24, 2015)

Anyone interested in supporting PWP’s mission can, Callie told me matter-of-factly, “just walk in and join us” (personal communication, May 24, 2015).

In reality, however, joining the group is not quite so easy. Potential members must cross several community boundaries before they can participate in PWP.

First, newcomers must *find* Permanent Wave, either online or in-person, a task made difficult by the group's countercultural characteristics. Members frequently referred to PWP as part of Philadelphia's "DIY scene," a network of local bands and amateur bookers who host shows in offbeat venues, typically someone's basement or living room, and operate outside the professional music industry. Like the zine community, the DIY scene provides an outlet for unconventional music and art and, historically, leftist politics and alternative identities, but lacks the visibility of more mainstream cultural circuits. As such, a certain degree of countercultural capital is required to enter the scene, to know where shows are hosted, and to become an active participant, either as a musician or a booker.¹⁵ The same is true for Permanent Wave Philly. Most of the group's members came to PWP through existing connections to the DIY scene; some played in local bands while others had either booked or attended house shows prior to discovering the group. The group's alterity acts as a barrier to entry to those not already "in the know" about the Philly DIY scene, which in turn limits participation to those who share the scene's punk ethos and leftist politics. PWP's underground nature raises concerns about exclusivity and impact; as Jenny lamented in an interview, "We get into our own little bubble" (personal communication, May 24, 2015). The group's purposeful positioning along the margins of the city's arts and culture scene, however, not only grants them a certain creative freedom, but also helps members form counterpublic connections with likeminded artists and activists.

In addition to this symbolic boundary, the PWP listserv, hosted on the free-to-use Google Groups platform, functions as a technological boundary around the group.

¹⁵ See Silberling, 2015 for more on Philadelphia's DIY scene and Lingel (2017) on DIY punk scenes as countercultural communities.

Newcomers, once they encounter PWP through the broader DIY scene, officially “join” the group when they become a member of the PWP listserv, either by filling out a sign-up form in person at a PWP event or sending a request to the group’s email account. Only listserv members can learn about internal meetings, help coordinate event logistics, and weigh in on organizational issues. PWP members carefully maintain the listserv as a boundary between the group and the broader public. Consistently throughout my fieldwork, there were between ten and 20 active PWP members, who reliably attended meetings, participated in events, and contributed to listserv discussions. But when, in 2015, members realized their at times heated email discussions were reaching more than 70 different people, they decided to cull the listserv down to 30 people to protect the community’s privacy. The listserv provides the informal grassroots collective with a formal method for demarcating and maintaining membership boundaries. PWP’s social and technological boundaries close the counterpublic collective off from more mainstream publics, creating a space specifically for feminist activists and artists.

The networked affordances of a listserv enabled Permanent Wave Philly’s founders to construct their own activist community from the ground up, without the institutional resources or structure of a more conventional organization like a nonprofit. Reflecting the DIY ethos of the punk scene and the *do-it-ourselves* logic of contemporary feminism, PWP was *not* built around a bureaucratic system of formal leaders or positions, but a dispersed, participatory communication network, where any member who wants to develop or contribute to a group project can. Through the group’s networked structure, PWP members practice a horizontalism that, in theory, counteracts the marginalization of women, LGBTQ+ people, and people of color in the punk scene and beyond.

In practice, however, PWP's listserv-as-community structure often gave rise to informal leaders who dominated the group. In her 1972 study of second-wave feminist collectives, Jo Freeman warns activists about what she calls "the tyranny of structurelessness," the risk of a group's commitment to leaderlessness masking the growth of unchecked hierarchies. In PWP, the horizontally networked nature of the listserv exacerbated this age-old organizing problem. Listserv membership indicates that one belongs to the Permanent Wave community, but it does not clarify what one's role is in the community or how community decisions are made. Members with more time on their hands or a higher level of commitment were more likely to take on tasks like calling for meetings, checking and responding to emails, posting on the group's social media pages, and coordinating event logistics. With the structure of the group and members' expectations of one another left unspoken, individual members could take charge and make unilateral decisions, while the rest of the group was left without a formal mechanism through which to hold these informal leaders accountable.

This issue came to a head in the aftermath of PWP's 2015 show at PhilaMOCA, described in the introduction to this chapter. While, on the surface, the event appeared to have been a success — the turnout was decent, the audience enjoyed themselves, the bands were well paid, and PWP made a profit selling merchandise — behind the scenes, Erin organized the show by herself, booking bands without consulting the rest of the group. The result was a lineup that did not reflect the group's feminist focus on centering the work of marginalized artists. "The opening band was a bunch of cis white dudes," Dee lamented at a meeting following the show, and there were no people of color in any of the other bands. Worse still, the opening band's lead singer was known to post

degrading images of and messages about women on his social media accounts. Dee placed blame on Erin, but other group members acknowledged that they had failed to question Erin's choices or even check in on the progress of her event planning. The show's shortcomings ultimately stemmed from a collective failure to practice community.

The PhilaMOCA show points to a particular challenge for feminist community-builders in the digital age. While platforms like email listservs may make it easier than ever for even the youngest, unseasoned activists to give shape to new communities, it is not enough to simply create a listerv and call it a community. In fact, doing so often obfuscates the work required to combat the imbalances of power that inevitably emerge within any social space. This is particularly problematic for feminist activists seeking to create communities that counteract patriarchal systems of oppression. When a community's structure is left unspoken, emergent hierarchies can sideline already marginalized voices. Dee pointed toward the tyranny of structurelessness within PWP at the post-show meeting: "I guess I thought this was a collective, and that 'collective' means a certain thing, and that everyone was on the same page about that. But I guess I was wrong." For the collective to prefigure its members' feminist values, steps needed to be taken to articulate the community's structure, cultivate a sense of belonging, and build a system of accountability within a community's boundaries.

Centering marginalized voices. Rather than, as Dee commented, assume everyone is on the same page about what the collective's goal are and what it means to participate in the collective, members worked on making the group's mission, structure, and expectations for one another explicit throughout the latter half of PWP's active years.

Through trial, error, and reflection on missteps like the PhilaMOCA show, Permanent Wave Philly members developed a set of specific strategies to push toward their goal of centering marginalized voices, not only in their shows and events, but internally, within their own community of organizers. These strategies were developed at meetings and added to an internal document referred to as the collective's "Extended Mission Statement" and made accessible for reading and editing to all members via the group's Google Drive. A key mantra for the group became "acting with intentionality," as members sought to align their events and their organizing methods with their feminist politics. PWP's networked community, closed off from outside influence and driven by its members' interests, offered the ideal space to experiment with intersectional organizing practices and imagine alternatives to existing models of social and political engagement.

For PWP, whose core members were a racially diverse group of women ranging in age and sexual orientation, acting with intentionality meant centering marginalized voices throughout the entire organizing process, from the early stages of planning a show through to its execution. At meetings and in interviews, members frequently described feeling alienated and unrepresented at shows, where male audience members aggressively crowded the pit and "guy punks" took center stage. Permanent Wave Philly, Callie explained, was founded with the intention of creating platforms and spaces that empower artists and fans who are women, queer, and/or of color, a political intervention into the DIY scene that could also spill over into everyday life:

It seems like a 'personal is political' kind of thing, because a lot of us have been going to shows or any kind of event and we just feel excluded. We feel like we're not welcomed and we're discouraged from making our own art or doing our own creative work or intellectual work. And also just didn't feel a sense of community

when we go to shows... We don't see ourselves represented when we do go to shows... I want to go to the shows that *I* want to see, and I want to feel like *I* can do this, and I want to see other women and gender-queer people making music and doing really cool stuff. It's not that these people don't exist, that they don't do stuff. But it's like, they're not always recognized... I know *I* just wanted to be recognized, to be supported. (personal communication, May 24, 2015)

PWP's activism was motivated by the idea that a seemingly personal experience — feeling alienated at shows — was rooted in a systematic imbalance of power — the white, heterosexual, male domination of the punk music scene. The collective took concrete steps to address this imbalance on stage, in the pit, and behind the scenes.

Within Philadelphia's DIY scene, PWP was best known for booking bands that were, in Kai's words, "inclusive of women, of queer folks, trans folks, people of color... Anyone who isn't represented by, I don't know, the Electric Factory or something." Frequently throughout my fieldwork, local bands or venues would reach out to PWP via email or Facebook message, requesting assistance organizing shows that highlighted "girl punks." The collective filled a gap in both the alternative and mainstream music landscapes by creating a team of show bookers specifically focused on promoting and supporting artists who were *not* straight, white, cisgender men. As much as possible, PWP also aimed to book diverse bands who, either in their lyrics or in their work off stage, advanced feminist causes. Dee put it simply at a meeting — "We choose bands because they're the kind of people we would like to hang out with." After the PhilaMOCA show, PWP members collaborated on a list of local bands that featured a diverse line up and aligned with the collective's values and went to work booking shows for those artists and promoting their music across PWP's social media networks. But beyond simply showcasing marginalized artists, the collective helped to sustain them. PWP never took a profit from admissions sales for a show, instead giving all proceeds

from the door to the bands and covering its own expenses by selling zines, handmade merchandise like patches and buttons, and baked goods. True to its mission to diversify music and the arts, the collective also created opportunities for people to try playing an instrument for the first time. Every February, PWP hosted its annual “Galentine’s Day Show,” open only to performers who identified as women, nonbinary, or queer and featuring cover bands with little or no music experience; collective members provided participants with free music lessons leading up to the show.

Permanent Wave Philly’s activist work also extended to the audience and collective members worked to create an empowering show experience. Here, as with the feminist zine community, accessibility was a key value. Like other DIY shows, PWP charged admission on a pay-what-you-can sliding scale, often between \$5 and \$10, and never turned away anyone who could not afford entry. In an effort to make their events as accessible as possible, the collective also aimed to host shows exclusively at venues open to people all ages, not just those over 21.

But PWP did more than make their shows accessible to diverse audiences; members actively worked to cultivate *safe spaces* for audiences at their shows. The collective’s “Safer Spaces Policy,” outlined in the introduction to this chapter, works from the assumption that no space can ever be truly safe for all people at all times but asks participants to respect one another’s physical and emotional boundaries to the best of their abilities. Implementing a safer space policy at a show is, as Jenny explained in an interview, an explicitly political critique of the world outside that show:

Just by having a safer spaces policy is talking about the fact that this isn’t the same state outside of the room...I think just acknowledging that is a huge thing for people. I remember having discussions with my coworkers, who were just like, ‘Well, why do you need feminism? We’ve all got jobs.’ This is so much

more complex and we're helping to do what we can to acknowledge what's wrong and try to fix it. (personal communication, May 24, 2015)

Safer space policies implicitly gesture toward the existence of domination throughout everyday life. Like Girl Army, PWP's safer space policy produces a counterpublic sphere, where the obstacles that prevent marginalized groups' full participation are explicitly addressed and an alternative mode of sociality that prioritizes care and validation is modeled.

While PWP's more publicly visible actions — its diverse band lineups and shows with safer space policies — disrupted the gendered power dynamics of the DIY and punk music scenes, their most important political intervention happened behind the scenes, within their own community of organizers. In an interview, Callie described PWP's intra-organizational work as an opportunity to live out utopian visions for a feminist future on a smaller scale:

I would like to see patriarchal and oppressive attitudes eliminated. And that's really hard, and I think we're all sort of working toward it in our own ways. But the way I see how we organize our shows, it's kind of like we're making that happen on a smaller level. (personal communication, May 24, 2015)

For Callie and others, organizing a show or event did not just involve coordinating logistics; it offered an important opportunity to prefigure feminist values.

PWP members implemented a number of different strategies for modeling their feminist politics through their organizational practices. To keep meetings accessible, collective members usually gathered in a public space, such as a park or a community center, rather than a commercial space, such as a cafe, where members would have to spend money, or a private space, such as a home, which can feel uncomfortable for newcomers. At the start of meetings, key responsibilities, such as facilitator, note taker,

email checker, and social media coordinator, were rotated among volunteers. Members applied a similar approach for organizing events. Anyone interested could take the lead on organizing a particular show or project with support from others who volunteered to perform more minor tasks, such as working the door or handling setup, and always in communication with the rest of the collective. All members were granted access to the collective's email account and a "how-to guide" for booking bands and venues, so that even those members without experience could take the lead on organizing a show. PWP's practice of rotating leadership positions subverted the sociopolitical structures that impede marginalized groups' access to leadership positions in the public sphere.

But while leadership roles rotated among individual members, decision-making was a collective process. Options for bands and venues to book were discussed as a group, ideally in person, and all decisions were made through consensus. Because PWP's active membership was constantly in flux, *true* consensus was not required. Instead, at least four people present at a meeting and in agreement could make a decision on behalf of the group. Striving for consensus was critical to PWP's status as a feminist counterpublic because it established what Dee in an interview called a system of "checks and balances" that helps ensure the all interested members have a say in a given matter. Still, arriving at consensus was often slow and arduous. As Jenny explained in an interview,

Consensus is something we take very seriously, but it does take time to arrive at something that everyone feels comfortable with. Because that's so important to us, that's something we're not willing to sacrifice to have a finished product. There are times when it's like, an hour or two-and-a-half hour meeting, and we have something that is *still* not done. And I want to leave, you know? But it's also a conversation I want to continue. That's something that can be both really great and really hard. (personal communication, May 24, 2015)

At times, consensus only came after hours-long meetings and debates, a source of frustration that led some to leave the collective. But as Callie argued at a meeting, “It’s not about efficiency...I mean if anything, slowing down the process is like, the whole point...It’s about doing something together as a community.” For PWP members, the behind-the-scenes *process* of collectively organizing a show together as a community mattered more than the *product*, the show itself. Following the PhilaMOCA show, members even agreed to remove the collective’s name from any event they planned if the behind-the-scenes process did not live up to their “Extended Mission.”

The PWP listserv presented collective members with both the challenge and the opportunity of structurelessness. The group’s email network drew feminist activists and artists together within a bounded space that they could shape to both fulfill their organizing needs and mirror their political values. Although the process could be inefficient and, at times, even fruitless, for Permanent Wave members, the process of constructing and maintaining a safe, empowering community was activist work, in and of itself.

Fostering open expression. When successful, Permanent Wave Philly’s tactics for centering marginalized voices throughout their organizational process created platforms for punk music artists and fans sidelined within the broader DIY scene and the public at large. Throughout my fieldwork, bands and audience members frequently thanked PWP for organizing events that highlighted underrepresented voices and that offered freedom of expression, away from the aggression and sexism they had come to expect at more typical DIY shows.

In line PWP's emphasis on process over produce, however, the collective's most transformative work happened off stage and outside the public eye, where members worked together to offer one another opportunities for creative control otherwise unavailable within the DIY scene. Members frequently spoke of the empowering experience of coming up with an idea for an event, pitching it to the collective, and bringing it to fruition with, in Jenny's words, "the power of Permanent Wave" on your side. Prior to joining PWP, most members had never planned their own house show before, let alone a public event. In a music scene that offers little room for artists and organizers who are not white men, the ability to flex creative control over a house show was exhilarating:

Definitely for me in the beginning, that felt really powerful, because I felt that you had to have some kind of magical authority to put together an event and *actually* have people go to it, *oh my God*. So, when I first started putting on shows with Permanent Wave, yeah, it definitely felt, *I* felt, powerful in a situation where I usually feel more powerless in the world. (personal communication, May 24, 2015)

Throughout my fieldwork, I often witnessed PWP's more seasoned bookers encourage novices to take the lead on a show, offering them assistance and advice along the way. Successfully hosting a show with the support of the group gave members a sense of self-confidence that they carried with them into their everyday lives.

Beyond planning shows together, PWP members also cultivated a community where members could openly discuss their experiences with gender-based oppression, especially sexism in the DIY scene. "If I didn't have this group, where we meet every couple weeks to rant after every show, I don't know what I would do," Dee told me in an interview. Members often began meetings sharing stories of frustration from the most recent "guy punk" house show, or outside the scene, their latest run-in with a street

harasser or a sexist coworker. The “safer space” policy of PWP’s shows applied to its meetings as well; wherever members convened, they offered one another a counterpublic sphere where they could give voice to these experiences and offer one another the reminder that they were not alone in their struggles. When new members attended meetings for the first time, they were welcomed with open arms and treated as friends. Every meeting began with group introductions, which almost always included an icebreaker members refer to as “Rose, Bud, Thorn”; each attendee shared something positive that happened to them recently, something they were looking forward to, and something that had been troubling them. With anywhere from four to 10 people at a meeting, the process could take upwards of 30 minutes, but like consensus-based decision-making, this opportunity to share personal stories openly was part of PWP’s community-building and maintenance practice. In its ideal form, the PWP collective provided members with a counterpublic safe space, where they found political agency and solidarity among a group of activists and artists who shared a common set of experiences and goals.

But “acting with intentionality” to center marginalized voices and foster open expression requires a great deal of time, energy, and patience, which can become a challenge for activists juggling the work of community-building with a day job and other responsibilities. As Dee told me in an interview, “This is not any of our main thing. It’s just not. It’s not our job. We’re not getting paid to do this.” After instituting their “Extended Mission” following the 2015 PhilaMOCA show, Permanent Wave Philly successfully hosted several events, but the effort required to live up to their ideals was often strenuous. Members began drifting back to old habits, allowing those with the most

spare time to take charge without the group's consent, which inevitably led to internal disputes. By the fall of 2016, most members stopped attending meetings altogether. In early 2017, reluctant to officially end the group, PWP members decided to go on "hiatus," ending their listserv correspondence and engagement with the DIY scene.

Permanent Wave Philly's six-year run offers important lessons for feminist community-builders in the digital age. While they struggled to live up to their ideals, collective members' efforts to grow a listserv into a feminist community that "acted with intentionality" illustrate the relational work required to cultivate safe spaces, online and off. As Dee told me in an interview, "The important part is that we *try*. It's not that we always accomplish that, but that's our intention, and that really matters... When we mess up, we want to do better. We try to reevaluate the situation... We try to make sure that if something went wrong, it's better for next time." PWP's resolve to be reflexive, to dissect and improve their organizing tactics until they aligned with their intersectional values, serves as a reminder that safe space communities are not fixed objects, but collective projects that require constant maintenance and tireless commitment.

Conclusion

Safe space communities have long played a key role in the tactical repertoire of U.S. feminist movements. But within our contemporary media landscape, where public and openly accessible digital platforms for expression and deliberation abound, the closed-off enclave has taken on new relevance for feminist activists. As I argue in the previous chapter, contemporary U.S. feminists have, with great fervor and success, adapted highly visible networked protest forms like hashtag activism to suit their goals and values. However, as body politics are reinscribed online, the same social media

platforms that have popularized feminist ideas and launched viral campaigns like #MeToo into global movements for gender justice have also given rise to a largely unchecked culture of networked misogyny, whose proponents subject anyone who is not a conservative, white, cisgender, heterosexual male to backlash, harassment, and violent threats (Banet-Weiser, 2018a; Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016). In a 2014 piece for the *Pacific Standard*, feminist journalist Amanda Hess cites sociologist Zygmunt Bauman to argue that while men surf the web as “tourists,” freely moving from one site to the next in search of new experiences, harassment displaces users with gendered, racialized, and sexualized bodies as “vagabonds...pushed and pulled through mean streets where they could never hope to settle down.” The three communities under study in this chapter – a secret feminist Facebook group, the feminist zine network, a grassroots feminist arts collective – provide a desperately needed safe space where women and other marginalized groups can not only “settle down,” but feel protected and uplifted. By bringing, to again borrow the Riot Grrrl mantra, *girls to the front*, these communities cultivate spaces that explicitly recognize the ways in which white male supremacy operates and develop alternative, more empowering ways of being, online and off. While their particular practices vary, each community draws on the social and technical affordances of digital media platforms to construct and maintain boundaries that filter out harassment, prioritize marginalized voices, and encourage free and open expression. Through their example, these communities help us imagine what a feminist internet might look like.

At the same time, however, these three case studies also illustrate that certain paradoxes characterize safe spaces. These paradoxes are magnified for intersectional

feminists seeking to build safe, inclusive communities in the digital age. Girl Army, for example, purports to offer safety for women and nonbinary individuals, who often face threats of violence for expressing themselves in public spaces and on the internet, but because the group is hosted on a corporately owned social media platform, moderators cannot completely guarantee the safety and privacy of Girl Army members. Permanent Wave Philly and the feminist zine community both describe themselves as inclusive spaces, where media-makers sidelined in mainstream commercial industries can enjoy creative agency, but the amount of countercultural capital and digital media literacy required to know about and enter these spaces renders them somewhat *exclusive*. Similarly, while each of the three communities under study offers an outlet for open expression that is otherwise unavailable, both their internal principles and external boundaries restrict the flow of free speech; Girl Army moderators, for instance, ban members who ask “feminism 101 questions” and the materiality and limited print run of zines means that feminist zinesters often reach only a small audience. And, while the mission of all three communities is to center marginalized voices, each paradoxically risks contributing to the marginalization of those voices by carving out a siloed space for them.

Safe but unsafe, inclusive but exclusive, open to but limiting of discourse, the three communities I studied in this chapter demonstrate that feminist safe spaces are always already incomplete, excluding some to include others, and imperfect, potentially reifying the inequities feminism aims to transform. These paradoxes have haunted feminist safe spaces across their history in the U.S., but the digital environment raises new questions for feminist community-builders: what does safety look like online? How

do social media platforms constrain or enhance activists' ability to cultivate safe space communities online? What impact can enclaved, digitally networked communities have on more visible, mainstream publics? How can we begin reshaping public-facing platforms to reflect the values of safety and inclusion embedded in feminist communities?

The answers will vary depending alongside the specific goals, context, forms, and practices of the feminist community in question. Taken together, however, my three case studies suggest that when it comes to cultivating safe space communities, activists should follow Permanent Wave Philly's lead and instead strive for *safer* spaces, always working from the assumption that no space can ever be truly safe for all participants at all times. The comparison implied in the term "*safer* spaces" between the activist community at hand and the broader public sphere makes visible the relational nature of safe spaces as living concepts that require constant maintenance, rather than closed objects with fixed but unspoken principles. Framing networked feminist communities as ongoing *projects*, always conducted in negotiation between activists' values and the digital community-building tools at their disposal, encourages a more reflexive safe space praxis, one that works to account for a community's exclusions and shortcomings. This relational, processual approach to building communities will be integral to the long-term sustainability of do-it-ourselves feminists' extra-institutional activist projects and movements.

CHAPTER 5 – Conclusion: Strength in a Feminist Present

I started this study caught between the hopeful swell of recent editorials heralding the arrival of the “Year of Women” and the harsh reality of President Donald Trump’s regressive policy efforts. How can commentators feel so certain that women’s time has arrived or, if it has not come yet, that a feminist political future is eminent, given the Trump administration’s attacks on reproductive justice, immigrants’ rights, civil rights legislation, and more? The answer is rooted in a feminist groundswell that has been building steadily for decades in the United States in spite of the rise of the new right, neoliberal conservatism, and the concomitant antifeminist backlash and decline of collective action. Drawing on an array of media tools and platforms, contemporary feminists have been engaged in a revitalization project, rebuilding feminist actions and spaces for the twenty-first century. The current generation of activists has moved away from the highly structured movements that characterized previous “waves” of U.S. feminism and toward *networked feminism*. This highly mediated organizing logic enables a diversity of people to join and shape collective actions, free from the gatekeeping functions of formal leaders or the entrenched exclusions of institutionalized politics. At the same time, as the contradiction between “The Year of Women” and the Time of Trump suggests, without the resources of formal organizations, networked feminism faces a wide range of obstacles when it comes to creating lasting social and political transformations. These challenges include, but are not limited to, violent backlash, activist burnout, commercial cooptation, movement sustainability, and, consequently, difficulty changing institutions, laws, and policies. At this critical juncture, activists’

networked media practices have left feminist movements simultaneously reinvigorated *and* precarious.

This project explored the questions this dilemma raises: how are activists negotiating between the affordances and shortcomings of networked feminism to craft an activist praxis that reflects their values and responds to the challenges of the current context? Why, despite their “double entanglements” (McRobbie, 2004), do networked media figure so centrally in contemporary feminists’ political visions? And what are the implications of feminists’ networked media practices for the long-term shape and reach of feminism, social movements, and political activism? Existing scholarship at the intersections of both gender and media and movements and media presents important insights into the structure of political opportunities and constraints surrounding networked feminism and offers detailed case studies of individual feminist media campaigns and their outcomes. Missing, however, is a theoretical framework built around actual activists’ agency, perspectives, and experiences that sheds light on the relationship between feminists’ political visions and their networked media tactics and, in turn, creates space to reflect on activists’ shared triumphs and struggles.

In this qualitative study of networked feminism, I have approached feminist media as *political practices*, informed by activists’ goals, contexts, and resources, to better understand what feminists are doing with media and why. Through a practitioner-centered methodology grounded in six case studies, I have explored three key types of networked feminist practices: networked feminist organizing, networked feminist visibility campaigns, and networked feminist community-building. An overarching media *praxis*, or embodied relationship between feminists’ political goals and media tactics,

connects all three types of practices. I call this praxis *do-it-ourselves feminism* (DIOF). Networked feminist practices can vary in form and content but they share a common DIY ethos, a collectively held set of normative assumptions that, with a little media savvy, anyone can build their own feminist actions and spaces from the ground up, regardless of previous organizing experience or available resources. Like other DIY projects, DIOF is an accessible, bottom-up, extra-institutional practice whose practitioners tactically “make do” (de Certeau, 1984) with whatever materials are on hand to quickly address a problem or need. But unlike other *do-it-yourself* forms of social or political engagement, *do-it-ourselves feminism* is a collective activist praxis, whose campaigns may start with the actions of one person with a social media account and an idea for a protest, but grow to include dozens, hundreds, or, at the global level, thousands or even millions of participants. DIOF represents a paradigm shift in the organizational logic behind U.S. feminism that reverses the typical trajectory of movements; now, instead of having to build organizational capacity prior to launching a major action, with large audiences only a few keyboard strokes away, the action happens first and the capacity-building may follow later. The result is protest actions that enable the collective articulation of dissent from a diversity of subject positions, rather than a singular, unified message filtered through an individual leader or organization. While a similarly networked mode of activism can be found across other social movements, DIOF represents a distinctly *feminist* praxis, shaped to embody feminist values and respond to the particular political challenges facing feminist activists.

When it comes to organizing feminist protests, the DIOF praxis can be found across actions at a variety of scales. The Women’s March on Washington (WMOW)

began after one person — a retired grandmother living in Hawaii — created and shared an event on Facebook. Her mediated outreach eventually sparked the wave of global street protests that took place around the world on Trump's Inauguration Day. Similarly, Philadelphia's March to End Rape Culture (MTERC), a local protest event that draws a crowd of about 500 to 1,000 people annually, grew out of the international SlutWalk Movement, which started when two activists used social media accounts to mobilize protesters in Toronto after a police officer blamed rape victims for their own assaults at a university assembly. But the DIOF praxis extends well beyond the initial sparking of a protest event. The same do-it-ourselves sensibility guides the logistical planning and execution of an action. The ad-hoc planning committee behind WMOW, for example, developed and revised the movement's mission statement in response to feedback and critiques dispersed networks of activists circulated through social media. The DIO ethos is deeply embedded in the organizing team behind MTERC, who have purposefully avoided formalizing as a structured organization or nonprofit in order to ensure broad participation and creative freedom. Every year, MTERC organizers start from scratch and, through online outreach and fundraising events, promote the protest and pool the resources necessary to host the march. At both events, protesters rally together but under a variety of rallying cries, collectively representing their individual experiences and concerns while also standing in solidarity with one another. Whether mobilized at the global or local level, do-it-ourselves feminism draws on everyday media tools to create openly accessible outlets for personalized protest expressions. In turn, this organizational paradigm produces more inclusive feminist movements and campaigns, free from the

structural inequities ingrained in organizational bureaucracies or institutional politics, reflecting contemporary feminists' core guiding value of intersectionality.

The same participatory, self-starting logic underpins feminist campaigns to make visible everyday social injustices that, like sexual harassment and assault, are otherwise normalized into invisibility. Through networked visibility tactics like hashtag feminism, activists engage in contentious performances that, following the classic U.S. feminist mantra, “make the personal political” by pushing it into the realm of public deliberation. The networking functions of the hashtag form bridge the individual with the collective; campaign participants can add their own experience or concerns to the hashtag, personalizing their expression of dissent while also participating in a solidary collective action by virtue of using the same hashtag as others. In the case of #MeToo, for example, hundreds of thousands of sexual violence survivors shared their personal narratives; while each story was unique, activists were connected through their collective participation in the hashtag's overarching narrative frame — the phrase, “Me, too” — which explicitly emphasized the widespread nature of sexual violence. Other movements have used hashtag activism and similar networked visibility tactics. But for U.S. feminists, who have historically worked to expose the ways in which power operates in everyday life, the practice helps reframe seemingly private experiences of injustice as public issues that require public responses. Moreover, the open accessibility of a Twitter hashtag, built into a social media platform that many peruse on a daily basis, brings a broader diversity of voices into visibility campaigns, enabling more intersectional feminist actions in the process.

Behind the scenes, in closed-off spaces where activists gather to connect, regroup, and plan actions, feminists also use networked media to build their own communities. Together, my case studies of the Girl Army Facebook group, the national feminist zine network, and the grassroots music and arts collective Permanent Wave Philly speak to the do-it-ourselves logic scaffolding contemporary feminist communities. In each case, feminists use media tools, such Facebook or email listservs, or engage in collective media-making projects, such as producing a zine or hosting a punk show, to create enclaved safe spaces, purposefully closed off from the “networked misogyny” (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016) that plagues public-facing media sites. Whereas, in previous generations, feminist community spaces were structured through a web of organizations, across these field sites, groups of otherwise unaffiliated activists who shared a common goal or need came together to construct their own communities, using networked media as their building blocks. Within the boundaries of these spaces outside the public eye, feminists can foster communities that prefigure their values, establishing social practices that center marginalized voices and encourage the open expression of experiences silenced or ignored within dominant discourse. While the search for community has long been a goal for U.S. feminists, in both the current digital media landscape and political climate, women, people of color, and queer people face especially high levels of harassment and violent threats. At precisely the same moment when public platforms for self-expression and political dissent abound, private feminist communities, where members can seek support and talk openly, are more important than ever. The DIO communities studied here suggest that networked media offer feminists new opportunities for community-building at both the local and translocal levels.

For today's activists, DIO feminism updates traditional feminist values, like personal politics and community, while also incorporating more contemporary goals, such as intersectional analysis and inclusion, and responding to current challenges, including the need to revitalize collective politics and circumvent networked misogyny. The do-it-ourselves media praxis, however, also suffers from a number of shortcomings that undermine all three types of networked media practices.

Chief among them is the question of sustainability. Within each type of networked feminist practice — organizing, visibility, and community — burnout, attention, and cooptation are major issues.

The bottom-up, participatory nature of do-it-ourselves organizing allows a more diverse range of activists to become involved in protest mobilization and enables a greater degree of creative freedom over the shape a protest takes, producing movements that, in form and content, embody the feminist value of intersectionality. At the same time, without the resources of a formal organization, the labor required to mobilize a protest can wholly consume activists' time and energy. This is the case, for example, with the MTERC organizing team, which has struggled to maintain a stable membership over the years. These same features of DIOF also empower feminists to build communities that live out their political visions, but, as my case study of Permanent Wave Philly illustrates, the effort required to constantly act with "intentionality" can strain activists and even lead to in-fighting, both of which threaten the longevity of the group.

Similarly, when it comes to networked visibility campaigns and hashtag feminism, activists use social media to quickly mobilize protest actions and invite a broad range of participation, laying the groundwork for a viral wave of dissent like #MeToo.

But publicly sharing personal stories on a globally networked stage can be both risky and traumatic, endangering the marginalized groups the tactic is meant to uplift. Through their mediated, personalizable nature and emphasis on visibility, these networked protest campaigns scale quickly and attain mainstream media attention easily. But they are also easily coopted by commercial interests, as seen in celebrities' and corporate entities' use of #MeToo as a branding strategy. Moreover, while the months-long discourse that has unfolded in the wake of #MeToo stands as an important exception, hashtag networks can disperse just as quickly as they came together, fading from public discourse before ever developing the capacity necessary for long-term struggle. The strengths of the do-it-ourselves praxis ultimately undermine its staying power.

Networked feminists' turn away from formally structured organizations facilitates more inclusive movements and communities. Their refusal to engage with institutional politics, however, raises concerns about contemporary feminism's ability to make the policy reforms necessary to push toward a more equitable future in the U.S. MTERC organizers, for example, frequently use the march's official social media account to raise awareness about legislative issues or encourage followers to contact their representatives. But in the seven years since the march first took place, organizers have not made formalized efforts to lobby for better sexual violence legislation in the Philadelphia area. In contrast, the WMOW planning committee has formalized into a highly structured "National Team," which has organized and funded efforts to support women candidates for local and national office. Their formalization efforts, however, have led to a less accessible movement structure and have raised criticisms about the activists who turned the global movement into a professional career. Do-it-ourselves practitioners have

struggled to strike a balance between the openness of remaining informal and the often exclusionary business of engaging in institutional politics.

Lastly, the do-it-ourselves praxis is encumbered by the structural constraints of the corporately-owned social media platforms its practitioners rely on.

Sites like Facebook and Twitter were not engineered with feminists' intersectional values or organizing needs in mind. In several of the case studies taken up in this project, activists struggled to protect one another from violent harassment or backlash.

Misogynist Twitter trolls harassed WMOW attendees and threaten survivors who posted #MeToo with rape. Both instances serve as a reminder that the same platforms that have raised U.S. feminism's profile have also facilitated the wave of "popular misogyny" (Banet-Weiser, 2015b, 2018b) that carried Trump to the Oval Office. Platform safety issues also plague closed-off feminist communities. In Girl Army, for example, there was little moderators could do to truly keep their safe space "safe," as members with ulterior motives took screen captures of highly personal posts and shared them with others outside the group.

Beyond participants' safety, in several cases, social media platforms exacerbated members' struggle to develop decision-making and accountability practices within otherwise informal groups. Facebook grants group moderators unilateral control over the group, leaving Girl Army members powerless to push back on moderators' choices to delete posts or ban members. In Permanent Wave Philly, where membership is defined through enrollment in the collective's email listserv, activists struggled to define the group's collective structure and prevent individual members from making decisions on behalf of the group.

DIO feminists' reliance on digital media raises concerns about the inclusivity of contemporary feminist movements and spaces. Networked feminist activism might allow for a diverse range of voices to shape movement mission statements or join hashtag campaigns, but participation is predicated on access to and literacy in the technologies that facilitate these actions.

The affinity networks of feminist campaigns and communities can also produce echo chambers, silo marginalized voices, and wall movements off from the very audiences activists are seeking to address. While news media coverage of networked visibility campaigns and street protests can help mitigate this shortcoming somewhat, the political uniformity of a feminist hashtag and closed-off nature of a feminist Facebook group can limit feminism's reach. Activists have to find ways to account for limitations of their networked media practices, while also taking advantage of their affordances.

But this project is about more than the affordances and limitations of networked feminist activism. The stories from the field collected here demonstrate that do-it-ourselves feminists are constantly negotiating among their activist values, the challenges engrained in the current context, and the structural constraints embedded in their networked media tools to develop and refine an activist media praxis that puts their political vision into action.

This dynamic is perhaps most evident in my case study of #MeToo, in which participants developed *performance maintenance strategies*, enacting care labor for survivors who chose to share their stories, correcting campaign erasures, and working to maintain narrative control over the hashtag. But a similar emphasis on reflexivity and revision can be found elsewhere. The WMOW planning committee publicly revisited

their “Unity Principles” following critiques from activists standing at various intersections of difference. When infighting indicated that the groups’ informal nature had led to a failure to articulate shared values, both the MTERC organizing team and Permanent Wave Philly paused to collectively develop mission statements. Feminist zinesters use public-facing social media sites to expand the accessibility and reach of their closed-off community. And in the months after my fieldwork ended and I shared my findings, Girl Army moderators put their heads together to develop a less hierarchical mode of decision-making despite the Facebook platform’s shortcomings and reevaluated their exclusion of trans men from the group.

These are just a few examples of the creative tactics contemporary feminists use to push against the structural constraints of both networked activism and social media platforms and strengthen their praxis. Their ongoing reflections and efforts demonstrate that while do-it-ourselves feminism may be precarious, it is also a complex, interactional, and recursive praxis, always in progress and constantly evolving, even while activists also juggle the everyday labors of organizing for social justice.

Implications for the Study and the Practice of Networked Activism

The dynamics of do-it-ourselves feminism highlighted throughout this project offer a number of important take-aways for social movement theory, media activism research, new media studies, and feminist media scholarship — five fields that converge through the study of networked feminism.

For social movement theory, the do-it-ourselves feminist media repertoire productively challenges and expands conventional definitions of “politics” and “activism.” Much existing scholarship assumes the political process model’s emphasis on

state-targeted, public-facing performances of dissent. Networked feminists' collective actions expose the political dynamics of everyday life beyond the walls of state institutions and their behind-the-scenes community-building work illustrates that the fight for social justice does not begin and end with the protest.

The processual nature of do-it-ourselves feminism points to the need for scholars of movements and media to treat networked activism as a media *practice*, not simply media content, one with historical precedents that is shifting and evolving over time. Analyses of networked activism as either effective or ineffective overlook crucial components of the much larger picture that is activist media practices. When activist media, digital and otherwise, are framed as practices, a more expansive view of media as complex arenas for political participation becomes possible. The media-as-practice approach helps point toward activists' historical struggles to negotiate between their political values and their media tactics. Similarly, centering contemporary practitioners' voices in the study of emerging media activism forms produces analyses that hold at once both the affordances and limitations of these new modes of protest. Rather than the either/or assumptions of the "techno-optimist" versus "techno-pessimist" debates, this *both/and* approach pushes beyond the overly simplistic narratives of technodeterminism and moves scholarship toward more robust theories of how practitioners navigate the double-edged nature of networked activism.

Do-it-ourselves feminism offers a related set of lessons for the field of new media studies. Attention to the affordances and limitations of networked feminism and the strategies feminists use to juggle both can expand critical analyses of the structural constraints built into social media platforms. In light of the lack of alternatives with

comparable reach and accessibility, activists are developing agentive strategies to navigate platforms' shortcomings without compromising their values. Embedded in their media practices are instructive visions of more empowering digital media platforms.

The media-as-practice approach taken here also highlights gaps in the growing body of feminist media studies scholarship focused on networked feminism. With few exceptions, a great deal of existing scholarship on networked tactics like hashtag feminism, feminist blogging, and online feminist communities takes up media content as its object of analysis. This leaves core components of the feminist media repertoire understudied. If I had not taken a multi-sited, ethnographic approach and “followed the people” (Marcus, 1995), I would not have had access to the networked organizing practices behind the March to End Rape Culture or the mediated safe space practices of inward-facing feminist communities. This practitioner-centered approach also pushed me to hone in on #MeToo participants' tweeted reflections on the campaign, highlighting a key tactic — performance maintenance strategies — missing from research on hashtag feminism. Future work in the field should continue to document feminist media campaigns while also grounding itself in feminist activists' perspectives in order to build a stronger theoretical toolkit for the study of networked feminism.

Most importantly, this study has implications for activists embedded in the everyday fight for social justice. The trials and triumphs of the practitioners across my field sites suggest that, in order to sustain long-term struggles, networked activists must develop tactics for building movement capacities while also retaining the openness and inclusivity signature to do-it-ourselves feminism. What striking this balance looks like in practice remains to be seen, but it will require the same degree of self-critique and

ongoing reflexivity contemporary feminists bring to their work. The energy they devote to, in Permanent Wave Philly members' words, "acting with intentionality" models a feminist approach to collective engagement for activists and advocates everywhere who see a need for social justice and dream of doing it themselves.

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